[The preface is a block-printed text made in low-quality ink. It identifies the owner of the field book as "Tz. Davidss., Volun.", a member of mobile infantry unit attached to the airship *Ramming Speed!*. It also specifies some medical data, and next of kin. The next thirty or so pages have been torn out neatly, the book mended with a strip of leather and some crude stitches to stop the spine from falling apart. The remaining pages have become uneven and ragged as a result. The script is crude Krytan calligraph, written in a large and messy hand.]

# 27th Phoenix.

Head injury, confined to medical. Brought the old observation book. Might as well start writing.  
  
Position.... difficult to determine accurately. North sea-side shore, Orr.  
Tide is low, wind predominately north / north-east, strong. Sea approach is troubling; cliffs and low reefs, no guidance buoys. Constant rain.  
Land approach is a narrow canyon. Seems to entrap giant risen. Cross quickly.  
  
Much like the rest of Orr, there is little surface plantlife. Though years of organic decay and the abundance of sand grint suggests it is arable, there is plenty of sea salt seeped into it. Several large sea-plants seem to continue to survive for long periods of time out of water despite this. Orr must have been lush, before it sank, with rolling hills of thick green vegetation and teeming jungles on par with those found west of the Southspurs. Some of the risen wildlife seems to have been absent in their live forms for hundreds of years in Tyria. It is terrifying, and oddly humbling to realise life was so efficiently erased here, leaving only this wasteland  
  
We look out over Murmur island, and into a bay. A vast structure obscures our horizon. It is clearly ancient Orrian in nature, with its large cocentric circles. There seems to be little point in it, functionally, despite perhaps sheltering its own shadow from the rain. I wonder if it was built like such, or if it ever was part of a greater system of which I cannot fathom the design. Perhaps it is merely another monument, built to outlast the tides of the sea, and still standing in proud defiance of all the ill that has befallen Orr. Secretly, I hope it is so, if only for the solace of knowing that somethings can stand defiant with such strength.

# 28th Phoenix.

Location same. Wind north, north-east, gale. Weather remains constant downpour.  
Tide is high, and filled with golems.  
  
I have become convinced, to some degree, of the divine power of the human spirits. Not in any crude way as 'gods', but as tremendously powerful magical beings that transcend the understanding of most beings. They must have been here as a presence, much in the same way bear, wolf and other spirits guide my people and their kin. Their priests are merely shamans under another name, another tradition. I feel in me some sadness knowing these human spirits have departed, leaving only their footprints in the ashes of their kingdoms.  
  
[there is a break in the page.]  
  
Night. Woken up from sleep; had a dream about a man, speaking to the sky.  
  
"My lady, I see what falls upon you as the troubling gaze of your mere servant, but what echoes to be a pit of despair most elegantly wrought in such mortal forms of beauty. That to leap down into the dark embrace of leering Death is the only answer you may give when I desire, bodily, to be graced by Life's touch. Broken asunder by the fool's flutter; a mere muse would have caused mirth! Yet; for your divinity, I stand convincted with no recourse. Contrition! Would that I exchanged sanity for my gift to this mortal plain upon which I am cursed to peer up at the heavens in longing."  
  
Head hurts like an anvil, but I've written down what I could remember before the dream escaped me.

# 29th Phoenix.

Location same. No wind briefly, but will likely return N / NE. Tide low. Rain.  
Everything's quiet. Preparing for assault on an Inquest base. Underwater, apparently. There is a Quaggan village nearby, so that suggests the water itself, though infested, is not immediately dangerous in itself. Several of those here can't swim, which makes me worry. Might have to carry them. Force nearly sank.  
  
Heard we're moving camp... soonish. Headache's better, even without painkillers, so this is good. Expect to leave medical soon, or at least resume regular duties without too much issue. Hope nothing smacks me in the head anytime soon. I miss Freyja terribly, these days. If I die, and this is what they send back to you; I will always love you, my little one. If not, I will hug you until your ribs are sore the next time I see you, wether you want it or not, you ungrateful little harpy.

# 30th Phoenix.

No change in location. Still raining, and likely will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The sound of water surrounds us. It falls from the sky, laps at the cloven hooves of the cliffs, and gushes from the walls in a constant torrent. It is as if Orr has just resurfaced, and the sea is still washing off.  
  
During guard, I saw the great calcified bones of the deap sea creatures that beached there. I am surprised that these great sea beasts did not get raised by the Dead Dragon's will, as so many other beings did. They have ribs as wide as my arms, and thick enough to withstand hammerblows. If they had lived, they would have been mighty prey to hunt, and deadly foes to overcome. Their remains now stand sentinel over the Orrian shores, the odd Crusader picking their way through their carcasses as they patrol the seaside.  
  
I've re-read the entry I made on the that dream I had, after talk about it with San. It seems foolishly clear now. It is Malchor, not talking to the sky, but to his goddess, lamenting his lot. His is a cruel faith, and it seems to touch this place they call Malchor's Leap. They say the rock from which he sprang is not far west from here. I imagine the rain that permeates this place to be Life's lament for a love spurned, however base and mortal he was. The sentiment is overly romantic, and reality is rarely so magical. But then again, few sane people would deign to call Orr 'mundane'.

# 31st Phoenix

Dawn, position same. Wind N/NE, gale. Tide... disturbed. We are preparing for the attack on the Inquest base. Word is the entrance is lined with cannon. Knowing Asura, this might be anything from shot to some sort of tech-magics. I am trembling. The armour is too heavy, as is my shield. There will be little between me and my foes. I fear getting overwhelmed, and sinking into an abyss. If the krait have gods, they must live in such depths as my mind fear exists.  
Mithra is nearby, sleeping from her shift. She reminds me painfully of Freyja at times, and I must- [The writing becomes unsteady, and trails off, leaving a break in the page].  
  
It is later now. We returned, unscathed. I was terrified, but it all seems so quaint looking back. I carried Roeland, who was wounded, back to camp. He must have been in a lot of pain.  
Spoke with Beaumont. San and I are her star soldiers, apparently. Knew San was doing well landing acting scout lead here, didn't know I was doing well just filling out the shield wall. Thick head on a thick body in thick plate. Guess that's all you need in tight spot.  
  
Night. Dreamt of drowning, too stirred to sleep again. Painkiller's worn off.  
Spent some time looking at the sky through the tent flap. There are no constellations I can make out through the clouds, but there is a silvery pearlessence that reflects light back into the night. It is almost as if there is light entrapped between earth and sky. There is a numbing spike in the back of my head where the wound is raw and sore still. I am trying to stay awake, but thinking of words is making me woozy.  
  
[Edit: fixed a small dating issue that resulted from me writing these after midnight, and thus advancing the log one day into the future from the events they describe].

# 32nd Phoenix

Position remains same. Wind decidedly north, strong gale. Heads of foam. Tide high. Overcast, as per usual.  
Quiet day, just irregular patrol duty. Small valley scourge, nothing to report aside from some abominations past the canyon. Arca seemed tense, but she's not talking to me. Didn't press her.  
  
Scouts reported that the Inquest base we scuttled was taken over by the Order of Whispers. Should have known. Probably the only reason why we're out this far from the main troop connections. Being manipulated like a pawn. I am a single solider in a vast army, yet I do not like being reminded how much of a playing piece I am to the greater war effort. My pride of arms and the deeply personal way in which I experience this war makes it seem alien to believe that anyone else than myself is in control of my fate. The immediacy of standing in the shield line obscures the greater importance of our daily struggle against the Dragons, and by extension the role I play in it. Greater minds are pulling our strings, like a twisted puppet show set to the backdrop of Tyria's desperate struggle to survive. Are we the last expression of defiance of civilisations that are, inevitably, doomed to fall? Or shall we be forever honoured as the victorious dead of a war that could last for another ten generations?

# 33rd Phoenix

Position remains the same, spirits be damned. Wind north, strong. Tide, low.  
  
Today was one of those rare pleasant ones, where it was easy to revel in the wonders of Orr, and forget about soldiering. Went to Sculptor's End; managed to attach myself to a scouting party with Beaumont, Athy and San. Spent some time drinking in the beauty of the landscape, and the tragedy of Malchor's story. It seems my dreams about the doomed sculptor are not merely dreams; his spirit is said to wander the old cathedral, and others have heard him cry out Life's name. We saw for ourselves the moving statues of the human goddess. I felt a deep sadness, briefly, at the edge of the End, as I recited the words Malchor spoke in my mind, peering out into the dark sea below.  
  
The Orrian structures continue to amaze me. The giant rings that stand in the water: they are made from one piece, carved out from vast boulders the size of cities. The stones, which must be hundreds, if not thousands, of years old, remain surprisingly unmarred. They stand out in the windswept bay of a sea, yet are barely touched by erosion. Even the coral formations that cling to every other surface seem shy away from them.  
  
Oh, 'fore I forget. Arca fell off the cliff, and broke her arm. No-one saw her fall, so she might have jumped, for all we know. Bumped her head badly. She was acting weird, angry, tense. I tried speaking to her again earlier, but she dismissed me. I begin to think her mind is breaking, like Satsuki did prior to her running away. I hope Arca did not break, and jump off in desperation.  
  
[A break in the page denotes a later entry.]  
  
There lie new burdens on my mind.  
  
Vanholm is lost to us, I am certain. He has descended into a madness he himself cannot yet see. It is the Dragon's corruption, the same that was causing him nightmares in the Keep. He has given in to the poisonous voice in his mind, and will slip further down into that dark pit, until he is naught but a puppet for Jormag. I consider slaying him where he lies, to spare him his own demise, but I fear the others would not understand. It is cowardly, I should go and end [the script becomes shaky, and there is a break in the text].  
I have written the Warmaster, though my mind wanders to my blade unbidden. I pray, as uncommon as that is, to the spirits, that they guide the Warmaster in her decision, and let me take his life in an act of mercy.  
  
There is more. Rotarn, the tricky sprig, has become obsessed with delving for Celdric's secrets. He has, of his own volition, revealed some of them to me, though I will not repeat their contents here. They unsettle me, as Celdric is clearly deranged beyond what I suspected, though I cannot fathom what has shattered his mind. Rotarn has given me the impression that Celdric is far from harmless, not by word, but by the mortified panic that filled his every movement when he thought that Celdric would find out what he had told me.  
At least he has confided in me, and opened my eyes to what I would elsewhise not have seen. I will remain vigilant for now.

Stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid, stupid.  
  
What did I think I was doing?! Don't... Spirits, you swear to yourself to never do this again, you useless [the rest of the page has been torn out.]

# 36th of Phoenix

Been a while since last entry. Burnt hands make writing a little slow, and somewhat inconvenient.  
  
Right, position: Caer Shadowfain, Cursed Shore, Orr, Tyria. General approach seems clear, though we're back at the main staging point for the invasion of southern Orr. Not much has changed, the cannons still roar across the perimeter, giants roam, and unexploded shells litter the valley.  
Weather mostly windless, though dust seems to slowly drift down overhead. The sky seems to be laced with some sort of shimmering lighter-than-air fog that reflects light. It makes for an extremely impressive and beautiful sky. Orr's true beauty is so readily apparent here, from the giant shell that houses Shadowfain, to the super-structure arches that rise out of landscape to curve into Arah to the south. We once moored the *Ramming Speed!* up near one, almost cresting the top over the cloud cover. Hard to forget the sight. They have not changed much, and remain the greatest structures I have seen on this living world.  
  
But I am racing ahead. We started off in our previous camp, and made our way to some sort of Orrian dig site, supporting some Priory scholars that seemed almost hilariously incompetent. One of them was *blind*, spirit's alive! First we had to beat back two Risen assaults and tear down some artillery pieces, before heading into some sort of catacomb shrine... That was a bad idea, the blasted tunnels housed an Eye of Zaithan. We popped the bloody thing, but it was a tense fight. Athy got burnt badly, and is out of duty for some days. It got better, instead of bailing, the scholars decided to stick around and poke at some funny looking altar, summoning more Risen. In the end, they didn't even take anything with them.  
  
Long march to Caer Shadowfain after that, already getting dark by the time we left. Pleasant surprise on arrival, I'm now a Vigil Crusader proper again, along with San. On that note, it seems we have mutually decided to brush away our little 'incident', and just go on as we were. I am immeasurably thankful for this. I don't understand what got into me. At the time, it all made so much sense, it just clicked. In hindsight, it was a wild thoughtless grab made even wilder by my own conviction of it's truth.  
  
Detained some sort of eye-patched drunk fellow, and had to deal with his dramatic friend. Don't trust either, but the Warmaster seems to know who they are, so I can't comment. Chained him up good, but we should really have gagged him. His incessant whining is working on my nerves, and I want to tear out his tongue, and feed it to an Abomination. One of those burst through the camp gate too, incidentally, though Mippl and I managed to kill it in short order.  
  
Ah, yes, Mippl; I had a long, surprisingly open, conversation with the Agent. Seems we both served together in the original campaign, and we've seen our share of warfare. I told some stories of my time with the Steelriders, though I might have embellished it a little for effect. I am surprisingly given to like the Agent, and sense that we could easily become good friends, if both of us were so inclined. It is also exceedingly rare for an Asuran to compliment me on my intelligence, something which he did not once, but twice.  
  
For the first time in a while, I feel relatively content.

[Continuation of entry.]  
  
It is dawn, early, with the slow ascent of the sun starting just over the horizon. The great shell above us casts deep and long shadows, hiding within them the feint staggering forms of our besiegers, occasionally lit up by the sharp flash and rumble of cannon as the wall crews call out, track and fire at anything that comes near to us. They work tirelessly, just as the risen, their ears ringing with the resounding and violent majesty, the song to which the blossoms of fire erupt from their steel maws, curling into whisps of gunpowder smoke that linger, just below the oily gasses that drift between us and the clouds.  
That such grace is to be found in something so devouring as war! I take joy everlasting in finding beauty and purpose in all things, however mundane, though never with such horrid fascination as this craft I have made my own.  
  
It is the bravery and base nobility of spirit of those around me that eclipse even that. Do I not think they are afraid? Of course they are! Afraid to fail with their duty unfulfilled, to never stand on the shores of their homelands in victorious joy! Afraid to fall short of their forbearers, who look proudly on from beyond to Mists, witnesses to deeds that will echo forever onwards! Hail to thee, crested white, my sisters and brothers, this salute to your valour!  
  
I am stirred deeply, as I am, realizing to what extent I have missed the company of others. The solace of the seas and endless rolling deserts pale in comparison to the kindness and company of my friends. I had forgotten what it is like to love others in my solitude. The presence of women of my folk here have also reminded me how long it has been since I have held, longingly, my sweet in my arms. I wish now, beyond all else, that you were alive, so I could kiss one last time the silken strands of your golden head, and show you what a breathtakingly beautiful gift you bore me that sad day.  
  
Ah, Orr, what have you done to bewitch me into feeling such emotion? To inspire me to honour and duty, to love and joy, and longing most dear? Are the spirits of your departed masters speaking to me? Beauty, Life, Death, War, Nature, they course through my veins now, roaring their songs to my heart! Come to me, lost spirits, and let me show you why they have called me "Skaaldson"!

# 37th of Phoenix.

Position constant, Shadowfain seeing a lot of traffic. Windstill, ocassional breeze, alternating. Higher wind currents observed as strong north gale, shift seawards. General ambient heat, relatively low air moisture, despite proximity to sea.  
  
Enemy presence constant, though only haphazardly organised in places. Managed to peek into the command tent, and observed strategic situation thanks to intelligence from the scouts. Seems the Hallows have been overrun. This means the southern Shore is open, and risen are likely bleeding out from around Arah. It is likely we'll see Penitent come under assault several times, and the general tug-of-war between the field lines shows little sign settling soon.  
  
General morale has improved radically, many finding the Shore to be more pleasant than Malchor's Leap. Additionally, it seems many of the soldiers and recruits are finding their place after the influx beofre this tour, me included. My promotion to the serving rank of Crusader has been swift, though I hope I am not begrudged for it. It has only been a few days, but I already feel more comfortable taking the lead when no-one else does, or when the situation demands it. I cannot deny that I have set my eyes on a post as First Crusader within Lance, something which I am sure would benefit our unit, as it will allow Beaumont some breathing room. If all goes well, and knowing the good work that she does, San will do similarily well with the Scouts before long, as will Athy, who is on her way to transition from recruit to crusader too.  
  
During patrol today, Knight Beaumont had me throw her, bodily, over a river, rather thann suffer wading it. I am not sure if having a trooper hurl her across a potentially fordable river is that much more dignified, but it did the trick. She then threw me some spirit-chains, which I had to hold tight so the others could pull themselves over the deep currents. At least I must applaud her on her creativty.  
Also noticed that I was in the shieldwall with Kadlin, Hakonarsd. again. We seem to fight well together, and adjust easily to eachother's combat rythym, more so than with Wulfbane and I. Despite this, we rarely speak, which I find odd.  
  
Yesterday's drunk proved interesting. Long story short, I was given orders to arrest the man again after he was set free, allegedly by the Warmaster, though she was not around to verify this in person. I managed to extract some information from him in exchange for small comforts, though he did strike me as rather harmless, if flippant in the extreme. He was pleasant enough when he was sincere, but quickly petered off into base vulgarity when Alyssa showed up, like some sort of lusting jotun.  
  
Other items of note; spoke with Vethrir and Force, briefly, on the parapet. First time I exchanged words with them like this, and they were in surprisingly good humour. Vethrir epsecially seemed to be a long enough distance away from pure grump to be outright pleasant, something which I did not expect after the admittedly unsettling things I had heard in regards to what happened in Gendarren. Bloody, that one polite Charr, was there too, though he was a little jarred by the cannon fire.

# 38th of Phoenix

Position same, Caer Shadowfain. Still no wind, except in the higher air currents. Under constant assault from the west, groups of risen and abominations, rare giant mixed in it. Guard duty is tiring us out, as we have to keep rotating troops to and from rest. Ran two rotation, one with the drunk, who was sworn in as Recruit Sima. That almost ended bad, idiot charged off towards an enormous abomination that nearly flattened us. Managed to batter it away and avoid the strikes while the Warmaster signalled a retreat, and 'the ranged' pelted it with arrows. Saw at least half of them being bowled over in the process, though.  
  
Patrol followed, little of note. Fought some risen War worshippers we had to smash apart. One summoned up real nasty energy blades from the ground. Managed to duel him briefly, before we managed to overwhelm it. Several wounded. Kath pushed us onwards, and we shielded some Asura power suit back to camp.  
  
San took the scouts up climbing the giant shell. Managed to tag along with Mippl, dragging the scouts along on a climbing rope. San had them run tactical analysis of the surrounding area, very astute. Her terrain knowledge is admirable, and passing it on to the scouts will benefit us greatly. Wish they passed this on during basic training too, having eyes on the field like that from every Crusader would greatly increase terrain awareness. Might have avoided having to throw Kath if she'd realised there was a river and a bridge. But then again, I did enjoy that far more than I should have. Mippl was pleasant, as always.  
  
Second guard rotation after that, long one. Just mashing risen at the gate with the Knight and San for what seemed to be forever, until we eventually managed to get relieved. Had a pleasant enough evening after that, until Beaumont wandered off and returned with a high-quality human-made arrowhead embedded in her plate's spineguard. It would have crippled her horrendously if it had hit, so we suspected a sharpshooter. So, San and I are now on close protection detail until at least further notice.  
  
Got my hands on a letter, apparently found outside the walls by a passing crusader. It was directed at the Knight, and included another arrowhead, and a note saying that whoever sent it 'was running out of patience". Settled it well enough: they're gunning for the Knight specifically, and they're using high-grade material, very accurately. They must have known the arrow wouldn't pierce, or they wouldn't have sent the letter. Warning shot.  
I am taking steps to prevent further attacks from succeeding, and will be trying to identify this assassin as quickly as possible. No-one touches one of my mine with impunity.

# 39th of Phoenix

Position same, wind none, weather constant. Meteorologically speaking, this place is about as interesting as a brick. I guess the old airborne method of marking out the overheads in the field book are less important for actual ground-bound infantry, but it is a good habit to maintain.  
  
Events of the day, in brief, are that large abomination wandered over and smacked Rotarn in the chest hard enough to knock the sapling out. Worry besets me, as he is very young, after all. Marcus is treating him as well as he can, but the sprig really needs surgery which can't be given on site to drag him out of the hazardous triage twilight he is in now.  
  
Spent most of the day in close proximity to Knight Beaumont and San, as a result of the protection detail. We have at least managed to identify the threat, though our options are somewhat limited. I strongly suggested we take this up beyond the immediate theatre of operations, as we're only dealing with a hired blade. We know who is beyond it, and can easily strongarm them through a variety of means into ceasing their operations. I am tempted to look them up and batter down their outer gate with a sledge, before paining their holdings with goat blood. If anything, that should deter them from playing any 'funny tricks' on a Knight commanding a contingent of highly temperamental norn shock troops for the next year or so.  
  
Aside from this, their company was, naturally, pleasant, as they are both prone to be. San is a tad overworked, and seems near constantly tired. I'm worried she's going to burnout at this rate; looking forwards to kicking it back a little with her on leave. Beaumont seems a little tense, and has become the de facto second officer of the camp, with the Warmaster and Tactican occupying themselves with whatever they deem is important. We are in urgent need of stepping up the number of First Crusader ranks to spread the command burden, or we'll end up in shambles before the tour ends.  
  
Morale took another dive between some of the more disgruntled troops. Especially Athelstan and Alyssa remain sour of the goings on, though both have their different reasons. Athel specifically seemed very bitter and was not as agreeable as he normally is. Their words bordered on insubordination, and there were comments made that unsettled me. I do realise they are pulling on the short end of a straw, however, and their toxicity are merely symptoms of a larger issue that will need to get resolved. Primarily, they are concerned about an aura of infallibility the surrounds the Tactician and Knight Beaumont. To an extent, I presume this is a methodological problem derived from a growing gap between the higher and lower ranks.  
  
I will decide come morning whether or not to report this formally or not, preferably to the Warmaster directly. I might wish to secure Knight Beaumont's support before I do, as I would not desire to be accidentally undermining her authority by sending it over her head.  
  
Managed to make a brief field analysis while I was in the command tent; I wish these sort of field charts were available to everyone. The backbone line Shadowfain - Penitent - Promenande seems to be under increased pressure from what I can tell, and half of the outlying western camps are apparently grossly understaffed. This means that any troop movement north or south across the Shore is under near-constant threat from being collapsed in on itself. Anything south of Shadowfain relies on this only supply route to keep a pulse going.  
What a disaster. Chapter will likely go on the move, either south directly, or west to bolster the troops emplacements there. Expect a though fight, either way.  
  
I have been thinking about the notions of the human 'god 'spirits, whose presence I did feel, if only as feint tremors on my soul. Something Marcus said about the Eternal Alchemy had me thinking. Gods, spirits and the like, are only a certain classification of magic entity. They are unquestionably extremely potent, and seem to exist in multiple places at once, manifesting their energy into the world. In that sense, the Spirits of the Wild and the human spirits are on equal terms. The typical style of veneration of my people, who worship only that which gives gives them strength directly, seems to hold true, as some of these spirits linger only here as a residue, whereas some, like bear or raven, can manifest themselves powerfully to those who desire it. Perhaps the human spirits manifested with equal potency before they departed Tyria. Anyway, I have always found little solace in the spirits, as they have rarely answered my calls. But... here, in Orr... this spirit of War sings to me, feeding my desire for martial glory and pride at arms. If this lost god has chosen a champion in me, I will humour it. Perhaps it will give me the strength to defend those around me from harm, and protect those I love.  
  
Unrelated, I think some of the womenfolk find my size to be unattractive, or even dangerous. Ah, how little they know of my capacity for tenderness...  
  
[Also, whoop, two pages].

# 40th of Phoenix

Head hurts. Giant fucking abomination crashed through the west gate. Overhead smash to the shield. Forced it into my forehead. Woozy. Sleep now, entry later.

[continuation of entry]  
  
Right, early entry. Position remains the same, as does the weather, or lack thereof, and the non-existent wind. The sand here doesn't seem to cool, and is hot even at night. Heat hazes whispers over the landscape outside, and the metal walkways supporting the breastwork are hot enough to crack an egg on. Wearing plate out in the sun is punishing, and the great shell's shadow is a welcome sanctuary.  
  
Breach smacked me up hard, but the worst faded overnight. Nasty cut on the head, but Marcus stitched it up nice enough, and it should heal fine. Lucky it didn't smack me in the back of the head, going out for a couple of days again doesn't sound healthy. Half my brain must be all over the place at this rate; bloody clubs.  
  
Talked to the Knight about that issue I noted down earlier, probably won't need a formal report. She was receptive enough of the notion that things weren't going quite as well as they should, and seemed positive about the idea of me picking up a supporting role in the command hierarchy sooner rather than later. Can't bound to First Crusader without another tour at the very least under the belt, but the idea of a field brevet until that time did pique her interest. Spirits knows, Lance could use it.  
  
Alyssa went around in her corset again. Spirits, but that didn't leave much to the imagination. Stinson was practically drooling on himself. Can't say I minded it either; she's rather ample for a human. Usually find them a tad frail. Chapter at least seems to attract a notable number of fairer creatures, if anything. Don't quite know if that makes it more or less bearable, but it certainly makes for a prettier view.  
  
San's been resting up, which is good. Looking forwards to leave; Beaumont, Athy and Mithy seem prepared to tag along, so we'll do something nice. Sent Usha a letter to secure something softer for them, as norn-strength ale might just put them out cold, which isn't the intention. Working on a gift for the two flowers, something a little silly I hope they'll enjoy. Something Celdric said also had me think about something for San, though I'll see. Ice skating and hot springs should be a nice change after Orr, anyway.

# 41st of Phoenix

Position remains Caer Shadowfain. Quiet, weather shifted mildly, very soft hint of wind. Cooling a little, perhaps a tidal shift causing cooler air flow? It is barely noticeable, but it gently trembles across the heated skin, causing a quite pleasant sensation, like being ticked softly by the smallest ice crystals of a summer snow. It is soothing to sit in the shade, and feel it dance across my temples and chin, caressing the harder lines in my features, softening them as I close my eyes briefly. Around me, Orr lies, both dead and majestically alive. It sings, to the tune of departed masters and intrusive living, a song in the great cacophony of noise that echoes here. The thunder of Pact cannon, the sound of plate sabatons crunching sand asunder, the whispering rip of steel shearing flesh.  
I drink it in, and feel alive here.  
  
Patrol was not of note, except for highlighting a crushing lack of officers in Blade, and a break in unit cohesion. Formations shattered outside camp when a giant clipped the rearguard. Had to call the column back inside in a confusion. First Crusader Cindertail lagged behind, and I had called her out on it before I realized who she was. She was, needless to say, not impressed, even though I was just attempting to close off the rearguard without leaving anyone behind. We seem not to be focusing on securing Penitent and the supply line south. I hope this is because we are not needed there, against my predictions that it is the area about to be hit hardest.  
  
Miremel and Athelstan both seem out of it. Miremel looks like she burnt herself out, and Athelstan is still sour. San fought a rather uninspiring bout with him to crack away some tension, but they didn't seem committed to it. Won some silver on a bet on San taking the round, though there's that. Seemed to have learned something from me, and simply body-smashed Athelstan at the last. Offered Athelstan a discreet drink, and some heavier combat play if he is up for it, though I don't think he'll take me up on it, sadly.  
Couldn't even find Miremel in order to cool her down.  
  
Chief... was acting weird. He made some foul smelling meal earlier. Apparently caused a major allergic reaction with Jorund, who was coughing up blood, and had us all worried. Roeland, bless his paws, took care of him, thankfully. Athy also shifted from elated to foul across meal time, according to Mithy, and turned in early. San and I picked up on the smell; smelled like all intents and purposes of broiled quaggan, but it just came out of a standard canned meat tin. That's not all, Chief seemed to talk as if he was planning on leaving us soon. Was quite adamant about me picking up field cook if that happened. Is he is hearing his own demise, or the end of his legend? Perhaps a vision? Spirits, that would be a loss to this chapter and our kind.  
  
It got worse later. Celdric and Marcus had stood at the gate, with the former poised up ready to strike. He had ripped the stitches on his face open, and was pouring with blood, like a being straight out from a nightmare. In a vivid moment, I was prepared to lunge forwards and skewer the twisted monster on my blade, so disconcerting was the experience. He shadowstepped away before we could do anything, though. Beaumont and Marcus seem adamant about their attempt to help him, and seek to search for a remnant of one 'Gillian' within his fractured mind. I fear they will end up only grasping helplessly at shards that only reflect their own desires. The sheer grotesque insanity and terror I saw in his eyes made me sick; I know evil well enough when I see.  
He likes San well enough, for some reason, as it is the only person he is even remotely nice to. The notion of allowing that monster I saw come close to her, however, sickens me beyond comprehension. I must not allow it.  
  
~~I catch myself thinking about San a lot lately. There is something about her I just cannot wrap my head around. It is driving my insane that I cannot pinpoint what it is. I was listening in to the Knight and her talking earlier, while I was working on something outside their tent. There just seems to be something that doesn't add up. She said she joined up with a Blade Chapter directly after basic training, but then also said she had joined up for the original Orrian campaign, and had spent transferring in and out of~~  
Stop it. Stop it stop it stop it stop it. Don't do this again. Stop it.  
  
[Break in page].  
  
The knight and San are sleeping behind me. I remain here, a vigilant sentinel, watching over them both. It is an easy duty, but heartfelt. I hope theirs is an easy slumber, and they dream of things dear to them as the stars are dear to the moon, and they are dear to me.

# 42nd of Phoenix

Position same, weather same, same, same, same. Orr is drab and dead, and howls with the sound of unmentionable horror. Thousands die here everyday in a gnawing maw of horror. Sons and daughter perish to creatures no sane man would fight. How do we even triumph here?  
  
Alright... let's... let's start with the mundane things.  
  
Miremel finally snapped, and had to be relieved of duty. Still angry that no-one did this earlier! I would have, if only they would give me the bloody authority to do so. This Chapter is falling apart at the seams; the First Crusaders that remain are overtaxed and spread to thin. They can barely regulate base unit cohesion, let alone discipline and the stress levels of the troops. That Mire was allowed to rail on for near-on three days without being found unfit for duty, only to be caught up in an enormous scene, screaming her lungs out, is just not acceptable.  
  
Gathering patrol, nothing of note. Just some plants, twigs and a disgustingly ugly truffle. San took team lead, despite there being First Crusaders around. Don't know how I feel about that, but it is not 'happy'.  
  
Roeland... spirits, Roeland was tasked by Force to apparently write an essay on the pro's and contra's of retaliating on insults. I had such high hopes, but he is about as assertive as a burlap sack. I thought to prove a point when I ordered him to hit me, show him how stupid it was to let himself get bossed around like that, but... that just made it worse. I know Force well enough to realise that he is the sort of Charr you impress by beating him in a good fight, and then drinking eachother under the table. Not this... weak-willed grovelling.  
  
Some ass of a mercenary passed by earlier, spouting obscenities. He was utterly unenjoyable, and very rude. I got so tired of his bullshit that I smacked him in the face hard enough to crack his gasmask into pieces. Of course, all the watching troops immediately agreed we all saw him "fall'. I needed to punch something so bad, I nearly killed him.  
Mithy, Athy and Alyssa were also around. They did a lot to brighten my day; especially Mithra was very kind. She hugged me twice when she noticed I was having an off day. At least that beautiful flower will never cease to move me.  
  
Talked to Sima. Good man, despite what everyone else thinks. Shakes got to him, so I give him something to calm his nerves. We spoke, pleasantly, as we did before. I think we understand eachother on a fundamental level; we speak little worlds, but plenty of meaning.  
  
Helped San with going through reports. Easy going, most pleasant between us. I eventually wandered off, but left my helmet in the command tent. When I got back, I found the Knight and San kissing eachother, passionately. I knew well enough they were together like this for a long enough time, but... that hurt me. I played it off with a laugh, but that hurt me, deeply. I didn't realise it, but I have fallen, deeply, for one of my dearest friends. It is like a vice of ice has gripped itself shut tighly across my chest. I cannot breathe. The idea of them being alone together is maddening, yet I know I am but a poor fool in the play of someone's else happiness.  
If I love them both, truely, I cannot selfishly begrudge them what solace they have found in eachother's embrace.  
  
It is all made that much more unbearable by the joy in her eyes when I gave her that little coral carving, and the soft kiss on my cheek she gifted me in return.

[](https://theashenchapter.enjin.com/profile/3099637)

[Tzahr Davidsson](/profile/3099637)

wrote:

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kath is so dead xD

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![096f256a83a199a4ce51475c96474c78f979b8b9566768d05e9e44771a819c0b.jpg](data:text/html; charset=utf-8;base64,)  
  
Poor Tzahr. -pat pat-

Kill them both.

# 43rd of Phoenix

Position, Caer Shadowfain, Orr. Weather, still clear, temperature still hot.  
Weird day today... just weird couple of days after eachother.  
  
Started off with field patrol, as expected. All geared up to hammer it out in the Lance shieldwall with Kadlin, when Force wanders over and puts me in field commander of Blade, under direct supervision of the warmaster. Had me pulling out a detachment of ten to eradicate some risen drakes. We did fine, pretty routine. Think everything went as well as it should, Blade responded well to my commands, and seemed comfortable enough. Had to lean on the Warmaster for some advisories, but that is all. Had me pen up a report; just like with the Steelriders. The military writing style comes back easily, though I have to stop myself from noting wind speed estimations and overheads. Don't need those here.  
  
Lance seemed to do fine in my absence, got a new blood legion Charr assigned to us, one Barf Axehound. Seems professional and diligent. San and the knight teased me about them sending me over to Blade for good. Bah! Blade are a good lot of soldiers, but Lance is like my home. I rather hope that whatever today's exercise is leading to keeps me in Lance, even though Blade needs those First Crusaders badly. Think I'd get a bit worried about San, Mithy and Kath when I'm not around to intercept those shots. Incidentally, Kath got herself flashed by a stun-grenade when I wasn't around. Point in case.  
  
Athy got herself shot with a hylek dart, on my watch too. Not happy about that. Didn't tell me until we were back at base either. Spirits, what would have happened if her body had responded differently to the toxin... I would never be able to look Mithy in the eyes again. She's alright though, thankfully. Seeing those two flowers wilt because of me would be heartwrenching.  
  
Two other new faces too, Asura called Vox, I think, and a human girl called... Emerata? They seemed solid enough, serious, if green. Didn't have time for much of a chat, Jorund challenged me to some bare-hand sparring as we were making introductions. Knocked me flat too, the wolf. Much faster than I expected him being.  
  
What else... San and Kath were pleasant enough today. Managed to flush up the ma'am horribly by calling her 'Kathy', so that's one to keep. Hurts a little to see them about. San looked ~~pretty~~ beautiful today, as if I saw her through new eyes. The soft wells of her scars, the turn of her nose and the angle of her neck, the rough down that is now slowly taking the place of that silly red cap. It is a softer, gentler affection that still warms me when I am near her.  
  
Things got out of hand at the gate. At first, it was a relatively pleasant chat between some of the male troops, discussing such things as weapons, risen, women, the lot. Then Garrick and the Tactician show up. Bloody Charr is insane in the head, about his banner. I'm pretty sure he threatened to outright violate Bjorn with it, edged on by the Tactician. Not impressed by the performance, and it fouled my mood a little.  
  
Sima still got the shakes. He's saying he's bringing in his own supply, which is bad. At least I can regulate what I give him, and build it down. No clue what he'll do to himself. Probably need to report it to the Warmaster, and take a punch in the jaw for what I've been feeding him...

# 44th of Pheonix

Caer Shadowfain, Orr. Weather still constant. What I wouldn't give for some snowfall, or even mild wash of rain.  
Windcurrent still only barely noticeable. Despite this, the high currents still seem to be roaring. If the *Ramming Speed!* is out there, it must be sailing the high winds mightily. I remember standing on the foredeck as we sailed away from our mooring at Trinity. The sense of wonder and terror as Orr surfaced from the low mists, gray, drab and ugly, but wondrous at the same time. The trepidation, as Verril the Steelrider mustered us for the first drop on the shores, the ship's cannon firing already. I remember her words still; proudly defiant, triumphing already. She could not have been more proud of us, her soldiers, to be there with her.  
  
"Hear that, my steel-clad bookahs? That's the sound of a Charr-forged one-four-four flinging Asuran high-yield magically charged shells at a lost human shore, about to be retaken by norn boots, in an alliance lead by a Sylvari. What you hear, what you feel, what you are about to do, heralds a new age of defiant unity. To stand together, to war together... We are going to hit that dragon bastard so hard that nevermore will any foe, god or man, dare look upon the shores of our homelands without fear. We will show, once and for all, that Tyria is not to be preyed upon with impunity! Oh, my glorious bookahs, let us show them what we do to people that piss us off."  
  
We thundered down on that shore like mortar shells, bursting into the sand. The guardian barriers barely slowed us down enough for us not to break every bone in our bodies. But we didn't care. We slaughtered every Risen we saw there, our voices raised, roaring our the words to the Crested White. Nervous recruits turned veterans that single day, carrying that beach. We could do anything.  
  
And here I am at Shadowfain again, years later. Almost no-one from that original assault is alive still. Verril lies dead, a column of stones at the foot of a blasted slope, a battered helmet sat atop it. I feel their losses keenly, every day. Their souls are printed on my skin, so that I may carry onwards their legends in my own. We will sing again, old friends, in the Mists, and raise our horns in honour to the fallen!  
  
Today's duty carried us out to that Labyrinth, sat squarely out west of Penitent. Recovery of a lost field team and some high value box. Went smooth enough, cleared it out by the book, shieldwall work. They had San and Azzis run the special box up back to camp. San wanted to do it on her own first, but that was madness. Weirdly eager about that, despite knowing she needed both her hands to carry it. Might have gotten herself killed. Anyway, rest of the unit cleaned up some risen spider nests with little problem. Quiet day for being in Orr. Seems at odds with the absolute shitstorm that I expected. Guess that'll change when we move south. Chapter still hasn't passed down any further than Penitent, except the scouts.  
  
San was dead on her feet with exhaustion today. I dwell on her, now, like a waking dream. It is a desire so profound, just to be near her. I can feel it drawing me to her with every heartbeat. Every fiber of my being wishes to embrace her in my arms, to comfort her, but I know I cannot, for the very sake of the love I bear her.  
  
It was the Knight who confounded me most deeply today. She did not seem to understand how deeply I value the lives of those around me, and thought me foolish for worrying about those whom I care for. It is cold and tragic that is exactly those feelings of selfless love for others that make me set aside what I feel for San, for her sake. She couldn't understand, even if I told her, and that wounds me. I thought that when she talked about that shy little girl in the colourful dresses, that danced, wrote and played music, she was talking about herself, but... that person does not seem to exist. I don't understand how she could tell me not to feel for others. It is the very nature of why I am here, and goes against the core tenants of my being. If not for the love for my daughter, where would I be?

[Continuation of entry]  
  
I am so tired, but I cannot sleep. Too many things swimming around the inside of my head.  
Skull is still sore from where the Abomination hit me, and I can feel the deformation in the bone where my helmet crumpled under the blow. The cut on the front healed well enough, pulled out the stitches myself, using my shield-boss as a mirror. I looked ugly and distorted in it, the reflection marred by the dents and blows I had to suffer. A suitable reflection of my spirit.  
  
Perhaps that is a good thought. Like my shield, I am imperfect, scarred by pains and hurts laid upon me, but I serve my purpose. To protect those that stand behind me, to weather whatever may comes. Like it, I too can stand proud in the face of adversity, and take what my foes throw at me. Yes, that is a good thought. To let blows deflect off me, and remain unbowed, to wear the marks of my failings outwards, to embrace and overcome what would topple others.  
  
Yes! Yes. The fair wisdom of arms, so base and simple, their truths brutal and unbiased. War guides me after all, in both battle and thought. A body clad in iron, and a soul plated in steel. I will stride onward then, and remain unbroken as the waves of hardship crash upon me. Let sorrow lap at my shins as I leap out onto vanquishing shores.  
  
The soldier alone can stare down Death's maw fearlessly, liberating himself from fear. Why live under that terrible sword; do you wish to live forever? If it does not fall today, it will fall tomorrow! And if it does fall on the morrow, would you not have had that you had lived today furiously? The world lies on the tip of a blade, hail to they who wield it!

# 45th of Phoenix

Still at Shadowfain, no change. Not even a mild drizzle, or a soft wind.  
  
Today's entry will be short: very little of note happened. Seemed yesterday knocked some air out of everyone, not just me. Just some sparring; I fought Axe. Mighty strong, the beast tried to lift me and throw me! Pitty I'm so heavy, I came crashing down on his sternum, knocked the air out of him. Note for the future, don't try to be clever, just beat this one into the ground, hard.  
  
Had a pleasant enough evening sharing the fire with Beaumont, Force and Axe. The Charr talked a bit about their culture, learned some things I didn't know. They're a fierce folk, Legion Charr. Wouldn't want to fight them if they ever pressed into the Peaks hard. Would likely bleeds us heavy.  
  
Beaumont actually apologized to me for what she said, if not in as much words. Just wanted to make sure I was prepared to lose someone without cracking. A sentiment born out of concern for me, rather than sheer coldness. I can forgive her for that, and I have done so readily. Been stitching her fingers up badly with a needle, for some reason. I'm not even sure she's ever held one. That, or she must be getting shakes worse than Sima.  
San'd probably like that, hah!

# 46th of Phoenix

Caer Shadowfain still. Fine, fine, let's go through it. Wind, none, high currants still strong north. Weather, still. It has become as if we are entrapped here, cut off from the outside world; the air is insufferably hot, and even the soft whisper of a current has died away again. It smells of acidic metal and spoilt foodstuffs, a sour tang that lingers at the back of your mouth. The air itself wafts under the weight of whispering columns of heat, shivering like tears in the fabric of the world itself. When you climb upon the cliffside behind the officer's tent, you can see the far camp, all the way across the river. In the dawn, it dances and writhes as the fields of gold are set alight in a sudden blaze of deep red. It is intrinsically beautiful, in its own way; I would that I could share the sight with someone, right now. I wish one of my Freyja's was here, or San, to see this rising sun with me, to revel in something so simply wondrous as a beautiful Orrian dawn.  
  
My pen casts long shadows as I sit here, resting in some shade of the coral, and the shell above me. The red sunlight laps at my feet, and the morning pickets at the west gate shield their eyes from the low beams to watch out across the plains. Smoke spills errantly from the cannon emplacements, their barks an oddly distorted rhythm that fades away into the background, our ears used to the feint ringing they evoke.  
The camp is asleep, though reveille will be called soon. I sleep little, as I am want to do, instead dropping away into that shallow sitting slumber, a solemn watcher resting by the gates. My sword is drawn, across my knees, my hand gripping the edge, the blade creasing shallow lines in the hardened leather of my gauntlets. The sun rises slowly. I can feel its rays kissing the strands of my beard, spreading a diffuse warmth across my lower jaw. It is pleasant.  
  
Celdric knows. He saw how it pains me sometimes when I look at her. I am almost laughably terrified that he will use this against me. To turn her against me, or spirits forbid, to hurt her. She was so tired today. How heart-aching that was, how maddeningly unbearable. I do not know if I am angry or sad, but it is not a good feeling. It is a feeling that corrupts with jealousy and anger, that moves to deep-stringed emotional avarice for her affections. I cannot give into the dark thoughts that lay there; they will bring ruin upon us all.  
  
No, I must remain: a solemn watcher, resting by the gates, wishing he was not alone.

# 47th of Phoenix

Shadowfain, no wind, no weather, no risen. Very mundane day. A quiet day in Orr, if such a miracle exists.  
Well, I say quiet. The risen have stopped swarming the west gate, which is always good. Things were wearing a little thin on that regard; only so many risen you can kill with relish before the taste turns stale.  
  
Overheard the Knight and Tactician discuss some things. San's getting sacked over to Blade, because of her things with the Knight. Not surprising, but you know... rather keep her around if I had a choice. Tensions between the officers are bad; Kath eventually clued in enough to dismiss me, but spirits alive, I sometimes wonder if they are competent at all, or just too dumb to die when attacked. They certainly miss that spark of brilliance Verril had.  
Also, the knight can't do base multiplications. For a moment, I seriously wondered if she was an actual officer, or just a gaudily painted cardboard box.  
  
Anyway, talks around the fire today. Sort of got a little weird, enormous lingering sexual tension. Some of the talk was outright indecent. Kathleen also barked hard at Mithy when the flower went up to hug San. Can't say I appreciate her for it, seemed unneeded and harsh.  
I've been settling into locking my feelings deep. It hurts, but they can never know. It'll drive San and the Knight away from me; it would destroy me. I have survived Orr once, I can live through this too, in silence.  
  
If Celdric breathes a word, I will rip what passes for his trachea out through his throat, and feast on his tongue as he chokes on his own sap. Wretched [a pencil broke here]. Bah. Anger is wasted upon you, book. How you would weep if you felt every emotion I have written as deeply as I did. Alas, you are but a tome for me to settle my mind in, though you are a loyal friend.  
  
Wynn sort of seemed broken today. Entire incident with Jorund seems to have hit her hard; she needs a friend to lean on. Don't think she has anyone else in the chapter to talk to. Offered her a hug; needed it. Sort of made me sad, I think.  
  
Athy just wandered over, settled down. Didn't seem to want to talk, just... carving something. Don't know what I think about it, but her presence is a little soothing. Surprised she's up this early, 'fore dawn, and not with Mithy.  
Do sort of feel like she's watching me. Bah, not in a good writing mood anyway.

# 48th of Phoenix

Caer Shadowfain. See previous entries for weather and wind observations. Should really be doing that more often, instead of repeating the same thing over and over again. Kind of gets tiresome.  
  
So. Good day today, training exercise I suggested to the Knight panned out; think it was good for morale to hear everyone say something good about each other. Sort of drew a blank on ways to improve on San's skillset, though. Little awkward. The two new recruits, Vee and Ema, joined us. Taken them a little under under my wing for now, just make sure they're settling in, and learning the ropes. They're very friendly, and seem eager enough. If they keep it up, they'll turn out great.  
Kath had Gutt lead out a patrol, with me as second. Put me in rearguard, which was the weirdest thing, as I'm usually shieldwall. Kept wanting to lurch ahead, but managed to hold down the fort well enough. Had to call out a few corrections to the formation on the march, but that's all. Lance's got good field discipline. Gutt drilled us a little before letting us off the hook.  
  
Also had a chat with Vethrir; he all but strongarmed me into engineering after he learned I served on the *Ramming Speed!*. Apparently basic aero-mech confers a very specific skillset; that of welding hull-plates, and arming live shells. Ironside wants me working on some project, and we made a deal for some engineering training in exchange for a nice smoke together once in a while. Kath had signed off on the request before I even had time to amble over.  
  
On another note, Wulfbane has caught on about what's going on as well. At least the Chief is quiet about that sort of thing. Solid man, that. Always seems to sniff out the most incredulous secrets. You'd think he knew something.  
  
Sort of confessed to the Tactician that I've been drip-feeding Sima his drink after the Tactican caught him out of camp. She'll give me some sort of punishment for the infraction, but seemed understanding. Additionally, despite the fact that I possessed drink, she noted that I was not getting *drunk*, meaning she might ovelrook the infraction a little. I have gained permission from her to continue giving Sima some to stop the shakes from crippling him too badly. Did have to chain him up again, he did leave camp, after all. He was understanding enough, and I tried to make him as comfortable as possible.  
  
Wynn's still down on herself; she was covered in latrine sludge earlier. Sort of feel bad I couldn't steal a quick chat,  
  
Oh, and Athy's here again. Crawled out of the woodwork a bit after I woke up from my usual spot. She's carving again. Heh, think she's making a carving out of me this time? That'd be nice. It is a rather thick piece of wood, so who knows. Doesn't seem to want to chat.  
  
Anyway. Dawn is upon me, and the camp is waking. Honour and duty, Crusader. Honour and duty.  
  
[Edit: Enjin apparently went full on NOPE mode, and posted the same post some twenty times. Needed deleting.]

tits

[Someone has apparently, in some gaudy handwriting, scribbled "Tits" in the margin. A single strand of white hair remains, embedded into the folds between the pages. No idea how it came there, and no-one ever will.]

# 49th of Phoenix

Caer Shadowfain, see earlier entries for overheads. Been sort of a hectic day, but I'll take it from the top, got to make sense of a lot of things.  
  
Right, generally pleasant day. Got pulled out for a random patrol with First Crusader Strongshield, was put in second lead, with Mithra taking first. She did alright, just seemed a bit nervous about it all. Doesn't like putting out commands, apparently. Either way, Force had us both write reports on it, to see how we'd handle it.  
Also inched closer to First Crusader Gutt a little, though spirits, she was hard to crack open. Don't even know if I dented that shell of discipline she has around her at all, though. Didn't as much talk to me as debriefed me over supper, in the full military sense of the word.  
  
Two risen attacks pierced the east gate. One big abomination crashed through, and flattened Kath and San's tent. Helped them set it back up, least I could do. Sort of felt good being able to help my friends, even if it was with something so small. It's the little pleasures, I guess, that warm my heart. Perhaps I can live in this state of loyal friendship for a while more, at least.  
  
Wynn's buckling, having a lot of issues with what's happening. Jorund and I are trying to support her, but... well, can't let all that stuff get to her. Can't have her shatter like Satsuki did; don't want to burry another friend on this isle.  
  
Spend a long time talking with Alyssa and the two flowers. Athy turned in earlier today, though I'm sure she'll pop up in a bit to resume her carving. Either way, long talk about folk and feelings. Alyssa knows my gaze occasionally wanders around her, seemed to enjoy it. Felt a little awkward being caught out on it, though, but then, what can you do. I've been sitting on a dry rock, surrounded by nice looking women for almost a month, can you you really blame me? We talked about jealousy, and feelings, and other things. Had to explain to Mithra why folk got jealous of others. Special sort of parenting instinct, I suppose.  
Did slip up bad though, think I accidentally dropped that I loved San when I got carried away by the sentiment. Spirits alive, but at this rate everyone will bloody know, and I might as well just have announced it on the notice board! Sometimes I feel like I have all the emotional subtlety of a concrete brick. Alyssa's not exactly someone I'd trust with my deepest and darkest secrets.  
  
Sima was pleasant enough, asked a lot about why I... well, do what I do to some of my foes. I never really thought about it much, just sort of do what ma used to do, even though the shamans disapproved of it. Guess that, without the affection of the Spirits of the Wild, I might as well draw strength from old traditions. Must be some meaning to it; Hejja was an incredibly talented hunter; her rites must have given he some of that strength. Besides, threatning to eat someone and then not being able to do it would be a loss for my intimidation repertoire. Sima's shakes are getting less, I'm going to scale down his drink as a result. Need him to get hooked off, eventually.  
He's a nice man, always optimistic. Sort of feel sorry for having to throw his friend out, but... tactician's orders.  
  
I am tired. I don't know why, but I feel like I'm very slowly going insane. Like a glass bead running down a spiral without end, until everything is just deep, dead and dark. I should really sleep well, and remove the armour. It's been weeks. But I can't sleep, the nightmare keep me out of my deeper rest. I sit where I sit, by the gates, dozing away superficially. Keep an eye out on the command tent, and the one next to it, just to be safe. There is a... fiddling, rickitty feeling running down my spine, and across my shoulderblades. Thick ropes of tension contort my back, almost painfully. Like a wound coil, unable to be sprung.  
  
And that is little compared to my enduring ordeal. There is little true happiness for me here. It claws and gauges at me, eating away, corroding that proud resolve. I wonder; if I fall, will I leave a dent?

# 50th of Phoenix

Position: Meddler's Summit, Cursed Shore, Orr, Tyria. Wind, east, gale. Weather, overcast, but no rainfall.  
Position itself tenuous, main passage point between Shadowfain, Penitent and the Promenande. Doesn't get much more south in Orr than this without running into overrun territory.  
Land route access is funneled through Penitent, we're in constant danger of being cut off. Penitent and the tunnel falls, we're dead in the water as far as terrestrial supplies go.  
Sea-side has the Anchorage, though, so there is a sea-side line. It's far, and deep into Orr, though, so generally not reliable. Most convoys would get sunk trying to run Malchor's Strait.  
Military analysis... well, let's say this place is defensible only in the most general sense of the world. It leads right into a semi-urban area that'll be hard to fight through. At least we can see the gates to Arah from here, an inspiring sight.  
  
We left Shadowfain earlier, under some issues. Sigra was badly wounded by a trampling abomination, had to leave her behind with broken bones and head trauma. Hard call. Scouts had already been dispatched, and we tallied too long. As we left the gate, we spotted a red flare. Athy came running, reported Jorund was being pincered on Jofast's, past Penitent. No choice, so Lance hammered down at speed down past Penitent. Other side... Shelter's Gate all but fallen. Massive attack. Ma'am ordered us through, so we did, attempted to break off. Unit cohesion broke, and we left half of them behind.  
Managed to push past with the others, found San pulling out Jorund out of Jofast's. Never been so relieved to see her in my bloody life, I was so afraid something had happened to her when I saw that flare. Either way, Jorund was badly wounded. Marcus patched him up well as he could. Hoisted him up on my shoulders.  
Meanwhile, ma'am sent Athy and Gutt back to Shelter's to pull out the remainder of the unit. By the time they came back, Jorund was all but bledding out on my shoulders. Mithra badly hit with coldburn. They had to leave First Crusader Cindertail behind too. No choice. We had to make a call; we pushed to Meddlers, at a jog. I could feel Jorund's warm blood trickle down my neck, and across my back. We reached it eventually, Marcus set to work. Almost dropped dead, but... couldn't.  
  
Immediately volunteered to go back with the ma'am and the scouts, rejoin Blade, see if they found Cindertail. We met them at Jofast's. Warmaster called the ma'am back to Meddler's, Blade would attempt to head back to Shelter's to find Gutt. I volunteered, again, attached myself to Blade. Promised the knight I'd find our First Crusader. I did, in a ditch below the gate. Carried her back to Meddler's with Blade around me. Cindertail is one of ours, and we don't leave anybody behind. Not ever. Not again.  
  
After that, sort of petered down fast. Mire's birthday, with cupcakes. New one in medical looked me over, nice way to make some new friends. Had a surprinsgly... weird talk with the Warmaster and Sima. Latter had naught but praise for me, and the Warmaster was inclined to listen. Seems like he is a good friend to have. First time I had a chat with my Chapter commander in a more or less casual manner. I just hope she doesn't hold that one exchange of especially lewd jokes against me. Weird end to a harsh day.  
  
~~There was a lot of blood~~ I was drenched in the blood of my comerades, people I had helped save, carried on my shoulders to safety. My purpose, to be a shield to mine, fulfilled. To become an unbreakable rock for others to lean on, to risk my life for theirs. Duty and honour, Crusader, where others would falter! I will fight the world, you hear me dragons, the world entire, for those I love! All your evil may stand against me, but I will prevail, if not by strength, then by sheer compassion and valour! I am the shield that holds back the darkness, so that others need not fear this dark night that has befallen us! They know, dawn is just a heartbeat away.  
Duty and honour, to protect the meek, the innocent, the poor, the lost and the repentant.  
  
How such passion elevates the heart! I am, happy, truely, for all those around me. Deeply, my love for San, but also her love Kathleen. I celebrate it, joyously, an ode to beauty so potent it is heart shattering! Oh, how I would kiss them both, to show them what emotion they bring me! Such glorious elation, thundering desire! Sadness and longing, both, the likes the gods themselves would envy for the most secret object of their affections! Spirits, has ever a mortal creature felt the raging fire of their own soul roar up to consume them entirely? Naught of me will remain but ashes.  
  
[Edit: bonus points if you get the double meaning of the last sentence!]

( What do you know, Tzahr's a poet! )

[Continuation fo entry.]  
  
Hm, later today now. Talk around the fire reminded me of the storm of the Cathedral of Glorious Victory. Faithful action, that, first taste of how hard this war was going to be. *Ramming Speed!* dropped the entire strike detachment right outside Rally, couldn't get any closer without risking the vessel.  
  
Non-combat drop, though, just dipped down and roped out, fast. Verill even had us draw up into formation prior to the advance, armoured. We where the ones that would batter down the door, so to speak. Full on shock attack, massed assault up the approach. Nothing more, nothing less. Impressive sight that; all the Steelbreakers lined out. Burunk and Unger at the front, with Verrili standing between them, tiny and out of place. As the attack started, Unger picked her up, and put her on his pouldron. She gripped the horn on his helmet, and swayed with every step as the ogre lumbered into the advance. Verril 'the Steelrider', indeed.  
  
I was left vanguard, saw Burunk move fowards. Risen crawled out of the woodwork at the bottom of that steep staircase, huge statue overhead, eyes filled with fire. Crashed through them like a sledge, didn't shatter them as much as trampled them over. Could feel the weight of the troops behind me push forwards, regardless. Couldn't have slowed if I wanted. We carried that charge over to the first steps, and then started climbing.  
  
Didn't have much time to think. Risen materialised out of thin air around us. Huge abomination the size of a Charr tank steps out below the statue. Verril and Unger didn't even have time to scream. Just... got dragged down into a mealstrom of hex-fields. Burunk simply turned around, and picked me up, like I was a toy. Threw me, just as he was about to be crushed. I fell, down the stairs we just stormed. Crashed hard into the sand. Never saw Burunk again. I owe that ogre my life and my soul. Without fear or thought, he saved my life at the cost of his own.  
  
Cannon from Rally was brought out, shelled the area into a ruin. Just sat there, cowering behind an outcrop as the shells fell not ten feet away. So few of us were left, scattered, broken. That unit that took the first beach? It was gone, smashed, thrown into the gnawing meatgrinder of Orr. I can't even remember what happened after that, just the line of Vigil helmets we lined up on the foredeck of the *Ramming Speed!*. Fifteen norn, eight charr, two ogres, and one single Asura, crested in the colours of a tactician.  
  
Har'varanar! Hail to the fallen.

# 51st of Phoenix

Position, Meddlers. Sleeping quarters have been erected outside the walls proper, but in a secluded spot. Need to post pickets more often, we still get wanderers. Still don't sleep, I just sit a little. Been almost a week and a half. I'm starting to feel like my brains are bubbling down my neck. But I can't. Keep getting woken up. Haven't even unpacked my tent.  
  
Today's duties were light; we secured an empty tomb, and swept a valley of stragglers. Command was split between Wulfbane and I, but there was hardly anything in in there worth engaging. One or two big abominations, rest was lone stragglers. Think I did well, unit operated quick and smooth under my command. They're competent soldiers, after all.  
  
After duties, everyone just seemed to drop away. Guess the advance knocked the breath out of people. Spent some time chatting with the Knight, now officially renamed "Boom Moon" as opposed to Beaumont, and the Tactician, who was typically direct as a cannon shell. Nothing of importance, really, just casual chat. Pressed me on my romantic preferences, oddly. Apparently, there's some sort of rumour around that I have a liking for Sima? Where did that even come from? He's nowhere tall enough. He's also a he, which sort of imposes on my usual phsyical preferences.  
  
Long chat with Marcus and Celdric, tried to see what makes him tick. Celdric sort of... drew into himself. A lot of dark, hidding things there. I think he stays in his own shadows to prevent himself from being hurt. Marcus waved off eventually, but Celdric and I stayed for a bit longer. Eventually offered him a drink, which Celdric accepted reluctantly. Eased him up right, Thistle even cracked a smile! Think we should do that again, someday.

# 52nd of Phoenix

Meddlers point, overheads still marked as previous, wind shift N/NE, constant.  
  
Today's action was... so smooth it was almost unremarkable. Ironside got orders down to blow out a undead barge in the Hallows. Two teams, one armour down the hull, one light on the outside. Used six three-minute charges, signals using the warhorns. Ironside and I lined out the plan, relayed instructions during line up. I was the demolitions lead for the inside team, plenty hard close quarters fighting. We pulled through that ship like a hot knife through butter. Plan executed perfectly, ship scuttled, mission attained. Mostly Lance on the inside, so no wonder. Good day in the Vigil, that.  
  
San took the scouts up climbing up some sort coral pillar. Decided to attach myself, because I always like a good vantage point. Knight tagged along too, but we knew she was afraid of heights. Roped her up to me, so that if anything happened, at least I'd be able to catch her. We sat at the top, spotted a risen ship laid out north of our position. Probably threatening our supply route, we'll have to take care of that. Need to notify the Warmaster about that next time I can. Knight eventually started having issues, so I took her down again. Didn't know she could get much more pale than that specifically. Had to lay down a bit. Took the oppertunity to have a look into the command tent, memorised some of the positions and troop dispositions from the field charts. Should help in the future.  
  
Wynn did well enough, sort of acts badly around explosives though, apparently. Her departure from medical seems to have impacted her badly. Talked about wanting to muster out after leave. Missed the feeling of grass below her feet.  
Very nice evening aside from that, cooking with San and Athy, because Chief wasn't around. Sort of uplifted the spirits a bit, reminded me of home to be doing mundane work in good company. Humours were good around the fire, after that. Boom Moon told an impressive and heroic story of how she overcame a troubling foe by banishing herself off a cliff. Exchanged some good boasts in return, though her feat was suitably mighty. If she had been a norn, her legend would have been worthy, indeed. I wonder if she'll tell me more about her past, sometime.  
In the end, Axehound sort of ruined it by riling on about the regulations on public affection. San took the hint, and waved off, unfortunately. Didn't think he appreciated me joking about it either. Killed the mood.  
  
Anyway, aside from the day ending at a minor, we did good work today. Hallows are robbed of their source of risen, San and Kath are in good humours, and the wounded seem to be recovering. Athy just appeared down from her night shift again. She's carrying about that little carving again, seems to be turning out to be a big fellow of some kind, maybe a Charr or a norn? I'd like it if she carved one of me. That'd be a worthy gift.  
Oh, reveille is called. Duty and honour, Crusader!

# 53nd of Phoenix

Meddler's, overheads marked previously. Wind, soft breeze, good air-sailing weather. Still dustfall, slowly drifting down. Light keeps getting caught in it, making them glint like a rain of silver.  
  
Soft day, again, nothing much going on in terms of military duty.  
  
Some nice talks, though. Kath apparently didn't have any other tales to share; apparently folk got hurt. Didn't press her on it, sort of seemed like that was sensitive.  
San having *that* week, rather grumpy company as a result. Pulled out that last jar of honey for dinner for her. Little comforts, you know. Apparently there was a bone shard in the meat? Well, never join the army for the food, that'll just end in disaster. I still can't wrap my head around the fact that the Chief can conjure up decent bloody meals from the stocks. Most times I'm hard pressed to come up with alternatives to field stew, lat alone make anything that actually has taste.  
  
Got angry with Jorund today. Fool is thinking about leaving, lost faith in 'the pack', that he isn't useful anymore. Nearly punched him, I worked my ass off to drag his bleeding body to Meddler's only for him to piss off? Sod that! Well, I can't stop him, though I wish I could. Bah, I'm just angry about it. Maybe he'll see sense before the tour is over.  
  
Rotarn itched me all the wrong ways today, with his constant teleporting. Nearly punched his jaw out, but the tactician expressly forbade me. So I kicked him in the shins instead. Bloody Tricky, doesn't understand it triggers me in all the wrong ways when he just pops out of nowhere. This is fucking Orr! I try to kill things that pop out of the ground on a daily basis! [angry scribbling]  
  
Spirits alive, now I'm angry again! Sod this, I'm going to see if I can kill something before dawn.

# 54th of Pheonix

Meddler's still, overheads marked out. Camp day.  
  
Mithy healing well, she was walking around earlier. Keep finding her sitting around with a pot of water, concentrating on it. Making little waves and stuff. She's getting better quickly. I wanted to carry her around on my shoulders for a bit today, but I guess that would have been silly.  
  
Cooked up some food with San and Kath, after Mire did some sort of weird ramble about Skritt and Grawl. Managed to make something nice enough, had that one old Charr scholar join us for a nice enough talk. Managed to maintain nice enough humours, exchanged some good tales.  
Until Rotarn got caught zapping around again. Kath put him onto cleaning duty; San tried to take some responsability, but didn't seem to realise that meant she was undermining Kath. So, knight put her on cleaning duty on the morrow. Sort of broke the evening a little. Kath seemed weird, switched topics rapidly, showing off little magic tricks. Think it sort of bothered her to have to make a call between San and maintaining her authority.  
  
Group sort of splintered; had an argument with Vanholm again. Bloody idiot still listening to the voices in his head. Dolt cannot understand that he is allowing the poison to seep in voluntarily. I told him as much, that I plan to slay him if he falls. We almost came to blows right there and then. This cannot go on. Why is the Warmaster not doing anything?  
  
Bah. I need to try to sleep. I've been awake for... entirely too long. Mithy noticed it, Em noticed, San noticed. I'm losing my edge. I just need to lie down for a bit.

[continuation of entry]  
I have been thinking. During the long nights of half-sleep, I watch the stirring forms of my comerades around me. I sit, solemnly, with my back against the rock, drifting in and out of awareness, opening lazily my eyes at every approaching figure, at every whispered word, the soft murring and snoring of the sleepers around me. Am I their guardian? Perhaps.  
  
It is when my eyes close too long that I drift. Not onto dreams, or nightmares, but onto deeper thoughts and desires too unbearable even to speak. Wandering, slowly, through a forest, in which to look at a tree too closely consigns it to wither under my very eyes. Everything I desire to touch, falls apart, crumbling into dust even as I fall to my knees, trying to hold it all together. In the end, I stand alone at the edge of an abyss, looking longingly across to those that stand on the other side. I peer down, and see only myself staring back, pained, hurt, but unable to give in. Too proud to fall, held aloft by empty vainglory and self-deceit. I hear her, softly, whispering me to wake up.  
  
And then I start awake again, the immediacy of who I am returning into such stark contrast, from where a mind without purpose will wander. What deep waters run below my veins and flesh, that ice so cold can remain in my chest, while my body burns in the fire? It has been too long since I have held something I truly hold dear to my heart.  
  
[the writing becomes less steady as the paragraph goes on]  
I drank of the purple, to fall away deeply into dreamless rest. It is settling in, a numbness that makes me terribly afraid to let it overtake me completely. I feel my mind going slower, even as I write. The pencil staggers and stumbles across the lines, marking out such meaning errantly, effortlessly, guided by the rumbling slowness of its wielder. Fighting it, the sleep, as black spots start appearing on the edge of my vision. Have to stop. Just let go of [writing trails off]

# 55th of Phoenix

~~I don't know where to sta~~ Yes you do, you idiot, it's standard military practise. Location, Meddler's, newly reinforced by a sapping detachment of the Ashen Chapter engineering corps. Overheads, marked up as previous, wind shift north predominantly, strong.  
  
Take it from the top, Crusader. Spirits, I'm giving myself orders. Keep it together.  
Early day, started by shoring up Meddler's defenses with Ironside and Boom Moon. Had a pleasant enough chat with San (whom I've started calling Redcap, for no particular reason). Didn't catch her for that after-duty drink, unfortunately. Pitty, I occasionally feel like she's drifting away from me as a friend. I try hard to make her laugh and tease her, but you know. Maybe too hard.  
  
Duty was nonesense, just physicals. We were allowed to go out of plate, so I didn't even slow down for those. I'm a Vigil Crusader, if I couldn't run some distance in packing, I wouldn't be in bloody Orr. Anyway, sort of kicked the shit out of the smaller ones, though. Vee had to be carried out. Boom Moon ran around in her top, guess that kept the mood up a little for the lads, though thinking of the Knight in that respect seems a little weird.  
  
Then... oh spirits, I had a long talk with Wynn, behind the command tent. Watched the sun set. We were just joking around, trying to see if I could get her to brighten up. Weird sort of tension came bubbling about, Wynn put her foot in her mouth a couple of times. Clued in eventually; San was right, Wynn is in love with me. I pressed her on it a little, thinking it was just a fancy, but... then she almost started crying. Tore me up. I took her up to my side and just held her a bit, trying to console her. She left; I fear I may have hurt her; a thought which is so unbearable, that I wish I had kissed her there and then.  
  
Spirits, you are cruel. To make me the object of affections so sincere, yet make me incapable of answering them. That I must feel contrition over the fact that I cannot return, sincerely, the love this beautiful woman bears for me. Oh, that I could bask in her gentle adoration, to kiss the crown of her head in contentment of her vindicated affections! It would only lead to ruin, the shattering collapse of a hollow cathedral in which I married myself to lies! I have no choice but to wound her; rejection or deceit, yet neither is a choice I would make. And yet, would not so furious a desire to answer her gaze, be itself borne out of love I yet bear her?  
I cannot stand to wound her so openly, her grief would be too much. If the comfort she desires of me damns my soul, I would rather stand damned than to see her wither.  
  
Everything got worse. Thistle was about to draw his weapon on me, after I touched him on the shoulder by accident. Such wild, thoughtless fury, he would have slain me where I stood if I had drawn my blade. I did not. Whatever is in his mind, I have seen a Celdric that feels love, passion and kindess, if only glimpses. The Knight and Tricky were right; there is something left in the wreckage that is worth fighting for. I will not give up on Celdric so easily as upon the edge of a blade drawn in fear. He is my comerade, my brother, and I will not see him slip into ruin again. You hear me spirits? I will fight you all for this man's soul. I will die, if I must, but I will never see his spirit broken again. This I pledge to you.  
Duty and Honour, Crusader. To protect the meek, the innocent, the poor, the lost and the repentant. *The lost.*  
  
Shatter below me, world, as I step out to meet your trials. I will not break, because I am already broken. All I fear is the loss of those that stand with me. You may see this as my weakness, but how mistaken you are. It is my only strength; you cannot threaten to take what I already fear losing.

[The fieldbook seems to have been dropeed into the mud, at one point, and a few pages are splattered with sludge and sand.]

# 56th of Phoenix

Meddler's point, etc. etc. Overheads marked previous.  
  
Very slow day, little to report. Made food again, pasta. San and Kath liked it, so that's good. Gave Kath some tinned pears; gobbled them all up too eagerly. Guess I'm making baked pears on the morrow for her, see how much syrup she can gorge herself on before she becomes all swollen and puffy. Then I'll have to roll her back into her tent like a keg.  
Running out of fresh produce though. Still not sure how Chief keeps pulling what he does out of his arse. Must be a portal hidden here somewhere.  
  
Rest was just camp chatter. Celdric joined us, he was still a little jumpy. Loosened up a little during the boasting game. Good. Need to ground him, make sure he knows where here for him when he needs us.  
  
Didn't see Wynn today. Hrm.

# 57th of Phoenix

Meddler's Point still. Overheads marked as previous, weather still blazing hot. Wind east-east, breeze. This place is filled with scum and pirates, it's a surprise this camp hasn't been overrun earlier by risen. They can barely arrange regular picket duty, let alone survive a determined assault.  
  
Easy start, chat with the Warmaster and Sima. Got coarse again, because we could. Warmaster seems to like the blunt soldier routine well enough; I like her back too. Good woman, inspires loyalty with little effort. Also learned that Mire hates puns. Viciously hates puns.  
  
Today's duty fell hard. Sounded like a routine supply job, but spirits alive... Airship that was going to land in crashed hard, instead. Was the *Ramming Speed!*, because of course, it had nothing better to do than *all head flank* my morale down into a dark pitt of loss as a final movement to an illustrious career. All hands lost, save one. Helmsman, asura called Melli. She managed to 'chute out right before it landed, rescued her. All wound up, we left her in Anchorage for a bit. Seems like we two is all that's left of the *Ramming Speed's* legacy.  
  
Of course, Anchorage came under attack soon after we left. Blasted Asura made it out in a power suit. She's in mental shock, doing my best to take care of her. Needs to be places up high to feel safe. Had her ride around on my shoulder up the tower for a bit, seemed to like that. Didn't want to let go of the helmet either. Woke up a bit later, turned out it's Kraxxi's sister. Very... hyperactive, very asura. I think I liked her better when she was still shell shocked.  
Still, she served on the *Speed!*, that makes her crew, and one of mine, I'll look after her, whether she wants it or not.  
  
Lyralli pulled out part of the ship's hull plating for me. Had the name on it. What a sad gift.  
How senselessly angry that all makes me. I feel it bubbling beneath my temples, a feint cramp in my fists. And yet it is futile. I cannot bring back that proud vessel nor its crew, no matter how much rage I throw at it. All I can think of are those helmets lined upon the foredeck; all the good memories of camaraderie, excitement, exultation, rendered more painfully knowing that proud vessel has sunk, almost trivially. We rammed a bloody dragon with that thing, and it crashed on a milk run. What a waste.  
  
Of course things don't get better. Half of Blade got hit out in the field. Sima and the Chief got extracted out to Shadowfain. Thistle and Red got beat up too. Morale took sort of a dive, not a good day to be in the Vigil, this. Sad.  
Feel like I've failed some of them by not being there. At least Athy is okay, so Mithy didn't run around all day in morbid despair. Small things.  
  
Vanholm... nearly killed the idiot, only the Knight stopped me. He's slid down too far. Command is in agreement, though, he'll be shipped out soon, for everyone's safety. Cannot risk him running amok, not with that poison or whatever it is in his brain. He'll go mad. Have to keep an eye on him, for now. He strays an inch, he's dead. That's it. No more compromises. That spiral of madness has run its course.  
  
It is a dark day indeed, with little to brighten it. I am conflicted, grieved, angered and spent. I feel as I have been roaring into the face of storm for an eternity, to no avail. Everyone is tense, wound up, angry. I almost want something or someone to snap, just so I am able to vent this built up pressure.  
  
And, Garrick is fucking insane.

# 58th of Phoenix

Meddler's Point, overheads marked out and mapped, as previous, wind shift north, mild breeze. High currents are steady. Long days again. Time to just... rattle it all off, I guess.  
  
Duty had us move out towards Verdance, sweeping the corridor to Artesian Waters. We did so with the help of a portal device; fairly overrun with risen, but nothing we couldn't handle. Met a very weird Sylvari there, called himself Oakskin, I seem to recall. Apparently wanted to go beyond the waters. He tried breaking through a very powerful shield-ward.... which blew him up. Cost him an arm too, ripped straight off. Vethrir and I didn't like it, so we bagged him up back to Meddler's. Found out halfway that he had some sort of... parasite thing on his back. Seemed sentient, and highly disturbing. Ironside was tempted to scourge it off.  
Back in camp, we tied him up, and put him on green to stop him from going into shock. Mire had a look at the parasite thing, she thinks there might be a spore infection. Best have gas masks out around him for now. Wonder if other Sylvari would suffer from skin-contact with that thing. Anyway, he's under guard.  
  
Had a chat with Wynn again, she's doing alright. Looking out towards leave. Things are a little awkward between us because of what happened, but at least she's doing better, I think. Chest is giving her issues, some of her ribs are badly healed. Hope it's not causing her too much pain. Her hair smelled of almonds, though she didn't like me ruffling it. Also spaced out when we talked about her past; touchy subject.  
  
Mippl and Melli seem to be getting along, which is good. Mippl being courteous, as he should. Talked to him over a cup of tea after, that was good. He's heading out to scour the airship crashsite later, seeing what he can recover. That's... uncommonly kind of him, I think. Mippl's trustworthy, I feel, even if he's in the Order. Sort of like Snowbanished was during the campaign. Understand how easy people talk.  
  
Vanholm situation getting worse. Knight said he was carving some sort weird totem, and Sima tried to force me into talking him, though he meant well. Warmaster made a call, and I'm sticking with it, even though my readiness to intervene is increasing. Vanholm *needs* to go away from here, before he hurts anyone in his insanity.  
  
Also talked, at length, to the Tactician. Seems I broke some ice, it was actually quite pleasant, and very open. Think I understand who Graceful Mist is a little better. Not actually a bad person, just managed to ostracize herself socially because of all the smuck that gets thrown her way. Angry troops talking bad about her to new recruits only help to taint her aura more. She doesn't really seem to do anything in regards to spare time, which I found weird. Might be worth asking her to unwind a little, at some stage.

# 59th of Phoenix

Meddler's, overheads marked out as previous, yadda yadda, bing bang, my airship crashed anyway.  
  
Erected a small monument to the fallen south of camp, after reveille. Not much else to say. Spent some time working through some material Mippl retrieved, at least inform the next of kin. Better than a MIA stamp that'll last until all eternity, I think. Agent apparently thinks there were risen knights in the engine room, which is why the left aerilon caught fire. That's odd, though, they'd have pierced the outer hull to reach that; how did they manage that without alerting the ship's crew? Melli says she didn't even know what happened before it was too late. Helsman would've noticed a hit on the hull... So, that suggests risen infiltration, or foul play. Mippl's on it, he's not liking this either. Hope he keeps me in the loop.  
  
Duty today; relief effort out west. Crossed the river, went into the old Death cathedral. Eerie place at best; fought some sort of risen priest in there. Place seemed to be overrun, and risen artillery was shelling the area. Pact megalaser team on site to return some fire, but that was it.  
Sweeped it, and out again. Nothing more, really.  
  
Going to rest early, sort of worn out.

# 60th of Phoenix

Meddler's Point, overheads marked as previous. Wind constant, south, for some reason.  
  
No formal duty today, but a volunteer operation. Pulled some mercenary group's ass out of the fire; go by the name of the Crimson Ashes. They were on some undisclosed S&R operation, and we offered a to be the good boots that we are, and punch some holes in the risen. Flare eventually went up, and we did just that. Force was formal command, but too wounded. Took first command, Athelstan took second. We did fine, ripped through the swam well enough. Athelstan pulled our asses out of the fire when I got confused. Guess I'm not as ready as I thought for fully fledged operation command, or I wouldn't get confused like that. Have to admit my mistakes; I commended Athelstan in the report for his actions. He was ready and able, I was found wanting.  
  
Mercs stayed in our camp, bit of an unruly lot. Nearly had to break up a brawl with the heavy hand. Having two of their lot locked up for disorderly conduct in a Pact camp wouldn't have looked good for them, I can tell you that. Anyway, things going as they go. Their 'leader', for lack of a word, was friendly enough, and did nothing but smile. Old friend of Ironside among them too, Sylvari 'professor'. Fellow was nice enough.  
After they went to rest, Ironside and I had a nice chat. Start seeing how ragged we both are at the edges. Vethrir's mangled in all ways, and I'm growing weary. Young veterans.  
  
The weird Sylvari with his backgrowth... I'm getting less and less at ease when I think about him; for some reason, the idea that his mutated little thing can spore off something dangerous makes me feel highly uncomfortable. Luckily, he got choppered out today. Someone else's problem.  
  
The entire Vanholm situation is slowly spinning out of control. Force is getting his paws in on it. Bjorn is concerned. Warmaster better act damn quick, before this turns into a faction split. People are going to be real angry, whatever happens.  
  
Damn it all to hell. Sleep. Just... just fucking go to sleep.

# 61st of Phoenix

Meddler's point, overcast, light, wind west south-west, breeze. Weather generally good, temperate. Occasional shifts between cold and heat, probably due to current shifts due west. Camp generally in a good state, though we have several walking wounded. Unfortunately, they're all good troops, like Ironside, Cindertail and Force, so they're being missed. Crimson Ashes left early, tallied them their supplies with a receipt.  
  
Took a volunteer patrol out today, marked up Jofast's as fallen. Sent Bjorn as a runner to Shelter's... also fallen. Hope Shadowfain's aware of the situation, or we're cut off badly. Vanholm gave me some lip, but... more on that later. Returned to base soon enough, and reported to the Knight.  
  
Knight tried to force the issue between me and Vanholm after. Spent some time shouting, when I look up and see San aiming a bow at us. Like ice vicing itself around my chest, that. Pounced her well enough, but I was so angry in the moment, I ignored a direct order. Knight and the Tactician had to rectify me hard. Stupid.  
  
Spoke with San. Says she was just lining up Vanholm, not me. I *need* to believe that. It would drive me to insanity to think otherwise. Can't let that paranoia get to me. I love her. Don't do this. Need to banish that thought from my mind. Sana's my friend, I'm just stressed out and stretched thin. Have to accept that she's just my friend.  
  
Brighter, after that, though. Celdric and the Knight danced. The old Reacher waltz, human, bombastic, majestic. Seeing Kath dance was liberating; the little girl in the dress I wrote about, once? She exists, and she is beautiful, elegant, and well-spoken. Spirits, but that was good to see! Celdric too! How happy he was! The elation! The joy in their eyes; like a light rekindled after spent too long in the dark. An ode to beauty found in elegantly cultivated simplicity alone!  
I danced with Alyssa; a giant caressing a curious rose indeed. It was good. We flirted idly, emptily, for the joke of it, waltzing in Orr, in utter defiance to the horror of war, the beauty of it all! A tender gesture, I think, Vigil soldiers in plate finding simple pleasure in the hummed rhythm of an old-fashioned dance.  
Guess that stint I spent in the Reach, tasting (and learning to abhor) the life of luxury had one good outcome after all.  
  
Wish I could end on that note. I really do. But I can't. Celdric and Bjorn found a shrine to Dragon that Vanholm has been keeping. It is over, it is done. He has fallen. I would slay him now, but the Warmaster has forced my hand. An extraction team is heading over to pull him out to Trinity. I hope they slay him swiftly and painfully. I failed in ending it quickly, before anyone was aware of how bad it was. Vanholm brought his own destruction about. I wash my hand of all blame, vindicated.  
  
Ended with a pleasant enough chat with the Tactician. Obviously, my advances onto her are met with almost reckless indifference. This only makes it more sporting, of course, though I have little desire to actually conquer the prize itself, if I ever get to her, even if she is pretty enough to make the thought an enjoyable one. Rather hollow concept, regardless.  
  
Dancing in Orr. If only you could have seen it, Freyj, you would have laughed at the giant oaf in plate steel, a tiny human on his arm, twirling about in the sand, making quips. You'd have laughed. I miss you, sweet, truly do. I will always be proud of you, whatever happens. Find it in your heart to forgive this blundering old man for leaving behind his most treasured gift.

# 62nd of Phoenix

Meddler's, overheads as marked, no change in conditions. All is well, I think, even though I grow tired of Orr. It is, and remains, a wondrous place that surpasses in mystical quality almost every other place in Tyria, but it would be good to see grass and trees again. To feel the cold wind of home, and the snow that heralds a blizzard best spent inside around the hearth. Hmm. The smell of dark pine, sheltered under the mountain shadow, the flicker of distant fires in the evening storms. The crisp morning air that makes the sleeping skins feel so comfortable. The sound of kinsmen yelling, shouting, laughing, talking. The taste of ale, and roasted boar! I miss home.  
  
The echoes of yesterday's evening still linger in the back of my head; Celdric remains elated, and Kath even smiled. It is curiously uplifting to see them so; a special sort of joy lies in seeing friends rendered so curiously happy by such a mundane thing. Yes, we must do it again! A pity the Knight begrudges me San for even a dance. Perhaps it is better anyway; I can imagine strong, bold Sana in much, but a dancing dress would be special indeed. An image best kept aside, I believe. Unfortunately, that leaves me rather short for a proper dancing partner; Alyssa danced pleasantly enough, but I'd need someone more to my size to do it properly. Tactician doesn't want to, so maybe Kadlin? I'd have to ask.  
  
Duty was light, ranged out to check if the risen barge we busted some days ago was still out of the picture. Small team, we had some nice idle chatter. Little contact though, seems we starved out the south of the Shore well enough, most of the undead must be pouring out of Arah itself. San wanted to have a peek up the Promenande on the way back, but that got cut short when the artillery started firing. Spotted it early enough, so no-one got hurt. Knight didn't risk it and pulled us down soon enough. Little else to mention.  
  
Mithy's... having issues. Sadistic tendencies. That's bad. Really bad. Need to talk to her about that in earnest, preferably with Athy too. She's young, and can yet be molded. Best steer her somewhere bright and beautiful while we can.  
  
Vanholm's gone. Left camp, pulled out by an extraction team, just as the Warmaster said. I am torn up. I would have ended it so much cleaner. Just a sword through the heart to finish it. The memory we had of him would have been kept intact. But no. Idiot broke down. Now he will be forever remembered as one of the damned; fallen to corruption. The good man that he was will be lost; his gifts to the world forever tainted. A loss.  
  
Saw Kath and San spar today. Got really excited to see the Knight fight, but turned out she didn't use her guardian magic. Sort of pulled the stops on making any useful observation, I know her hammerwork well enough, see her fight with it daily. San needs some work, goes for the overhead too often, and tries to be mobile. Saw her circling; she keeps doing that to foes with a superior defensive stance, she's going to get skewered. Didn't use her superior strength to her advantage, and forgot rule one of fighting small foes with big weapons: they're always faster than you are.  
On a related note, I swung a war-sledge in drill today. Spirits, that makes me feel strong. Pure amplified strength. The hammerhead sang with the joy of percussive impact, and targets crumbled. Feel like I could demolish Arah itself with this thing.  
  
I'm sleeping better, though not longer. Drift off into half-sleep still, but it's quieter inside. Pleasant dreams too, on occasion, softer. I woke up crying the other day, but could not remember why.

# 63rd of Phoenix

Meddler's, overheads marked as previous. Wind still, though intermittent variations in direction and strength occur throughout the day. Still seeing minor weather complications, though nothing major. Rain to the west bringing cooler air.  
  
Quiet start to the day, just idle chatter. Knight likes her compliments well enough, I've found, which I find delightful. More delicate company than the Tactician or the Warmaster, too. Warmed me up to the ma'am well enough to see her dance the other day. Really did. Noticed Celdric acting a little odd.  
  
Led out another volunteer patrol to Jofast's, check if the camp was back under our control. Reached it fine, all in order. Sent Athy up to Shelter's, reported back that same. Seems like our northern supply route is open, and the we silenced the risen in the south. Only Arah left. We're going there, soon. That'll be a hard, hard fight. Blood will spill; hopefully all of it is theirs.  
  
Got back from patrol, had a chat with Mithy. It's not as bad as I thought it was, though the seed of malice lies dormant in her. She needs our support, from Athy and I, to keep it unfed and uncultivated. Mithra is not a monster, nor will I allow her to become one.  
  
After that... well, Celdric was clearly drunk. So became Sima, over the course of the evening. Celdric was so elated, it was brilliant. We danced again, I even sang! Mithra danced with Celdric, and I danced with Alyssa. Lyss got a little jealous, and got out in her corset again. Now that was pleasant to have so close, not to mention entirely too easy on the eye to have kept the gaze held aloft for much of the time. Tried to trip me over, eventually, going too fast. Small lass in leathers against an orge in plate, I'm surprised I didn't fall flat.  
  
Rest of the evening petered out after that. Short discussion about our officers; think I took a stance against the other boots in favour of the Knight and the Tactician. Guess I'm on their side, despite their occasional shortcomings. Loyalty, in that.  
  
I'm not even going to mention the last bit of the day...

*Ræisa stæin æftir Tzahr, sunn Davidr*  
*Es fell i liði Alleshias*  
*Hann hafði Suðri um varit længi*

Spoiler: Translation[Show](javascript:;)

This stone erected in memory of Tzahr, David's son,  
Who fell in Alleshia's retinue  
He had long been in the South

Reader, erect for me a stone that reads as such, should I fall on the morrow. Cut off the locks of my hair with a sharp blade, and send the rings therein to my daughter, Freyja Tzahrsdottir, and to my kin, Usha Snowbanished. Light aloft for me a pyre in blue flame, and know that as I burn, I look down from the Mists, and will drink to the fallen until you have taken your place at my side. Those that fall besides me will know.  
  
My arms I leave to anyone who would wield them with honour.  
The bottle of Wyrmblood in my tent, I leave to Sima. Drink it where they cannot find you.  
To Kathleen, Celdric, the flowers, Ironside and Wynn; my friendship, my respect and my gratitude. Value them how you see fit.  
This fieldbook and my heart, I leave to San, whom I love.  
To my Freyja, I leave nothing. She already possessed all of true worth that was ever mine to give.

# 64th of Phoenix

Meddler's, all quiet. Risen activity dropped sharply. We blew the Hallows out flat, and the north is held secure. Operations out west call it all clear. Arah awaits, a maw. We can see the steps of the promenade from the watchtower, the statues lining it crackling with magical energies. It is the epicenter of all the darkness and evil that taints this land. And we are marching right into it, holding aloft Vigil banners made of ash-coloured cloth. Hail, a roar to all eternity, for we march into a maelstrom that has claimed the lives of thousands of soldiers.  
  
The sensation is around camp; the silence before the storm. You can feel it, smell it. Diffuse tension, palpable in every movement. We speak softly, kindly, lovingly, knowing that this could well be the last day. We refuse to acknowledge it, but we all feel it.  
  
Temporary transfer in, boisterous norn lass called Thorun. Shieldwall, good bit smaller than I am. Young, very young. All guts, all brawns, no brains. I hope she lives to see ages mature her into something wiser, even though she marches into Arah with us on the morrow. I like her well enough, think she reminds me Freyja a little. Must be the same age, around about. Showed her around camp, set herself up near to where I'm sleeping almost by accident. Feel like I should keep an eye out on the lass, but that might just be the paternal instinct flaring up.  
  
Pleasant enough camp chatter. Tension makes everyone talk. Made noodles with meatballs; San liked it so well, I made her a keg of the stuff. Ate herself sick, had to shift into spirit form to get it all down. Knocked herself flat, the silly lass. Made me smile though, glad to see her happy like that. Really am. Kath, too. All scoffing and fuzzing. Didn't know what she signed up for with a norn lass like San. It's all good though, seeing those two together makes me smile. Spirits, thank you for making them happy. I can live with this.  
  
I can die with this.  
  
Made my peace during quiet moment after noon. It's all in here, before this entry. What I want to happen. A stone to be remembered by. I will leave the fieldbook with the supplies before we leave. San knows where, so she can find it ~~when~~ if I fall, and carry out my last rites for me. All my thoughts are in it. That they remember me as a worthy friend. Har'varanar. I am ready.

# 65th of Phoenix

Fort Trinity. We weathered Arah. Half the Chapter's wounded, but almost everyone is alive. Only one to fall is Isabeth. Har'varanar, Red. I did not know you well, and this is a loss. It is more painful, because it is not keenly felt, for which I am ashamed. All I know of her is that she spoke oddly, was quick on her feet, and she... loved Sima. He must have felt her loss most keenly of all, because he did not know until after she died. This saddens me greatly.  
  
Arah itself was... magnificent. Decrepit beauty, with its own elegance. Unlike anything else I have ever seen. It dwarfed us with its size, the great bounding arches, the architecture. It is not inconceivable to imagine the gods walking there. Everything glows with magical power, so potent you can taste it. Energy crackles over the steel. The foes are unlike any I've fought before. Ferociously strong, and very hard to kill, they gave us a hard fight every time, almost on equal terms. It is a wonder more of us did not perish.  
  
We went into the Fallen City in strike teams. On the Warmaster's lead with Mithra, Sima and Redcap. We did well. San fought heroically, beat off a huge spider when all of us where webbed down. Saved our lives and our command. Strong feat; I envy her for it, in all the best ways. Cost the flower an eye through. Scooped her up right, and carried her out to medical. Lost the eyeball, but it grows back on Sylvari, aye?  
Anyway. Only noticed the rents in my gut when I walked out. Suddenly, blood pouring out under the cuirass plate, felt sick. Staggered to medical; turned out one of the wraith's minions ripped straight through, left me three parallel parting gifts. The wounds are deep, and Marcus had to excise some infected flesh. I was too high on adrenaline to realize.  
  
Seems Force's band pulled a suicide stunt. Got cut off. Tactician took Celdric and Redcap back in, while I was in medical. Marcus had to chain me down in spectrals to stop me going after them. Sod this wound, I could've have done it too. They pulled them out though. Heard chatter from Ironside that Force screwed up his command. That'd be bad, they'll have his stripes for that. Relief chopper came down soon enough; flown by none other than Melli. Didn't crash us, thankfully, pulled our asses out to Trinity.  
  
Eventually rejoined by the others. Apparently the Gate had come under assault directly after we left. Another fight I missed. I hate this wound. Good to be back somewhere with grass and leaves, though. Cracked open two kegs with San, Kath and Bjorn. I drank most of it, but that is not surprising. Kath got a little drunk, the dear. She was all flustered. San let her hair grow; short dark locks. They were both perfect, in that one moment. I think I have made my peace with them being how they are in my life. It does not detract from the love I feel for Sana, or even Kath. On the contrary, they are endeared to me greatly, both. Something worth fighting for, here, now. It is worth drawing my sword every dawn to be greeted by their sight at dusk! Ah, they can never know how I feel about it, but I would fight the world for those two.  
  
Mithy's blinded for the time being, unfortunately. We got the flower all drunk on cider, which she had never drank before. Took some of the edge off the shock of the day, I think. She slept well enough after. I wrote a letter to the Warmaster on Alyssa's behalf, hoping to work the system so she can come with us to the Lodges. Mithy and Athy would appreciate it, I am sure, and I myself find her pleasant enough company most of the time.  
  
Either way, on the morrow, we will be debriefed. I look forward to hearing what they will say. Perhaps they will hold last rites of Isabeth. It would be honourable for her to be saluted one more time by her former comrades in arms, I think. Regardless, I survived a second tour in Orr. A feat few can boast of, I think.  
We will march ever onward, unto distant fields, new foes, and great tales.  
Hail thee, Crested White, whom in tarnished armour fight. Come with thee, 'cross th' sea, fight a dragon, cure a blight.

# 66th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep. Overheads... don't matter at all. It is good to be home. Grass, trees, water, wind, the cold wind from the east. *Snow.* Spirits, but I missed snow. We have been in Orr so long, I had forgotten what clean air smelled like. Never has the world been so vividly beautiful; to see deer running through the meadows below the Vigil keep. Soldiers that do not have that tired, dead look in their eyes. No ditches filled with the ashes of incinerated brothers, no lines of empty, dented Vigil helmets. Just the keep again; closest thing I have to a home.  
  
Celdric made Crusader, and Ironside is now First Crusader Ironside. Deserved it, both of them. Will have to get used to calling Ironside sir, though, even if he used to be a former knight. Regardless.  
Oh, also, chapter ball. Need to get on that in the Arch, though I'm sure Usha will work her magic, and send some goods over if I ask her nicely.  
  
Still wounded, still hurts. Use my sword to lean on when it gets too hard. Need to sit down often, or I keel over. It could be worse, though, like poor Mithra. Still blinded, needs to be helped along. At least we got her other eye free, so that should be good. Leave'll take her mind of things.  
San and Kath left early, guess they wish to enjoy themselves without all the boots ambling about. Can't blame them. I'll see them on the morrow, anyway. March off to Lion's Arch, get ourselves utterly smashed in some seedy pub before the Lodges beckon. Didn't managed to get permission from the Warmaster to take Lyss with us, however, damn it. Feels needlessly pedantic; Lyss is well enough in my eyes; screw humans and their stupid systems. At least we norn have the decency to settle our own problems like our ancestors did.  
  
Anyway. Em and Vee also want to tag along with us to the Lodges. Don't see why not, it's a nice enough way to relax, and taking part in a friendly moot is an experience everyone should go through. Athy, Mithy, Kath, San, Em, Vee... I wonder if anyone else will show up. Huh. Just realised, I'm the only man. Usha's going to laugh her guts out over that, I can imagine. "Tzahr and the six lasses."  
  
It'll be good to see the big furball again. Married to Cannonclaw, too. Spirits alive, she'll have cubs soon enough, I am sure. Would that make me their uncle? I guess it does. I'll show them how to fight when they're big enough. Hah! Repay Usha for all she did for Freyja. Wonder if my lass is still in Hoelbrak. I'd like to see her again. She must be big, strong and beautiful now. Full of fury and passion, guided by a good heart. And stubborn as a rock, like I was.  
  
Anyway. I live. I am wounded, but also hungry and thirsty. The keep is abuzz with people. I see Wulfbane standing in the distance, with crutches. The flowers in medical, talking. It is good. We survived Orr!

# 67th of Phoenix

Leave! Guess I'm using this as a journal anyway, might as well continue during the off days.  
  
Thorun, lass rejoined us before Arah sent me a letter. Vigil warmaster at Marriner knew we were in Lion's Arch, and had a courier dispatched to hand it over. Surprised; didn't think I'd hear from her again, ever. Wrote her a nice reply back. Odd.  
  
Took the flowers out Lion's Arch to meet Kath and San there. Some others tagged along too, including a rather eccentric Charr of whom I am not sure I even know their name. We reached the Arch well enough, and rejoined the two in a buccaneer tavern inside a cavern. They had kept a bottle of Blood Whiskey apart for me, as a gift. How touchingly beautiful of them. We ate roast pig, cheese, and drank copiously. That is, I did. Kath got buzzed off a bottle of pear cider, Mithra had another sugar crash. San went easy on the ale. I drank two kegs of ale and a tub of firewater. Certainly got me swaying at the end, I seem to recall.  
  
Encountered two Charr, former Chapter veterans looking to rejoin us, I heard. Menacing, or tried to be. It was interesting, one was a former Knight, as far as I could tell. Spoke pleasantly enough. His friend was some sort of glowering non-talker. Tried to stare me down; unfortunately, I am entirely too used to Usha for that to work.  
The lasses all went home, I stayed back a little with Rotarn, chat with the two charr. Mostly speak about other Charr, not unsurprisingly. I was pretty buzzed at this stage. They left, after a bit, so I rejoined the girls.  
  
San's got a neat little house, very cosy, though a little understated for an Archer place. Had some tea; Athy showed San and I the most beautiful carvings she had been making. One of them is, indeed, me. It was amazing to see, a little Tzahr bent over a cooking pot. As it should be!  
I was drunk, so I gave away the moot gifts early. The crude little quaggan dolls and the coral carving. The raven and the blizzard. They're... not very well made, but they came from the heart. I hope that was what they valued most.  
  
Slept in the room belonging to San's father. Smelled of norn well enough, so that wasn't too bad. Still smelt better than Orr, so I can't complain. Sounds of Lion's Arch outside little disturbing though. All the water outside keeps making me think I'm back on a sailing ship. Doesn't matter. Slept well enough, woke early with a mild hangover.  
  
Took the spare key, headed to the market. Not where it used to be, but found it easy enough. Expensive though, cost me double of what it was three years ago. Still, I have fresh apples, pears, honey and dough. San's stove will do me fine. They will wake to the wondrous smell of apple and pear honey-pie. Going to put them in the oven now.  
  
I have never been more happy to be here than anywhere else, in my entire life.

# 68th of Phoenix

In Lion's Arch at the moment, about to leave for the Lodges on the morrow.  
  
Mithra bit ill on sugar, seems that juice knocked her out pretty effectively the other day. San took us to the Reach. That was fun, spent a long time there. Took a round through the market, cotton candy and bagels, it was great fun. San stocked up some some nice spices too. Went around, saw the zoo there. Pity the animals in there; they are so much more majestic in the wild. No creature like that should be caged and gawked at by snot-nosed children. That they pick up a sword, and find some real ones! Humans.  
  
Eventually found a quirky Asuran jeweller that also doubled as an optician. San managed to convince the knight in picking up a pair of glasses, at long last. Picked up nice and expensive crystal lenses too, for which the Asura even issued us a receipt. Think it's the first time the knight saw sharp in a long while. Of course, Kath being Kath, she spent the rest of the evening bumbling about with the set like a flailing little child. Also managed to get herself picked clean by pickpockets. I'm not even going to comment. My superior officer, dear reader.  
  
Ran into Celdric too, almost by accident, when we were visiting the pavillion. He was dressed rather different from his grim hood; San and Kath made him flush about it. Didn't think I'd see the day, but here we are. Seemed that he was 'repaying some debts', as it were, which lead to cuts and bruises. Rather not dwell too long on what that hints at, to be honest. He was heading back to the keep already, so our paths split when the girls and I returned to Lion's Arch.  
  
Went kicking down at Marriner's for a bit, food and drink, and ice cream. It was amazing, San was like some sort of generous Spirit of Food. Athy was out of it, for a bit, unfortunately. Courrier brought in a letter for her, apparently from some blasted Nightmare fiend or some such. Apparently was a former lover of Athy's, but then she killed him. Now he's back, threatning to come for her. If he does, he will die, simple as that. Had to coerce Athy to eat something, after that. Sort of soured the evening a little, even if we managed to keep most of the good humour in it.  
Marcus was there too, and we cracked a keg, drank to a number of things. "Fruity pillows", too, on account of a slightly buzzed knight Beaumont! Guess that's Redcap's new nickname now the token red cap is no more.  
  
Took a long walk around the bay after, even ended up taking a long swim in the water. Clothing got a little clammy, but that rarely bothers me anyway. It dries on the skin fair enough, after all. After that, the lasses were tired, and went back home. I went up to see if the Crow's Nest still had some patrons; ended up meeting a rather pleasant Sylvari called Orchid. Whisper's Order man, bought me a keg on account of me being there on my own. He heard of the Chapter before, from in Dry Top, and was rather interested in speaking to Athy and Mithy, though he'll have to wait until we're back from Hoelbrak. Crow's Nest; interesting place, I reckon.  
  
Returned home shortly after, found Athy all shaking and panicked. Spilled some of her paints all over the floor while trying paint the figurines, the poor lass. I calmed her down and put her to bed with Mithy. She fell asleep fast enough. Spent some time cleaning up, can't ruin San's hospitality by staining the floor. Listened to the sound of the sleeping house until I got tired. I slept well enough after, but not long; another early morning. Went out to the market again, have some fresh breakfast with eggs, bacon, a large pot of tea and some wonderfully fresh spiced fish here. Feels a little like home, taking care of people.  
  
[also: whoo, six pages of journal]

# 69th of Phoenix

Left for Hoelbrak; San and Kath left early, which annoyed me a little, but can't help it, can we? Went through that portal... greeted by the sharp summer deep-freeze of home. Spirits, but how I missed that. Snow! Actual, freezing, snow. Magnificent. Of course, Mithra almost instantly froze solid; flower not made for the climate.  
  
Picked up San and Kath from the Great Lodge, and set out to find Mithy some furs. Had to waddle her up in the little kid stuff to find something her size. Took a tour through Wolf and Bear lodge, as well as the caverns. San apparently wintered there a lot. How weird; she's probably been in close proximity to me for many years, but we've never met before. I wonder if we had become good friends as children. Hm. I wonder what would happened if I had met her instead of Freyja (Sorundsdottir). Would I have loved her like I do now? Would she have died, bearing me a child, too? What a weirdly errant thought. I feel almost ashamed that this long past love for my daughter's mother has eroded away such. I barely remember anything of her; just that she was beautiful, and that she loved me.  
  
But I digress. We spent the rest of the evening in the tavern, getting utterly smashed on accounts of Usha. Wonderful Charr, my sister. Basically told off the entire Vigil in the face of a drunk Vigil unit, and walked off. San and I got *wiped out* on Wyrmblood. Got Fruity Pillow all up in the passions, she all but devoured Kath on the spot, and dragged her off to what I can only assume was a long and sleepless night. Well deserved to them, let them enjoy their leave! I can't remember anything at all after that, though. Just woke up in the Great Lodge.

# 70th of Phoenix

Still in the Lodges. Picked up Kath and San from the Great Lodge. Kath went a bit haywire about us going to the hotsprings, demanding we didn't look at her or San at all, and that sort of thing. She seemed really aggressive about it too. It I had known that, I wouldn't have proposed, I mean... Anyway, I suggested going ice skating instead, but the two flowers insisted on going to the hotsprings anyway. Knew it was a bad idea.  
  
Went there, and, as it was, decided to give Kath the space she wanted. Ended up sitting awkwardly in separate pools, not exactly the way it is intended. Then Rotarn showed up, and Kath went berserk, throwing rocks like a lunatic. San had to nab her by the neck and pull her under to stop here. Just... broke it entirely for me. What a bad, bad, bad idea.  
  
When she was still alive, I was there with Freyja once. Flooded all back. She had come to try and run the rookery trial with Usha and me, and some of the others, all woaded and beautiful, ready to impress. Had her eye on me, I think. After the run, near dusk, we puffed out into the snow, all sweaty, bruised from the trials. Mocked me, said she wasn't even tired, and I couldn't catch her if I wanted to. Saw through it well enough, but I took the bait. Chased her off up the slope, the sun setting over us. Eventually caught her, as she had intended of course, right near the springs. Tussled her to the ground in the snow. We fought a little, laughing, struggling, knowing what we wanted, before she rolled me into the pool. Dropped her furs there and then, and jumped in after me, naked as the day she was born. Her woad washed out across our bodies in the steam. We stayed there, that night, together between the snow cherries, as I whispered into her ear the wondrous Vabbian tales she so loved to hear.  
  
To think I'd nearly forgotten that. Spirits, so few happy memories of me and sweet, golden Freyja. They are too often overshadowed by loss.

# 71th of Phoenix

All over the place, today. Yesterday left me feeling melancholic, so I left early, had to empty my mind. Decided to count down the silvers, and head through to the Reach by the gate network. Wore the Vigil steel, so they didn't stop me long. Spent the morning in some pub down Rurikton's way. Crowd was nice enough, even met another trooper. Not one of ours, though.  
  
I, uh, met someone. Norn girl, called 'Kay. Just walked up to me because of the uniform. Hit off well, got to talking. Really good talking too, lass all flush and cooing. Seems like the norn around the Reach are all bucketheaded idiots, relieved she had someone to chat too, I think. She's been working out these past few years as a tailor, does all sort of stitching work for folk. Really nice lass. Asked her if she wanted to go out, eat something together, or something. Seemed a bit nervous, but took me out for a tour of the city. Smarter than I expected, knew all sort of things about the town. Showed me around a bit. Only got a bit weird when I asked if she wanted to eat something again, when we passed around Ossan. But I think that was just a small misunderstanding. Walked her home pleasantly enough; decided to exchange some letters, when I get deployed. Made some plans too.  
  
Wandered off after, thought I might as well return to the pub. Here, I find those mercenaries we saw at Meddler's, Crimson Ashes. Lass named Niria was about there, so we exchanged some drinks. They were all out ready for a mission, though, but some faces I remember. Dark norn, the one who brawled, ambled up too. Didn't recall me very well, but seemed a nice enough sort. Decided we'd crack a keg together when we had more time. Pity leave's off so soon already, Reach seemed a nice enough place for an afternoon of wandering.  
  
Headed back to Hoelbrak right after, pick up the flowers for a last look around. Em and Vee were there too, which was good. Decided to range out Wayfarer's again, took them all out to Bear shrine. They spent some time oohing over cubs. Some Svanir nearly ruined the party, but they weren't expecting a troop of Vigil boots to stand in their way. Chopped them up quick. Headed out over to the hot springs again, took the scenic route over the mountain. Athy wanted to see the Rookery trials, so we passed that first. Ran it with her, fastest I've ever ran, in half plate. Under fifteen seconds, flat. Athy was faster than me, though. Shamans should've seen us!  
  
Hot springs were nice enough without the entire 'Kath will banish your skull out of your body' issue. Just relaxed a bit, splashing around in the hot water. Two flowers got a little *too* comfortable though, so I took Em and Vee back down to the Lodges. Headed over the tavern, got them some cherry beer to ease into it. That lass from previous was also there, Igri. Still unsure if she wanted to become Vigil. Lass was a bit awkward, but nice enough. When the flowers got back, we said our farewells, and made back to Arch and to the Vigil Keep.  
  
When we got there, Alyssa was drunk on spirits. Athy got mad, and stormed of. Had to have Mithy calm her down. All settled soon enough though. Those two Charr we met in Arch were there too. Had a long chat with the officer; reinstated as Knight now. Good talker, strong ideas, sharp wit, though very Charr. All Legion focus; another lifer, as far as I can tell. Should be interesting to see him lead.  
  
Anyway, not sure what I'm going to do on the morrow. Might stick around keep, might range back down to the Arch. Need to start making preparations for the ball, though Chief seems to have embraced the idea with a furor! Guess we won't be starving at least, I can tell you that much!

# 72nd of Phoenix

Last day of leave! Spent the morning going out to Arch and the Reach one more time, enjoy some luxuries before leave ticks over.Thought about looking up 'Kay again, but decided against it. Would've been weird so soon, I think. Instead went down to the pub. Met some other boots on leave, so that was nice. Not from our unit, though, just resting troops. Some minor kerfuffles with some of the locals, but nothing major. Just some kids that need a good smack across the head to teach them some respect for a soldier.  
  
Back to the keep. Wonderful news! Sigrun is with child. Or children, as she seems to feel they will be twins. Wulfbane was so elated, truly a grand occasion! They're retiring, however, to raise their family. I can do nothing but approve; the two small ones will grow up in a strong and worthy household as a result, and knowing Wulfbane, they will eat well, and grow big.  
  
Looking forwards to the ball on the morrow. Will have to head off early to collect the lass, and make sure she lives through the tedium of the duty announcements, before we can get to dancing. Hope the Vigil Keep proves to be a nice enough place to take out a lass used to the Reach, but you never know.

# 73rd of Phoenix

Back to duty today. I went out to the Reach to pick up Kay earlier, walked her all the way back to the Keep. With the portal system, it wasn't actually that far, to her surprise. She seemed a fair bit nervous, but that's not unusual, I guess. Can imagine meeting a Chapter of Vigil troops is a fairly intimidating affair for most people.  
Walked her through the keep a little before line up, show her the grounds.  
  
Duty lineup was meager, surprised to see how small our rear field line has become. Lot of the heavyweights out of the count. Been a while since I've felt so tall in a duty role. New Charr got Knight for Blade, so that's going to be interesting. Gutt picked up Senior First Crusader for Lance too, give the steel-eater some more punch for good measure. Not that she needed it. Institution of luxury rations, too, that's new. Guess we'll be seeing what that is on the morrow?  
  
Anyway, we got dismissed soon after. Kicked off the Chapter ball, brilliant occasion. Kay made me the most amazing outfit, perfectly to measure. She's got her talents alright. Looked stunning herself, beautiful. I think we certainly made an impression, dressed to match, we'd have stopped the show at a proper noble ball, let alone the Vigil. Good to see all the others out in their dresses and sharps too. Disappointingly few of the lads joined in; you'd think a chance to dance with all the nice womenfolk would've brought them out of the woodwork, but no. It takes a plated norn and a scarred Sylvari to lead the way for the 'fine gentlemen'. Bah!  
  
Wulfbane, though... did his magic. That feast he prepared with the keep cooks! San was gorging herself on it like a glutton. Even took the whole duck. It was all delicious, what a wonderful parting gift. Ale, too, to which my seamstress is apparently partial. Took her a few mugs to find her dancing legs, but then... we danced well enough, alright. Found her, too, I think. I... I don't know what it is yet, but it is good.  
Ale overtook her a little, and she went to sit after the dance. Was asleep by the time I came to find her; better. I left her to rest in quiet. She's alseep now, still, right here.  
  
Sour note to the evening: some Sylvari in Vigil armour chatted his way up into the keep. Later turned out the sod was Athy's stalking former lover. Could've pierced him though the heart before anyone had been any wiser, but sod it all, I didn't know. Athy's all shook up. Lyssa's going to keep an eye, and a gun, out this evening, I think. I checked the battlements before turning in myself.  
  
Also, Wynn. I think I broke her heart today. Should've known bringing along Kay would rub her the wrong way, but... Wynn's not even of my folk. I'll be there for her as a friend, but I don't think I can be anything more than that. Stupid, stupid Wynn. I feel so sad that I must hurt her so, even in my own joy.  
  
My seamstress though... something worth working on, I think. See where it leads? I hope we can become closer. It's clear we both want to. But... this sort of thing is going to be hard. I am bound by duty to the Vigil; I will likely not see her for many, many days once redeployment comes. Is this something we can live with? I don't know yet. Where does that even leave what I feel for San...  
Ah, I worry too much.

# 74th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep, return to camp duties after the Chapter ball. Grand event, great success, I think. A lot of folks walking around with a headache, I wager. Saw Kay off back to the Reach as well, watcher her go for a good long time, until she was all the way past the bend. Went for some practice drills after, grinning like an idiot the entire time. Helped Athy with her swords too, was a little rough on the technique.  
  
Went out hunting for minotaurs with the new lass, the engineer. Used some sort of dart gun. Picked off two nice ones, which I butchered for the meat. Baked up the steak well enough with some foraged spices, served it some fried potato slices. Good, hearty meal. Good eating.  
  
Some Charr Warmaster brought it a prisoners late; apparently a Tactician on leave smacked up a noble well enough to kill the fellow. Sort of a garbled escalation ensued, apparently some idiot shot the corpse to make sure it wasn't dead, or something? Instead of checking for a pulse, like a normal being would. Anyway, long story short, the Tactician had to dip in and save the Warmaster from getting shot, or something, I can't recall the details. Took the man into custody, and brought him to the keep. Seemed like a good man, actually, honourable. Took responsability for his actions. He's locked up, we'll probably end up handing him over to a military court hearing soon enough. If anything, he'll lose his rank.  
  
Dragon Bash tomorrow, we get a day off to attend! I'm considering calling on Kay to accompany me, have some fun together. Would that be too soon after the ball? Also, I'd have to show up at her place unannounced, and ask her there and then. I'll see, maybe it's not a good idea. But then, I do want to see her as often as I can before we're deployed again, so you know.

# 75th of Phoenix

Spent most of the morning in the Keep, went through sword drills again with Athy. She's a very eager learner, which at least makes giving instructions more interesting. Can see her respond well to the training, though I'm not sure my less-than-elegant fighting style suits her well. Learning her how to brawl with a sword, effectively, not as much 'fence'. Might need to hand her over to a more elegant swordsman for the finishing touches. Ferocious fighter, though, probably using practice to vent some stress; good.  
  
The prisoner is still around. Not sure how to call him, man used to be a tactician. Seems he has his heart in the right place, though. Wears his crest proudly. Poet was content in playing guard for the duration of the day, minded little that I wandered off, I think.  
So I did; I went to the Reach, hopes to surprise my seamstress, take her out for a festival would have been fantastic. That, and I know a few nice romantic nooks and crannies in Arch to entertain a beautiful woman like 'Kay. Alas, she wasn't home when I called on her. I left her a note instead. Can't say I wasn't disappointed, sort of looked forwards to it.  
  
Instead ran into some weird woman called Xeyia. Apparently former member of the Chapter, but not on all too good terms. She walked back to the Dragon Bash with me, but was greeted with extreme hostility by SFC Cindertail, who was also present. I'll come back on that later, though.  
  
Dragon Bash was great fun. There was a costumed play about the fall of Zaithan, complete with model dragon and airship. Good to see them honour the war as they did, plenty of good folk died for that. Drank a keg of whiskey with San, though the lass used a mug. Never a good sport. Went off wandering a little; lot of fun out in the streets. Games about 'beating' the dragons and challenges, and quizes, amazing. Didn't participate much, the whiskey was already kicking in. I bought a plate of fantastic spiced ribs, but spirit's alive, that cost me seven days wage! Worth it though, headed back to the pub with it. Kath was completely down her drinks, fantastic to see. Then, this Xeyia woman from earlier walks in. Turns out she and the Knight are old lovers, and didn't part on too good terms. Seeing Sana tense up and reach for her blade clued me in well enough, simply stood casually between the two. Adrenaline spike cleaned out the alcohol out of my system real fast too.  
Didn't come to blows though, luckily. Calder sent San and the Knight home after, they're staying at Sana's place well enough. Kath was so smashed, she simply teetered and veered about in the end.  
  
Athelstan also took a bottle to the head, and seems to suffer from memory distortion. Sent him to the keep with Mire. He'll probably turn out alright after some rest.  
  
Spent some time in the pub after, even encountered Melli! Grounded, though, the Asura. And apparently a surprisingly strong drinker. Evening went well enough until some of the local scum tried to throw a bottle at me. Simply clanked off my shield. Calder decided that, rather than to devolve into a brawl, we best leave. Xeyia woman came out to apologize on their behalf, which I appreciated a lot. I think she went back and started a fight on our behalf, because we could hear the sound of fighting from outside. Calder sent us back in, heavy hand, to break it up. Locals didn't seem to clue in they were facing down a detachment of heavily armed Vigil troops that weren't in a mood for jokes, but they eventually realized that walking out was the best course of action. So they did, kicked out their own bar by force. The weird Xeiya lady was alright, though, I think, if a bit volatile. Not many folk in the Chapter seem to think highly of her, however.  
  
Either way, we returned to the Keep without much issue. Spend some time talking. Weird Sylvari from the Priory, one Magister Noron, showed up, apparently on business with the Warmaster. He seemed nice enough, though I'm rather weary of strangers these days. Anyway, I turned in early.

# 76th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep, back to formal duties. Morning drill was more swordwork, now with the two flowers together. She's... more sporadic, very aggressive, uncontrolled. Glimmer of talent in there, though, somewhere. Need to be more discipline, less lashing. Can do that, just need time and practice. At least she listens intently when I speak. Went through hammer with the Knight in between. Still feels ridiculously strong. I'm not bad with it, but not my preferred weapon.  
  
Spent some time working through engineering duties with Ironside and the new human girl with her elixirs. Her turret thing is real handy. We had Poet test it, says it did him quite well. Probably get permission from command to take the thing down to the refugee camp, see if there are some kids with scabs and cuts that want to earn a copper if they let us treat the wounds with the lass's healing solution. Either way, that thing is a major addition to our arsenal. Kid also carries around an elixir gun. Doesn't seem much of a killer, more like someone who wants to help out. Kirk's funny too, little bird.  
  
Duties resumed not much later. Squads got reshuffled, I'm now in Blade. Yeah... well, guess Lance suddenly sucks, right? Spirits damn it. Either way, I'm Knight Calder's shieldwall now, so that's different. Line up today was me, and a bunch of Charr. Furry as a bear's arse. Knight made some things very clear, which is good. Had us square up in sparring teams, got to fight the White Stare. Good bout, got real dirty real quick. Ended when I smashed my shield into her throat, while she kneed me in the old good ones. Called it a draw. Calder said she was the best fighter, huh? Guess that's a contested spot now, Cat.  
  
Went out hunting with Sana after, though we just ended up picking some fresh water crabs. Fruity also nailed a moa for Kath, who doesn't enjoy her seafood as much. Spent a good time prepping the food, good talk with her, it was fun. Like when we first met. Evening meal got served, and was received well enough. Plenty left though, so I guess breakfast rations are going to be amended with crab meat and roast moa.  
Good enough evening chat. Then this Xeyia Meadows shows up again, apparently set up a meeting with Boom Moon. Sana and I lingered nearby, chatting, until it was done. Seems like it all settled peacefully, as Meadows walked out after. Said she'd see us again out west.  
  
Teza, or Punchy as I've decided to call him, seems to be looking for a sparring partner. Lad apparently blends shadow magic, and necromancy, probably a real nasty opponent to fight. Took the challenge, I'll see what he's made of on the morrow. Part of the Chapter now too. Command stripped him of rank all the way back to Recruit, and he's with us to re-learn the ropes. Good man, I think, made a good impression on Poet and I.  
  
Turned in quite early, been thinking about 'Kay, Wynn, Sana... it's all a mess up there. I don't know what I feel half the time, and I have even less of an idea of what I'm supposed to be feeling. 'Kay ending up being a fluke would be horrendous; my mind keeps wandering over to her. I wish she'd write, or anything. Something. I wake up every morning with the hope she'd come down to the Keep for a visit.  
Wynn... gah, but I feel like a horrible, terrible person for hurting her. Should've told her from the start that this wasn't going to be... what she wanted. Never the intention, just not brave enough to hurt her like that. And of course, I only made it worse. I read back that entry I wrote, and I want to tear out the page. Fool! Fool, fool, fool.  
And then there's San. I honestly don't even know anymore. I do adore her, in a way that is hard to explain, but it is not the fierce passion I felt in Malchor. It is a softer, more diffuse affection. 'd Still fight for her and Kath, no end.

# 77th of Phoenix

Vigil keep, all quiet. Brief chat with Faith and the flowers, not much going on. Spoke with Lorma too, see how we want to divvy up the command duties between us. Not much of a social talker, but we established that earlier. Had a spar with Punchy, man almost got me on the ropes, good combination of magic and speed, slapping me around with life force blasts. Eventually lured me into a trap, blasted me with an ice blast. Managed to dodge that just in time, but got some surface freezeburn on my back. Not new, but it'll be sleeping on my belly today.  
  
Wynn was around, really wished I had a time to talk to her, but she left before the spar was concluded. She's hurting, and I'm the reason. Sod it all, why is this happening? Why can't she be happy? I feel guilty that I have affection towards others, and I shouldn't. It sours a beautiful feeling. Wynn deserves better, but damn it, so do I. Gah! Angry at my field book, and no-one is to blame. Just a stupid powerless feeling.

# 78th of Phoenix

Vigil keep, training day today. We've been assigned bunking buddies, to conserve space in tents. I'm saddled up with Marcus, which is fine, we share a sense of mutual respect, and I don't think Asura snore very loudly anyway.  
  
Went out for a patrol today, Calder handed command over to Marcus, together with some formation work. Did well enough, little rough around the edges. We went far afield, though, all the way across the fields. I planted some suggestions here and there, as I was second lead, and Marcus followed through nice. Catapult smacked Lyralii on the skull, luckily was only a glancing blow, or she'd be squished. Spotted some Toxic Alliance as well, probably going to send us in for clean up on that too.  
  
Return to the keep was uneventful, just some casual chat.  
Talked to Wynn... that was painful, and terrifying. I let her get far too close, she's blaming herself. Asked me how it was with 'Kay. That must've stung for her. I feel horrible. Then suddenly she... lit on fire. Wrathfire, the blue stuff. She just... torched herself, uncontrolled. Marcus had to jump in. I, uh... left. I think I did enough damage. What a monster I have been to this poor girl.

# 79th of Phoenix

Another day in the Keep, more training. Seemed quiet enough, just some sword-only fencing. Not my forte, I was up against Thistle. Obviously outmatched on pure bladework, especially because any other contact was restricted. Considering my more physical fighting style, meant I was rather hard pressed. Celdric allowed two hits to land though, one in the throat. Was pretty obvious he could've dodged it, but he didn't. Had to take him over to medical for treatment, will be having some issue swallowing for a bit.  
  
New change, Crusaders getting assigned recruits as trainees. I landed Roeland and Sima, both of which have been in the Chapter longer than I have. Sima was a Tactician, spirits above. Well enough, though, I suppose, set straight to work on it. Had Roeland get a field book, and write down each day's lessons. Help him internalize the good and bad things a little, and show him his own progression. I can teach the lad how to fight like a warrior, but I can't force him to accept the mindset of a soldier. Not without him understanding some of the principles himself. I'm being strict with him, and he follows well enough. I hope he'll start showing initiative in the long run.  
Sima shouldn't be a problem, just need to keep him reined in.  
  
Scouts went out for a long stint, all came back exhausted. Sure half of them didn't even eat. I all but had to force some of them into it. San and Athy especially seemed to be worn out. Kath and Sana both been going into this weird 'duty mode' of theirs, where they become so focused it's difficult to talk to them. Don't think I'll get used to it soon, but you know how it goes.  
  
New lasses, Caliburn and Faith, seem to be doing well enough, getting integrated a little. Caliburn's dumb as a brick, but trained well enough from home. Seems to have had a good master-at-arms that taught her the ropes; little more experience needed, though. Faith's weirdly intelligent, but doesn't talk much, and tends to isolate herself a little. Works on her turret thing a lot, which I think is good.  
  
Sword training on the morrow for the flowers, bringing in Thistle to show them some finer work. I'll be busying myself with Roeland and Caliburn, they're more my type of fighters anyway. See what they can learn, and what can be improved. Shouldn't be too much effort; they're both eager.  
  
'Kay sent me a letter, got it just now. Finally, I was so worried she wouldn't. Happy state of mind, I'll send her a return as soon as I can!

# 80th of Phoenix

Another training day at the Keep. Not much happening, but Calder send around circulation that I was to prepare today's exercise. I based something of the one we did the other day, worked out fine. Look day in the field with the detachment, hope most of them picked something up. Roeland, specifically, it getting my attention on a number of things, the lad is... different. Don't know if I can do it yet, make him a Crusader, but I damn well will try my best.  
  
That blonde lass, Faith, and her moa chick, Kirk, cracked me up today. Girl was trying to have the little bird play tag with her. Amusingly cute, though I worry she might not be entirely suited for the Vigil. She'll probably hit a brick wall on deployment, when she realizes that it's not all as polished as it as at the keep. You can say that for most recruits, but she specifically; wouldn't hurt a fly. Kirk's a real trooper though.  
  
Aside from that, it's been a rather slow day as far as things go, everyone turned in early, so you know. Oh, I sent 'Kay a return letter. Might have been a little too open about 'us', but you know. I'm a Vigil soldier, better live in the moment, so there you go. Keep hoping she'll show up unannounced. I'd grab her on my shoulders and carry her off towards the lake, or Almuten, keep her all for myself for a bit. Pleasant enough thought.  
  
Dug into the records today, filed entirely too much letters to the next of kin for the former crewmembers. Spirits damn it. Well. At least we pulled Melli out, so that's something I guess. Still, though, entirely too many names on that list.

[Continuation of entry].

Spoiler: [Show](javascript:;)

**Ice Storm and Raven**

**Svell Veðr eða Hrafn**  
  
*The north wind carried through, a blizzard's storm of winter ice.*  
*It roiled so on through shivering peaks, and mountains high.*  
*West it wished to pass, to melting snow and spring-coloured ground.*  
*By the peaks it stayed, armoured in cliffs and passes it could not cross.*  
*Never to see where sun touched earth into thaw.*  
  
*By flew a raven, curious kind, free and high above the ground.*  
*Above the blizzard it yet flew, wondering what disturbed the evening snow.*  
*So it dove and spread its wings, carried through the blizzard's veil.*  
*There it fell along in dusk's storm, the raven's love for a winter's kiss.*  
*Together they flew through winds bound west.*  
  
*The raven's guide led them on, drifting feathers left aside.*  
*Morning's call was greeted, green grass on an eastern slope.*  
*They passed through there together.*  
*A softer storm and her curious raven.*

# 81st of Phoenix

Quiet day, don't think anything of note happened. Good, moment to think about things, I guess, muse a little.  
Wrote something for Sana and Kath earlier, when I stood out on the eastern ramparts where the snows still gets washed over the battlements. Apt, I think, a poem I will tell my Freyja, and Freyja's children, when I am old, worn and senile, looking back to better times, remembering fondly the Blizzard and Raven.  
  
I am becoming more and more content with my life. I have become a Crusader of the Vigil, I am decently respected by my fellow soldiers, hold the trust of my superiors, and I judge my prospects of promotion well. I am surrounded by friends and allies for whom I will happily endure terrible hardships. My hearts rises, happily, at the thought of a beautiful seamstress that has just entered my life. And yet, I miss my Freyja near-on everyday, and see myself responsible for the broken heart of a lonely girl. Bah Of course, Sana's right; I worry too much. Live in the moment, Crusader, step up and seize life by the horns.  
  
I've been giving thoughts about what happened in Orr, spiritually. What I felt there, I am certain, was the grace of the human Six, there is little doubt. Such strength and ferocity, the powerful emotions of joy, rapture, and terrible sadness, too. I see them all, spirits, dragons, gods; they are but magical entities in a hierarchy of power. They are different each, in their own way, but they exist well enough, and they can be slain too. It makes me wonder, is there a magical being above even the spirits and gods we acknowledge? If so, I can only imagine what sort of boons this spirit would give if it chose you as its follower. Perhaps I should consult a shaman. Or Marcus.

# 82nd of Phoenix

Vigil keep, all quiet on the evening's watch.  
  
Spoke with Knight Calder, seems generally satisfied with my performance, I think. Bit of a weird one to chat to, very direct, very acutely intelligent. Like a razor. Probably way more dangerous than he lets on, the old Charr. Lucky he's on our side, I think, or he'd be a lethal enemy. Could probably handle White Cat, though I'd like to think we established a relation of mutual respect after our spar. Good.  
  
Backyard was full of action today, Calder tried to summon a daemon or something, and Vethrir shouted at the entire ritual, while Kath looked like a cardboard box. A very confused, gaudily painted, cardboard box. I didn't bother with it too much, it all just seemed too weird in the long run. Haven't got a drop of magic in, can't even cast a small fireball. I just hammer away at things until they cease living. Straightforwards.  
  
Heard San and Kath went sparring again. Kath had to blunt trauma San in the guts five times until she yielded. Bloody lass is too stubborn, got a feeling the Knight's not the person to train her in that regard. Too dogmatic. Could ask if she wanted to pick up a lesson with me, but I'm not sure I have time. Hands full with Sima and Roeland, though the former skulks, and the latter runs away every time he's afraid I'm going to do something. They need to shape up, and sooner, rather than later.

# 83rd of Phoenix

Field drills at the keep. Knight Calder had us play some sort of 'capture the flag' game, which is mis-termed as king of the hill. No matter though, split up in teams, and required to seize hold of a banner. I was with the Golemancer, allowed the Asura to starts out the engagement mounted up on my shoulders. Matched against Tricky and Forgewood. Kraxxi basically leaped off into the fray from my shoulder guard. Short tussle, I fell over Rotarn, incapacitated him with a smack to the skull. Forced Bridgit to yield as a result. Rotarn was a tad grumpy over it, can't blame him. I did basically hammer a fist into his noggin. But still, mission accomplished, which is what it is all about, in the end.  
  
Came back up the keep, Celdric freaking out because Mithy touched him. Managed to calm him down well enough, but he got spooked when Kath and Faith started firing off guns on the ramparts. Refused to come down to medical. Mire camped out with him for now, but... this is bad. Celdric going off like that again... we need that controlled.  
  
Roeland's back in medical too. I gave him an assignment, hoping he picks up some soldierly traits or notions from other troopers. If he can find something he can rally behind that's in line with the Vigil ideals, he'll have a goal to strive for. Set him on a road, if anything.

# 84th of Phoenix

Slow day again, still at the keep. No idea when we're being sent out on deployment yet. No drills today, except the usual morning routines with the trainees and recruits. I've got Caliburn, the two flowers, Rotarn, Celdric and Roeland beating away at swordwork, steadily improving. See how far the can pull it. Sima, as well as Faith and Sana should join us on the morrow. Probably run through some physicals. I'm going to change the curve, step away from just sword lessons, and start imparting more general fitness and readiness exercises as well. Maybe pull a few pages from how we did things with the Steelbreakers, get those troops into peak fighting condition.  
  
New lass in today, Svala. Good looking, too, caught both Fruity and my eye for a moment when she went about flashing skin. She seemed nice enough, green for the moment, but she should settle in well enough. Sana tried poaching her for the scouts from the get-go. Hardly surprising, archer in lighter gear, mobile. She'd do well with the scouts. Anyway, we'll see how that goes in the field.  
  
Usual kitchen chat was good, made some basic cheese-pasta dish for the boots that everyone seemed to enjoy well enough. Not much else to note. Oh yes, Boom Moon got herself a new warhammer. Pretty sure she likes that thing better than she liked anything else. At least for today, that is. Interesting to see if the weapon changes her fighting style. Still set on beating the knight into the dirt in a spar at one point.  
  
Day ended with a Quaggan wandering around the keep. Lad was about the size of a small boulder, and a long way away from home. Came asking for the Warmaster in person. I can still hear the coo-ing. I am not sure if I should be disturbed or not;

# 85th of Phoenix

Move to Lion's Arch today. City's changed, massively. All white stone and towers. Good, alive, bustling, beautiful, in its own way. Open. Like the Reach, but without all the prissy nobles and obnoxious locals. Fort Marriner has been fortified up all sorts of fierce, with lines of large-bore field cannons lining up the battlements. Next thing that invades here is going to be blown sky-high.  
That, and there's an airbase, arming airships. Good place to be.  
  
We marched in alright from the Keep, close formation. Roeland was at the front, kept himself well enough. The little quaggan fellow is following us around, seems he's been appointed some sort of diplomatic stature by the warmaster. Fair enough, I guess, quaggans have to do their duties too.  
Regardless, we rolled up into Marriner well enough, seems like we're going to settle in here for a moment. I wrote 'Kay this morning, hopefully she'll come visit me. I heard we might be getting a day off, would be a good opportunity to take the lady out along the piers and beaches, perhaps even take a swim. I hope she likes that.  
  
Anyway, duties for today were easy, just a patrol. Turns out the locals aren't friendly to Sylvari; threw a bottle at Mithy's head, and there was one murdered on the beach. Idiots, guess they hold a grudge against Sylvari because of the Scarlet thing. They should know better, the fools. Gah! Knight Calder asked me to alert all the Sylvari about the danger.  
  
When we came back, Calder decided to rotate Lorma, Forgewood and I through second in command posts every seven days. I have third spot in the rotation; after that, we'll see who Calder picks. No issues there, I suppose, pretty sure I've got what it takes. And if not, I'll go for First Crusader.  
  
Found some norn lass tussling with the warmaster. Stepped in quick enough, knocked her out. Turns out she's that one Thorun's lass ma, Kahr. Not the best introduction I've made, but that's it that. Lass did attack the warmaster, and didn't back down when we told her to unhand her, so I'm not sure we had a choice, regardless. Warmaster will allow me to speak to her after she's done with her. Hopefully explain some things.  
  
Spirits, then Wynn... Wynn lit herself on fire again, seems Marcus was talking to her about controlling her wrathfire. Literal wrath. She must hate me, she was so angry. I feel hollow. She would've attacked me if not for Marcus casting up a barrier. Spirits, damn it all to the Mists and back, I made a terrible mistake leading her on when I did. Should have crushed that idea before the seed in her head had any time to take root.  
Damn it.  
  
Bah. I'm tired now. Wish 'Kay was here. Or Freyja. Or Sana. Or anyone.

# 86th of Phoenix

Fort Marriner, clear Krytan skies. Easy day, Arch is a pleasant enough place to stay at. Dawn drills going well, a lot of trainees showing up to pull their weight, they're learning slowly. At least most of them are physically solid, and able enough at arms. Issue is getting them to become proper soldiers. That's a mindset thing, not something I can fix by having them learn how to swing a sword proper. Roeland's assignment got me filled with some hope, though. Ironside and Calder's good, solid folk to look up to. Not so sure about my own place in it, but I won't deny claiming that I'm somewhat pleased I can be a rolemodel for the lad. Just hope he's not just sucking up, or writing down what he thinks I want to hear. He needs to genuinely want to become a better soldier for any of it to stick.  
  
Field duties today. Tested the storm boat, that was good. And then patrols with Bridgit in the lead, went hunting Karkas with repeater rifles. Nifty things. Spotted entirely too many of the little crabs, though, they were everywhere. Loud too, chattering. We swept through the Commodore's Quarter, but I'm fairly sure we missed a bunch. Checked out the Skritt-cave after. Still run by skritt, unsurprisingly. Managed to mooch off a bottle of blood whiskey off one on the cheap. That's a plus at least.  
  
New recruit showed up, fairly lost in the clouds. One Zara Drakemoor, human lass. Seemed eager enough, wanted to make a difference. Guess she's in the right place for that, as far as I'm concerned. Still needs to be oathed, but that'll happen without any issue, I wager. Seemed solid, learned quick. See how she turns out.  
  
Xeyia Meadows was here, in the mess, with that strange little friend of hers, charmer called Devin. They were friendly enough, though they did make a ruckus. Meadows looking to rejoin, apparently. Seems mad as a bat, in her own very sane way. Looks like she'd fight like a berserk harpy. I hope she does rejoin, might be a good spar in there.  
  
No sign or word from 'Kay, yet, unfortunately. I hope she's ~~okay~~ alright. Maybe... maybe I was too hasty, and that's why she's not answering my letters? Or maybe I worry too much. She'll write, or something. She will.

# 87th of Phoenix

Fort Marriner, all well on the Krytan homefront. Clear weather strong breeze out into the bay. The banners here fly high and mighty. Lion's Arch is alive like it has never been before. Citizens that spent season being displaced in refugee camps are finally home again. Children of all races play in the streets, laughing through the fountains and white-paved streets of this rebuilt city. It is a marvel, testimony to the will to endure of a united people. A melting pot that, above all else, represents a unified Tyria. Verril the Steelrider used to muse about a place like this. It is good to see her wish come through, even in death.  
  
Field duties today were brief; just a physical exercise for Blade squadron. Knight divided the exercises between the command candidates, meaning Lorma, myself an Forgewood had to come up with something. I had the troops carry me across the Piazza. Not just strength, but co-ordination as well. They did good. Roeland, apparently, the weakest link physically, but making a strong effort to make the grade despite this. He's adamant on pressing on. Maybe he wants to prove himself? Lad also did confess to abandoning his post while on watch. Will have to deal with that; can't let that stand.  
  
New faces, too. The new lass, Zara, made the jump, got sworn in by the Knight. Big Charr called Pryde also around, he's green in the Vigil, but the makings of a good soldier. Guess he'll transfer into the Ashen first thing come morning. Surprisingly, Devin, Meadows' friend, had himself signed up too, apparently edged on by the pale lady. Not sure if he's got the character for it, but we'll see, won't we?  
  
More news! We get two days of leave. Celebrated by cracking a keg of ale. Good drinking, I think I'll go for a walk around town on the morrow. Oh, by the by, out of nowhere, Usha barged into the barrack. Dragged me out of bed, and gave me a bone-shattering hug like only she can. She was apparently on business, moving through a number of shipping orders to opening taverns and inns across the Arch. Had a brief talk before she left off again, good surprise, that.  
  
'Kay wrote me a letter. She's coming to see me the 89th! I am already looking forwards to seeing the sweet lass again. Just want to see her, and hold her for a moment. That'll be good enough to last me another tour out in the wilderness.

# 88th of Phoenix

Fort Marriner, and a day off! Good. Still ran dawn drills though, because we need to keep in shape regardless of duties or not. Talked to Sana about that, now I think of it. She's going to help me out with the weapons training, especially because a growing number of recruits are showing up for training. Between Sana and me, we're only really learning them how to employ heavy arms with little finesse, and physical fitness. San's a little more elegant than I am, but that's not saying much, I fear. Still, it's a good basis to build on for the heavy troops, and physicals are important for everyone. Zara and Pryde, the two newbloods, should be right at home with the entire thing, seems to be in line with their style.  
  
About that, seems we're getting an impulse of new recruits. Zara's settling in fine. Pryde requested a transfer, as I predicted, and Devin made sure he landed a post with us too. Then there's this new asura called Straxx that showed up. They're already bonding together, with Rajani, Zara and Pryde forming a core group of friends inside the new recruits. Meadows herself signed on again, too.  
Good feeling about the new troops, a lot of them seem to have what it takes to make the grade. They're all very respectful, and eager to make a good impression. Well, except maybe Devin, who seems to primarily like hitting on women.  
  
Went out for a drink with Pryde and Zara earlier, and took a walk around the new building of the Arch. Mightily impressive, the entire thing. The Field of the Fallen monument left an impression, that's for certain, and the new streets and towers are on par with the finest houses in the Reach. Seems like it's slowly becoming a decent city in its own right, rather than just a free port.  
  
Had a long talk with Sana this evening, that was very nice. Just us, casually talking about the state of the Chapter, our friendship, joking. Spirits, I can see why I used to love her like I did, but much of that feeling has gone. True, I remain increasingly fond of her, and she will always have a place in my heart, but it will be as a loyal and trusted friend, with whom I would brave any danger. We've fought well, side by side, Sana and I. If not for Kath, we would've been worthy of eachother. But that ship has sailed beyond the horizon now, and I am at perfect peace with it.  
  
My seamstress has filled up many of the holes left in my heart, however. She'll be here on the morrow! There is nothing I look forwards more than seeing my 'Kay again. I want this to work. I'll show her what we two can have together. Who knows how long it'll be before we find the chance again?

# 89th of Phoenix

She didn't show up.

# 90th of Phoenix

Everything went to shit today. We're still at Marriner, but... I woke up, did dawn drills until noon. Then, when I went for food, I saw Sima over in medical, and there was a notice up that Celdric had gone missing. Didn't take me long, Poet and I put two and two together. No-one wanted to tell me though, damn it. Mire, cunt that she is, basically told me off because she was too 'busy' striding around in that ridiculous coat of hers when I asked her what happened to Sima. I nearly socked her in the jaw right there and then. How she ever made acting head medical with that attitude is beyond me.  
  
Layfon, who was around the Fort, eventually told me, some idiot Order of Whispers agent tried to manhandle Celdric when we were both out drunk yesterday. Of course, that ended with Celdric getting triggered. Sima, not knowing what was happening, stepped in to break it apart, ending up in a struggle where Celdric pulled a blade and knifed the man. Apparently, medical was too asinine to pass on the notion that touching Celdric is a bad idea, even after the event with Mithra when I outright told Calder and Mire. So much for competence. At least Calder circulated an internal notice for Blade.  
Celdric bolted of course, no-one knows where. I got my field kit out, basically made ready to find him there and then, because no-one seemingly gave a rat's arse. Kath eventually stopped me. She's handling it, she sent a letter to Celdric's mentor, that Noron fellow I encountered up at the Keep some days ago.  
I trust Kath on this one, I know she cares for Celdric, and wants to help him. Frustrating, however. I'd take the entire Chapter out and comb the Arch and the Grove entire if I had a say in it.  
  
We did some blindfolded sword drill set-up by Lorma. Ended up fighting Roeland. Well, 'fighting', wasn't much of that in there. Roeland... does not seem to be recovering his fundamental flaws. I'm slowly getting convinced he's not cut out for soldier work, no matter how much I try to hammer it home. If he does not start improving at a higher rate, I will have to recommend he be discharged on the next evaluation.  
Exercise itself was useful, though, blind fighting.  
  
Some normal bar talk after, not much of note. Devin got himself into a situation, seems he's chasing after Zara's tail, while his little pseudo-girlfriend decided to sign on with the Vigil, something which he is terrified of. That's going to end badly, one way or another, half-tempted to just tell the lass. Or smack Devin across the jaw, and tell him to soldier up. Anyway, I'll see.  
  
Heard we're moving to Southsun. Sand. At least the place is pretty enough from what I hear, so you never know. Karka meat is nice and juicy too, once you pierce the armour. Might have some good meals from the kills we get. Exciting hunting, if anything, I suppose.  
  
'Kay didn't show up today either. I'm mortified something happened to her, or even worse, she willfully stood me up. I'm not sure I could bear that. I had so much hopes stacked up on... us. Maybe I'm foolish for falling so deeply so fast, like a stripling, running away with a fantasy that was never there. I feel like an idiot, or worse, a fool played on his emotions. Oh, 'Kay, why didn't you just show up, and spare me this pain.  
I'll write her a letter. I hope she's alright. Please be alright.

# 1st of Scion

Marriner. Not much to say. Scouts went off early to Southsun for a scouting operation. Did some work with Engineering, and half the Chapter was co-opted into the exercise as physical labour. It went well enough, at least kept everyone sort of busy, and worked them into a sweat in a group exercise. Voxkk and Meadows did well enough as far engineering team leads go. I've inducted them both in as temporary engineering members. Ironside can decide to keep them on or not when he returns.  
  
Miremel came to apologize, but only highlighted the issue. Can't take the pressure, and vents on people when she reaches boiling point. And Mire is always at boiling point. Can't have that. I alerted command of my concern; that sort of none-sense gets good people killed because their head medic creaks under even a modest workload. We had -one- injured, spirits alive, and not even one she operated on. What happens if half the Chapter gets cracked over by a Karka Queen, and she loses her shit again like at Shadowfain? Madness.  
  
At least she told me they found Celdric. Good, seems the Knight came through with her letter to Noron. I suspect we'll be sending out a retrieval party soon, if not on the morrow. I'll volunteer if they ask. Hell, I'll volunteer if they don't ask. Get the Thistle back before he's marked up as a deserter. I know that it is unlikely he will ever return to the Chapter as a soldier, but... still. Kath is on my side, so we'll see.  
  
Seems a lot of the recruits are flocking to me for guidance, even though I'm just a Crusader. I've caught myself acting from this position of authority they've accorded me beyond my rank, disciplining the recruits when they step out of line, and giving them orders, rather than suggestions. Need to remember I'm not a First Crusader. Maybe soon, if the officers appreciate the work I have been doing, but not yet. Regardless, I feel some measure of pride in the notion the recruits carry me in high regard. If they listen to me, they'll go a long way in becoming able and solid soldiers for the Vigil.  
  
The last couple of days have been a haze of new faces. A lot of people signing on with the Vigil, and they all seem to be of surprisingly good caliber. Many of them are promising in their own right, or at least show every intention of being in here for the long run. Spirits, the only one with any issue seems to be Devin, and that's mostly because he's chasing tail, rather than paying attention. I wonder if he'll sharpen up, or be blunted out.  
  
Oh, and apparently both Athy and Bjorn made Crusader. Not even announced at a formal line up, just blurted out. Well, I guess it's something. Pity, though, they deserve the pride of standing in front of their comrades as they are given their rank. Like Sana and I at Shadowfain.  
  
Feeling around camp we're moving to Sotuhsun soon. Tomorrow or the day after, for certain. I've packed my field kit, and am ready to go at a moment's notice. Sort of looking forwards to having something to do aside from ponder over wounded friends, run-away drinking buddies and absent sweethearts.  
Giant deep-sea ocean crab sort of seems like a relevant distraction.

# 2nd of Scion

Position: Peal Islet, Southsun Cove.  
Wind: steady south-east breeze. Weather generally hot, risk of sunburns and heat exhaustion. Terrain is rough and rocky outside the encampment's bridge, and there is plenty of low foliage. Abundant wildlife, and the famous passion fruits. Foraging will be easy here, just need to take care not to eat anything we're not sure is edible, as many of it may be poisonous. At least there are fish the size of a man in the crystal clear waters.  
  
Rajani helped me out in the kitchen today, and we shot some four Reef Drakes for easy eating. She did will, can probably take over cooking duties when I'm not around in the long run. The steaks were good, I've set a fair share of them apart in palm leaves before putting them away in crates. They should be nicely preserved by the palm oils, if we don't eat them directly. Most of those will be set aside for the non-fish eaters in the coming days, I wager. Probably going to bake up some fish for tomorrow, so that'll be instantly useful.  
  
Duties today mainly involved moving, and some patrols. No actual karka yet, though, just some reef riders. Sana's shaken about the scouting work the other day, though, which worries me quite a bit. Not usually see her on edge. Guess we'll encounter the crabs furthers inland.  
  
Apparently command decided to fine me for those three trees I cut on the firing clearance. Contested it. Ridiculous. Oh, apparently that letter I sent to command about Mire punched through, and got her dismissed as head medic. She was replaced by Marcus. That didn't take long. The announcement was made sort of as a slap, though, in front of everyone. I suppose it's important everyone remains aware, after a fashion.  
Regardless, can't say I regret my words, but I wonder if Mire took the news well. I did tell her beforehand that I did send out that letter. No point in hiding it. Wonder if she carries a grudge about that sort of thing.  
  
Another new recruit signed on, one Kim. She looks a little aloof, and doesn't seem to know quite what's she's doing yet. Wonder why we took her on so hastily. A lot of new faces, though, as a result. Aldoven was around too, seems like she and Devin got their relationship registered by the Knight. Not sure how I feel about it, I fear Devin has no intention of keeping the sort of relation going aside from a quick fling. Not sure though, might be judging him too harshly. They do make for a nice couple, in a weird sense. Ellie's an airship boot, from the Aetherblades, apparently. Caught her out on it. Real tech-head, though, her weapon is about as non-standard as it can get. Talked her into considering engineering. With Lyss still stuck under conscript and Ironside away, we could use a gun-techie. She'll send in some diagrams for me later.  
  
We know where Celdric is. We're sending Rotarn in with a letter to talk to him, over at the Grove. Spirits protect them both, I hope it goes well. This is a mess. Wish I could go, but a norn in Vigil plate stomping through the Grove would not be very stealthy. Pretty much like a signpost saying 'the Vigil is coming for you', I fear.  
They better get him back.  
  
'Kay hasn't written back. Perhaps she's just busy. I don't know. Perhaps she doesn't care.  
Wynn hates me. Thoroughly.

# 3rd of Scion

Pearl Islet, no change in weather or wind conditions, still very warm. Drinking a lot of water to keep cool, even though the platesteel makes me sweat like an ox. Got an early guard duty, saw Sana head out with a team to capture some Karka. Dangerous work. I helped them bag a hatchling right after. Sana spent all day working them over, and ended up giving a rather lengthy, if dearly needed, presentation on the critters. Plenty I already knew, of course, but a refresher was welcome.  
  
Spend most of the day handling engineering; I've cleared the scouts for using explosive charges to weed out nests, and I've filled out several requisition forms for some solvent with the intention to weaponise the stuff. Additionally, Voxkk seems to be making headway into developing a highly effective, if unstable, incendiary launcher we might employ. At this rate, I'll also need to release the stock of explosive ammunition and explosive arrows Engineering has been keeping around. Spirits, we might need them if we want any of the ranged fighters to even dent the bigger things. Limited supplies though...  
  
Rest of the day was slow. Devin apparently goofed, and nearly got into a scrap with Jadepaw and Drakemoor over how he talks on about Aldoven. Can't have that, internal friction between new recruits will crack cohesion wide open. I've impressed on Pryde that he needs to tolerate Devin, if anything, not like him. Hope that doesn't became a real issue. Devin better treat that girl right, though or I'll tear his tongue out.  
Oh, and Straxx signed out due to personal reasons, weirdly enough.  
  
Celdric's back in camp, and not in chains. He's not under arrest, just under scrutiny from what I can tell. Kath came through, as I trusted she would, despite some apprehension I was feeling. But yes, Kath made all the good calls, and Celdric is back. Seems to be doing alright as well. I hope that remains the way it is, but I doubt it, especially with Sima and the Warmaster involved. Sima's doing alright, luckily. Hope he doesn't hold a grudge... If anything, the fucking Order of fucking Whispers should be the ones taking the blame.  
  
On that, Orchid showed up in camp today, apparently sent here as some sort of reconciliation... gift? Service? Thing? Warmaster kicked him over to Engineering. I can use a Creator, much as I dislike the Order at this point. Might set him to work quick. Actually, getting him to work on expanding our stock of high-impact munitions might help. I wonder if he's any good with grenades? I'll find a use for him regardless.  
  
'Kay still not answered. Probably won't. Not sure if I should send another letter or not. Hell, not sure if I should be worried, angry or sad. Maybe just disappointed.

# 4th of Scion

Pearl Islet, wind shift east, gale, alternating quickly. Weather clear, very warm outside the shade.  
This place is beautiful, like an exotic pearl in an oyster with razor sharp edges. The local wildlife is aggressive in the extreme, and the place is crawling with karka. Still, the white beaches, clear blue water and living flora is astounding; it is as colourful as the coral in Orr, but teeming with life in all scales. I enjoy it, in a way, as a holiday-on-the-job; a beautiful landscape and a good hunt all in one. The rum-passion fruit cocktails that seem to quickly become a mainstay in the Chapter's drinking rations helps a lot to perpetuate that feeling.  
  
Combat patrol today saw our first real run in with how nasty these critters get. Went to help out an overrun campsite, we all but got scattered. A drake that must have weighed several tonnes smashed into my chest, and sent me sprawling. Blacked out for a couple of seconds. Had me short of breath and overheated the entire patrol, plate mail boiling me alive. The hot sweat just stays inside, and slowly steams me into a heat stroke. Not sure if I can wear the plate suit for any lengthy amount of time without a mage cooling me down, or plunging myself into a pool of water. I'd wear the lighter outfit I secured, but the Karka sort of make me wish I carry along my thick cuirass, just in case. Pulled back with some wounded. Rough first day, though the new recruits seem to have taken it well, rather than badly. Motivated, eager. We have a really good patch this time around.  
  
Athelstan lead a detachment back out to collect some stuff, including karka shells and some choice bits, like eggs and legs for eating. Went well enough, until we spotted a large female bumbling about. We attacked and overwhelmed it easy, though we were more surprised to see a man spew out of the creature's maw when it was dead. He was smothered in goop alright, but in one piece. Just thanked us and ran off, the most peculiar thing. Not sure how to cope with that, except by just assuming people are weird.  
  
Another new face, on Seth Ruthford this time. Timid, quiet man, but seems to have his heart in the right place. Apparently, he worked with the Priory and knew my Freyja. I didn't have to time to ask him properly; there is a lot he should tell me. I hope she's doing well, my little one, making me proud. I thought I'd be more terrified of her being out and about making her legend, but I'm not. If anything, I swell with pride at the thought of my lass being a ferocious warrior. Perhaps I held her cooped up way too long. I'm considering writing her, but... I'm not sure that would accomplish anything.  
  
Cooked up some karka legs, the things were as amazing as I remember them being. Cracked them with the warsledge, and poured molten butter down the cracks, straight from the fire. It was delicious, if messy eating. I hope the Chapter enjoyed their meal as well.  
  
No news from 'Kay. [Writing stops and starts several times, before trailing off.]

# 5th of Scion

Pear Islet, wind same as previous, breeze.  
Heat is getting to me, going to keep the journal short.  
  
Marcus gave a demonstration on the aggressive capacities of acid, and the effect it has on wounds. It was very thorough, though a bit grissly. Certainly picked up a thing or two, and I'm more of less willing to tolerate any heat to stop that stuff from getting to my skin. Plate armour at least slows it down a notch.  
  
Plenty of talk with the troops, had Rajani cook a meal as apprentice cook; turned out fine on her own, barely needed any guidance. I'll have her working in the kitchens plenty now, help me out to outbalance some of the workload.  
  
Issues with Pryde and Devin. Had them spar it out. Marcus and I played it perfectly, neither wanted that fight, and they were forced into reconciliation in the face of us two forcing them to fight anyway. Used the oppertunity to give all the recruits a lesson about banding together against a common foe. It worked well enough, even if the fight itself was of little note. Devin... is still Devin, but I feel some of the latent tension have been worked out as a result. At least, I hope so. Impress upon the new folk that the Vigil is about standing together, and undivided. There no room for that against the Dragons.  
  
Regardless, it is late, and the heat is murder.

[Continuation of entry]  
  
This place. It is a teeming jungle, a mass of barely-contained life about to sprawl out and overtake everything around it with its violence and energy. It seethes and heaves, like a single mass of life. The tourists at the beach pay in silver to make their way here, and they only see a tiny glimpse. A tamed, still version, a glimpse of what is really is. Beyond camp, however, is the true beauty of Southsun. Raw wilderness, ferociously hostile to outsiders and newcomers. It would be the joy of many young hunter to prove themselves here, seeking their legend against mighty foes such as the Karka. There is prey here that is uniquely hard to kill, with poisons and acids. Many would perish, but those that return... they would fashion shields out of the shell of the greater ones they had slain, and turned a dark shade of olive tan.  
  
It is not unlike the bogs and swamps west of the Steamspurs where it is told I was born. I can imagine the great and terrible Hejja stalking through the razor-sharp cliffs here, devouring her foes whole. Or the Oddwalker, wandering the wilds. They would not have left any footprints to follow.  
Sometimes I wonder about my lineage. Strong and great, they both were, but both outsiders. Had they lived, I would have been a different man, I think. Would I have had Freyja? Would I have joined the Vigil? Perhaps not. Hm. I wonder if the Oddwalker lives yet, far out in distant lands. If not, I hope he found what he was looking for over the horizons.

# 6th of Scion

Pear Islet, wind shift minor. Mild storm passed over, but didn't break. Just flew straight by. Little rain would have been good, I think, the sweltering head is ferocious. I wish I could say that I'm able to pour the sweat out of my boots, but it evaporates too quickly. My kit padding is slick with sweat when I take it off, and I'm tired all the time. Short breaths, need to drink a lot of water to keep going. Also sunburn. My nose looks like an angry strawberry, and the noseguard is rubbing a patch raw. I'll have to put some padding in between, before it becomes a sore, and I need to ask in medical. I also just laid down in a shallow earlier, and just... drifted for a while, thinking, listening to the sound of water, and the sounds of the world around. Sort of felt like taking a boat out into the ocean, and drift through the waves and deep sea currents. For some reason, I can see myself dieing peacefully like that. Just lay down in a rowboat, fall quietly sleep, and never wake up, my sun-bleached bones washing up on a distant shore.  
  
Today was quiet. Aside from a minor trip out to stomp some Skelk with Celdric, and Rajani making some excellent stew, little of note passed about. Oh, Pryde and Zara think they're in some sort of love. I'm surprised, but I have a feeling it might just be an infatuation. The result of the two of them becoming friends quickly since their induction. Oh well, we'll see, won't we?  
  
Been thinking a lot. I kept Freyja behind closed doors too long, no wonder she was angry when I left her all of a sudden. I did it for all the right reasons, but she wanted her father, not a soldier over the seas. Damn it, I will not let that cost me the love of my daughter. I should write her. The new face, Ruthford, should be able to tell me where to send it. Maybe I can see her again next leave. It's been almost three years... she must have changed. Become tall, great, terrifying. From what Seth tells me... I should be very proud.  
  
Return to duties on the morrow, see what they have set aside for us. Shouldn't be too bad. At least get a good night's sleep in, I hope.

[Continuation of entry]  
  
Quiet. Warmaster called a night alert; sprinted out in my buns. Turned out it was just an unannounced drill. Quite funny. Should've seen their faces! You'd think some of them had never seen a naked norn before. At least I wasn't alone, Calder was out in his fur, and I'm pretty sure Fruity was wearing a whole lot of nothing before she became a giant norn-raven. Anyway, you'd think the sight of my Davidsson wouldn't spook them that much; we do fight giant winged ~~phalluses~~ dragons. Bah.  
  
Buh. Considering some things. I want to write 'Kay and Freyja letters, both. I've started several times on each, but then trailed off as I failed to find words worth saying. So instead I'm writing in my fieldbook. Maybe get some ideas going by just pouring out my mind on paper where no-one can read it anyway. Sort of a liberating idea, in a way, to just... throw it all out there. I'd talk to the recruits, but they're not... you know, friends yet. Some of them might become, but not this instant. Maybe Sima, or Ironside. Or even Fruity, if we find a spot to just chat. [scribble]  
I'm not happy. I'm content, but not happy. Duties are weighing heavily. Seems that many of the recruits default to thinking I'm one of the officers, and not just another soldier who took too much on his plate. Well too much... I can manage. Rajani seems to be perfectly suited for cooking duties, so that takes off some tension.  
Engineering's a hotspot now, though, with weapons development ongoing to combat the Karka. Most of it is adaptation work, but still. I'll need to send out a progress report sometimes soon.  
  
Recruits! Spirits, we're drowning in recruits, and a lot of them seem promising. Ruthford is worried about Kim Yeong suffering from some sort of depression. I hope he finds the courage to write up to medical before that becomes an issue. He's a quiet one, though, not sure if he's assertive enough to step forwards with it. Then again, he did attempt to stare Gutt down, so there's that. Not sure what that was all about anyway. I hope he realises he'll break all his teeth on Gutt. Not even I am that stupid. Kim herself is quiet, she didn't make much of a first impression, except that she is apparently unstable.  
Zara and Pryde. Hm. Well, it goes where it goes, I figure? I mean, I remember Ulfing once claiming his intentions to court Usha, but my sister wasn't very amused about the entire thing. I guess it's not unheard of, but it won't be accepted by a lot of people. Especially the other Charr and humans might stigmatize them for it as a result, which could lead to social isolation from their kin. I've warned them about it, and they're smart enough not to rush it, at least. Well, either way, I'm won't think any less of them for it.  
Who else... Ellie and Devin! They're a curious pair. I'm surprisingly fond of them both for some reason, though with Devin, it's a mixture between exasperation and anger on a regular basis as well. Don't know why he can't just... shut up. He speaks. So much. At least Ellie seems to have the entire womanising thing under control well enough. She seems determined to stick with him, even after I told her how the situation was at the Fort. It does her credit, I suppose; she must love him quite a bit.  
Grim's solid, looks like that one will make the grade by sheer force of not falling out of line. Good, we could use a Charr soldier through and through for a change.  
  
Hmhm. Might make some good food tonight, I have a good idea. I do need to send out foraging parties to find non-fish based foods. Can't have Boom Moon living off palm-oil preserved drake steak and tins while the rest get ocean fresh grub. Also need more passion fruits, my supply has run dry, and we'll be getting ration tickets soon. Could use a good refreshing drink while I sit here writing.  
  
Hm.  
  
~~A seamstress once went, stood upon high castle walls.~~  
~~She threaded needle and lived with silk, passing through her gentle hands.~~  
~~A soldier passed by, he called her sweet; they danced a merry jig.~~  
~~To war he went and she remained, stood upon high castle walls.~~  
  
Spirits damn it all.

# 7th of Scion

Pear Islet, wind change due north, north west, changing rapidly in strength. More storm clouds overhead, but they all seem to head out overseas before breaking. Observed some weather turmoil out further inlands, but it didn't change much about the local weather.  
  
Duty today was a bounding cover exercise overseen by Forgewood. Not bad, though the instructions weren't fully clear, which made it a little bit chaotic. Also, there was a lot of sand, which always annoys me. Combined with being slick with sweat almost the entire time, it means it just sort of... sticks around, and crawls up everywhere inconvenient. Stuff gets in my beard and everything, and is hell to remove, especially after I just greased the hairs.  
  
Different note, Kath ended up in medical. Sort of scared me bad, all of a sudden. Same for Sana, had to comfort her a little when Boom Moon was still knocked out. She woke up, though, just a heatstroke. She'll be **fine**. Knight's too hard to kill anyway, wouldn't give some soddy worm or the sun the pleasure.  
Devin ended up in medical too, more on that later. Seeing Ellie coo over him, and Sana over Kath was... tender, in a way. People taking care of their loved ones makes a nice change of scenery. A snapshot in the life of a Vigil soldier; one that's not about death, or honour, or glory. Sort of moments you fight for, I wager.  
  
Right. Rosetto. Forced to run back and forth between the beach and the yard by Calder because he keeps shouting. I've warned him not to, but... it's Devin. Lad eventually just crashed from heat exhaustion, no small wonder. Dragged off to medical. Calder and I figure that fitting him with a gas-hood might make it more difficult for him to speak as loudly and constantly as he does. We'll see about that.  
  
Another new face, one Luke Storm. Seraphi veteran, eight years of service. Wears plate, shield and a sword. Clear cut shieldwall shock troop. Good, always happy to see more heavy boots in the sand that know what they're doing. We'll see how he does out in the field soon enough, I wager.  
  
Anyway, slow, hot days here. Guess we'll see movement in a few days, so might as well enjoy it. Kath'll be fine.

# 8th of Scion

Pear Islet, wind change minor, still mostly north-north east. There is strong tide here, but sea-side supply runs are possible should the Asura gate malfunction. However, the Consortium seems surprisingly competent in not letting the thing fail. Guess they're not totally useless after all. Pear Islet still treating us surprisingly well, though what I hear from Sana, that'll change soon.  
  
Scouts set off early on a mission, so I took a large party of volunteers out for a weapons demonstration. I think I might have gone a mite too technical about the composition and manufacture of the munitions, but I think the demonstration worked out well enough. Some of the recruits seemed impressed alright about the impact profiles of some of that nastier large bore stuff we have. Good, make sure they know these are not toys.  
  
Another new face! Leugers. Guess we'll see what's up with her, made a straight beeline for the scouting corps, though. Looked like one for them, so you know. Seemed eager enough.  
  
Aldoven and Drakemoor managed to get Fruity and I to pitch a marksman team idea to Calder. He seemed interested in the idea, and assigned Rosetto and Rotarn as spotters into an impromptu team for now. I issued the two girls some special issue munitions from the stocks to celebrate. If they're going to lay down sniper fire, they may as well do so using effective rounds, after all. Seems like a good thing; I hope Devin picks up, he could use something to strive for. Sana seemed reluctant to let him in on the scouts regardless. Plus, for some reason, if anyone can keep him on a leash, it's Aldoven alright. Lady knows her game, if anything.  
  
Had a nosebleed earlier. Guess that's the heat. Surprised me, suddenly trickle of warm liquid down my face. Pressed a knuckle into my nosetril until it dried, but I looked like a pillock until then. As if I was knuckle-deep into picking my nose or something. Guh, this heat.  
  
I wrote Freyj. Hope she writes back something. I should write 'Kay too, but I don't know what to say. Am I angry, disappointed, what? Maybe somethig happened to her, and she's been hurt. Damn it, I'm half tempted to ask permission to leave camp and go find out while we're still close to this Asura gate, but they won't grant that request. I can only imagine the knights looking at me when I ask them to go find the woman who stood me up. Blast it all, maybe a letter anyway? I don't know. I'll sleep it over, I think.

[Continuation of entry.]  
  
Moment of tranquillity this afternoon. Far enough into the day for everyone to be thoroughly exhausted, the heat at its punishing peak. We lay here, sweating bodies under tent canvas, baking in the unforgiving tropical blaze of the island. Shade and the crystal clear deep blue water are our relief.  
  
My skin's slowly turning away from strawberry-tomato into a deeper tan, and sleeping is a lot more comfortable now that I can turn on my side comfortably without mild stabs of pain eating through the burnt skin. The mosquitoes are murder however, and their near incessant buzzing around the campfires and tents is driving me mad. Half-tempted to task Engineering with finding something to ward them off. Maybe even some sort of small chemical weapon to melt their stupid wings off. Bites are irritating itchy, and typically, the moment I need to scratch most is the moment I'm wearing my armour. Maddening.  
  
I spent some time cleaning my armour and equipment today, making sure everything's still up to standards. The suit of battered old plate has its dent, but it's sturdy. You can still see the marks on the finishing and ornaments where the smiths narrowed the shoulders and collar of the cuirass. Orge that used to wear it before me must have been small for his kind, but strong, to have shoulders that wide. Sometimes I wonder how he (or she) died. Perhaps I will meet them in the Mists when I die; a chance encounter between an Ogre and a Norn united by a set of plate. It would be an interesting tale. Perhaps I shall write an account of it before it happens, and tell it to the young warriors of Hoelbrak when I am old. Har'varanar! Hail to the fallen.  
  
My duties are starting to weigh on me a bit, but I see it as a challenge. Something to be overcome. If anything, I feel I will be rewarded justly for my efforts. First Crusader Tzahr Davidsson of the Ashen Chapter. Something worthy of my legend, hm? But I'm getting ahead of myself. If I continue to prove myself and show my skill, command will find a use for me. Of anything, the recruits are dancing in the palm of my hand. Only troublemaker is, and remains, Rosetto. Spirits, even Roeland seems to be making inroads under my tutelage. I'm not sure if Devin is one to be bent, broke or discarded, but he's remarkably resilient against any form of punishment I try to levy against him. A pity he continues to misbehave, he actually seems like a nice enough sort. But, as it stands, he will do his duty correctly, or he won't at all. I'll hammer that through his thick skull if I need to.  
  
I finally wrote my letter to 'Kay. Not a good feeling in my chest right now. I'm a bloody fool. Bloody, bloody fool. Sweet, golden Freyja died. My own Freyja detests me. Sana's the Knight's. Wynn hates me for not loving her back. 'Kay never showed up.  
Well. At least it can only go uphill from here, right? Right.

# 9th of Scion

Pear Islet, wind constant, no changes. Weather still too hot, but milder wind passed over more than usual. Colder air. Still no clouds, so it's still near-constant sunshine. Feel like I've been axing on about the weather forever.  
  
Duty today was... bloody hell. Sharks. Sharks fucking everywhere. They even ripped up my storm boat, idiotic flesh eating fish. We killed a fair bit, but the waters are absolutely infested. The blood didn't help, just attracted more. Bloody hell. Literally. Ruthford and Lorma got bitten, no small wonder with the amount of them coming at us. Anyway, mission accomplished in the long run, though I'm not sure what or why. Just some Consortium boxes containing... whatever. Hope command knows what they're doing, because the soldiers sure as hell don't seem to.  
  
Kath apparently got hit by karka acid, had to ditch her armour. Ran around in Vigil standard for a moment. Quite the sight, I must say. Weird, always keep finding seeing the Knight in that context a little jarring. She's pretty enough, mind, just... carboard box. Eh well, could be worse, she could be Warmaster. I can only imagine seeing the word 'banish' written in man-sized letters on notice board in pink lipstick. Spirits preserve us of that day!  
  
Aside from that, just some casual chat. Until, that is, Sana stopped by and required a field detachment sent out to Steampipe. Needed some engineers, so I attached myself and Meadows. We got there, place was overrun all to hell, apparently. Seems like we're retaking it on the morrow. Was privy to the officer's meeting with Sana about the stuff. It's going to be a hard fight, and we're putting troops in risky places. Engineering will have its hands full; we need to shore up the west wall, exterminate the karka nests and probably burn down a major hive. So... all hands on deck for tomorrow.

# 10th of Scion

Spirits alive, what a mess.  
  
Marched out from Pearl Islet in double column, full Chapter strength intended to retake Steampipe. Scouts split off and got ready to pincer in from the south while the core marched around north. We reached our positions easy enough, and then charged down the north gate at flare signal. Crashed through them like a hot knife through butter, linked up with the scouts, and secured the settlement. I instructed setting charges on the karka hives before we blew the lot sky high.  
  
Meadows and I checked the wall for integrity. Could use some bracing, so we set a detachment to work. But then the Karka came back. Several times. Wounded started stacking up. Then Gutt keeled over, dead, perforated. We had to backtrack quick, pulled out the wounded over the bridge. Karka basically lapped at our heels as we moved out. Hectic. Half the Chapter was badly wounded.  
  
Wired the bridge for explosives, ready to scuttle the entire thing. Had to keep watch with Sana and Kath. Kath's really angry, paced up and down, snapped at me. Guess I can't blame her, Gutt seemed to talk to Kath more than anyone. Sana was curt and far-looking. Not the first person she's lost, I think. Seen that look before in soldiers. I let them be, even though I was chattering to keep my mind occupied.  
  
We got relieved, pulled back all the way to Pearl Islet again. Some of the recruits are taking it hard. Death of a senior trooper in the first days of a deployment, and full on retreat? It's a miracle we didn't lose more. Gutt lost though, spirits... Carried her home in Orr on my shoulders in a last ditch effort to save her life, and now she just went up and died like that. Didn't even see what killed her, just heard the yell, and then SFC Cindertail was dead. Pity, never got to know her. We'll bury her on the morrow. Don't think it's sunk in to me yet, I'm still to high on adrenaline. Tired, too. Need to distract myself before it all sinks in too deep.  
  
Freyja write me. Seemed like she had trouble making up her mind, but she'll see me. I would be euphoric at the news, but I can't. Too tense. But she wants to see me, and 'has to show me a flower'. Maybe she's made a Sylvari friend or something? I don't know.  
I'll think about it tomorrow. When everything returns to normal speed.

# 11th of Scion

Pearl Islet, everything quieted down after the assault yesterday. Things settling for everyone. They're all battered, tired, exhausted, and morale is low. Keep telling people to keep their chins up, and bear it without complaining. There are bad days, and there are good days; we've come back from worse, haven't we? We'll weather the storm, and come out richer with the added experience. Gutt has perished, and entered into the realms beyond our reach, where they will linger in the company of all heroes that fell on the field of honour. To her legend they will drink seven and hundred and thirty kegs, retelling her deeds until death claims us all, and we will meet again in the Mists. Hail to the fallen, for they are never truly vanquished in the memories we keep of them!  
  
After the ceremony, camp sort of got quiet. Sana spoke of her prior experiences against the Karka, and the losses she suffered. Keeps looking at her hands when she does, I think something happened that changed her a little. Too delicate to ask, not now. Perhaps later, when it is all softer and less... fresh. Keeps claiming she's alright, but she isn't. Not really. Kath is neither, but then, the Knight's always a little special in that regard. They're both back to their working mindset which makes them less pleasant company that one would like. Didn't stay for chow and a chat either. Pity. I sort of miss that one time I just spent an evebing playing the boasting game with the Knight, or the kitchen club banter with Sana at the keep. All seems so quaint and distant, even if it's been only... what? A season? Time passes fast.  
  
Mithy trying to remain strong. Gutt's loss hit her hard, and she's young. Doesn't have any experience with dealing with loss. Neither do some of the recruits, you see it in their eyes. They fight it, tooth and claw, in order not to despair, but they're flagging. We could use some good news, or something that shores up morale in the Chapter. A round of promotions or a good victory would do wonders. On that note, seems Sana's being considered for a rank in Lance. Being held back because Boom Moon was selfish and kept her close, instead of moving her to a different unit like she should have done. Now she can't move Sana up without it looking like favouritism. Could've told her that was a bad idea from the start. Should've kept me in Lance, and sent San out into Blade. Eh well, not my place to complain. Got a feeling Fruity and I'll get our spurs one way or another. We're hard working and able. Officers should've seen that by now, and we're low on Firsts. Feels harsh, but Gutt passing away leaves a hole that needs to be filled. We have the boots to do that.  
  
Freyja. I'll need to respond to her. Spirits, I'm seeing my Freyja again, sometimes soon. That'll be interesting, I haven't seen her for so long. I hope she forgives me, and we can work out all the anger that has been left to fester over these years. She's my little girl, and I'll be damned to let this chance pass by to make amends.

# 12th of Scion

Pearl Islet. Not a lot happening. Took out a patrol to check out Steampipe. Decided to sweep out to the north camps to check if the entire northern flank was still intact. Seemed well enough. Came back, get told off by the knight for making a reactive command decision. Guess taking initiative and thinking on your feet as a patrol lead are no longer allowed. Sometimes... sometimes I wonder if I'm in the right place.  
  
That's about it, really. Had some chat with the wounded and the recruits. At least they appreciate what I'm trying to do. Don't think the officers do anymore. You'll see, next they'll shoot me for telling Devin to clean up when he spills his meal like a pillock. So aye, I'm stepping up once in a while, because no-one else is. Our First Crusaders are about as duty-oriented as a tin of canned pears. Meanwhile, we have a dozen and a half recruits running amok, needing a morale boost, being taught how to hold a bloody sword. They can't hold bloody *swords* straight, and we're sending them off to fight giant karka that tore a hole through people as formidable as Gutt. And they'll try to hang me for trying to teach them, too.  
  
Could just dive off a cliff. See golden Freyja again, and Verril the Steelrider. Repay Burunk and Unger for my life. Get to know Isabeth better. Sixty-four times sevenhundred and thirty kegs. I can't even count that high from my head. It would be a feat in itself, to drink to the memory or all those who have fallen besides me.  
  
[break in page]  
  
Sat on the cliffside, now. It's dark, had to announce myself to the night picket, or he'd have sounded the alarm. All quiet now, though. Some people snoring here and there, and rustling noise of the sea crashing around the islet here. Still angry at a lot of things, but it's all pointless. I can't even get drunk, out of rum. And the picket won't let me light a cigar at night, because visibility. Arse.  
  
I wonder if I'll be missed if I just get up an leave. The gate's right there. Could just heft my pack and go find Freyj and her 'flower'. The temptation is there, but I can't. Too much responsibilities, much as I wish I could cast them aside now. Just another day in the Vigil, I guess.

# 13th of Scion

We're still at Pearl Islet, wind south, south-west, weather clear. More storm weather passes over, but they oinly seem to make it more pressing and humid. At least my skin's starting to tan nicely, and I'm not longer just burning. I don't envy the Charr, having fur in this heat must be torture. They're probably too dignified to admit it, but I wouldn't be surprised if some of them had considered shaving it all off for a few days.  
  
Drakemoor gave a weapons demonstration about firearms, just went through basics. Lass did well enough, tad nervous about the entire thing, but it made sense. Nothing I didn't know yet, though, but that can't be helped. Went out on a foraging detachment afterwards briefly, gathered up some extra supplies.  
Had to be creative with food today, but I think it worked out alright. People actually dug into the oatmeal happily. Good to see they're enjoying their chow well enough.  
  
New recruit, old Charr warrior in plate. Kaela Skullcrusher. Old, experienced, and prejudiced. Was on the bad side of Ebonhawke during the sieges, and seems to only tolerate norn and other Charr. We'll see how that goes, I reckon. Calder pulled her up into Blade. Good, could use some more armour.  
  
Did some preparation work for tomorrow exercise with Blade. Guess we'll do some live-karka stomping. It'll be good for some of the boots to vent some energy and frustration out into the fuckers. Knight OK'd it, so better get cracking on thinking it all out.  
  
That's it, though, for now. Seem weirdly angry yesterday. Think everything just sort of reached a peak and made me crack a tiny bit. Don't let it happen again.

[continuation of entry]  
  
I sat wondering about a number of things. Orr, mostly. It is strange, that weird continent stirred up so many strong emotions. I read through the pages, surprised at how eloquent the words are. Rage, determination, sorrow... it's all so faded now. I feel hollow and empty in comparison to the memories.  
  
I used to think I was fighting for a better world for Freyja to grow up in. But then she *was* grown up, and now she's out there, unrestrained, free, happy, despite everything I thought I ~~could~~ should have change. And I didn't change anything. I just stood by and watched others die in droves, with or without me. And they will do so again. What is this illusion I hold of being able to make a difference? I am one man. I thought I could shield everyone from harm, if I just was everywhere at once, without seeing the folly in that.  
  
[break in page]  
  
Bah! The pointless musing of a wandering mind. Steel yourself, you fool, and gird your sword. Others have gone before you, and more will follow. Loss and pain is temporary, but honour will last you all eternity. Why am I wavering? There is no need. Strength and purpose remain here. They have changed, perhaps, but not in such fashion that there is any reason for doubt. Hah! That reminds me of something Verril once said about Ikitik, the 'War-Skritt'. "Blessed is the mind too small for doubt." Ikitik never faltered, not even in the end. In his memory, then.  
  
Hm. Last few pages in the book. Need a new one.

# 14th of Scion

Pearl Islet, weather steady, no wind change. Little cooler, I think there was a current shift. Bodes well for the future. Duties today went well, cracked two karka females with a perfect by-the-books drill. Calder seemed pleased, took a shell keepsake for the kill. Some of the recruits seemed to enjoy a good karka-stomp too. The new Charr seemed suitably impressed as well, which is good. Approval of a veteran is a good thing, after all  
  
But that's that. Celdric deserted. With his explosive charge. So, that's an issue. I hope he doesn't set it off somewhere, because that will shred anyone. Could blow a bloody hole in the Trader's Forum with little issue. Had to recall all explosives from the scouts and engineers, and recount the stocks in case anything else went missing.  
  
So yeah. Celdric ran off. Angry about that, seems like a loss. We went through the frustration of that already in Marriner. Now again. Don't think he'll come back either, this time. Spirits damn it all, he made so much progress over the last season. All burnt away. Lost a friend, in a way, too, even though he never acknowledged it. Hell, we cracked kegs over a bad day, that means something, right? We didn't even go after him through the portal. Was tempted to go after him regardless, but... that would have been pointless. Needle in a haystack.  
  
Also found Lyss, Mithra and Sana back-talking Zara and Pryde. Shameful. Of all people, those three *specifically* should know better than to mock that sort of thing. Actually got me angry for a bit, until I shrugged it off. People can be so petty about something that is none of their business. A good smacking across the jaw should set them straight, and tell them not to talk bad about people behind their back. That's cowardly, and I won't have it.  
Sana disappointed me in that, I must say.  
  
I'm too angry. The news about Celdric has me in a foul, foul mood, and I seem to be snapping at people. I saw them arrest Rotarn too. He admitted to desiring to kill Celdric of he returned. Spirits. Nothing you can do about that, I fear, even though it surprises me from Tricky. I'll talk to him on the morrow. Sleep, now, though.  
  
I'm too tired for anything else.

[The old, ragged field book is now scribbled almost full. The last few pages is just a list of sixty-four names.]

Spoiler: List[Show](javascript:;)

* Freyja Sorundsdottir, childbirth. May the snow cherries shade your sleep.
* Eirik Roar-Caster, mauled.
* Old Hakon Urrersson, old age.
* Alla Grayfiend, old age.
* Blast Speedcycle, explosion.
* Speed Blastcycle, explosion.
* Eamyllen, fell.
* Haemillen Ullasson, drowned.
* George Farfield, mauled.
* Loika Bylssdottir, slain in battle.
* Lilly the Young, sickness. Passed before her time.
* Murmer Snowbanished, mauled.
* Elby Lodge-Born, slain in battle.
* Constantine Aenimalf, old age.
* Xi Yee, sickness.
* Timur Snowbanished, fell.
* Fjolda Kurnsdottir, slain in battle atop a mound of foes.
* Grox Pawcrank, misfire.
* Anger Furystrike, slain in battle.
* Bjorn Piersson, fell.
* Echo Ashcrawler, missing, presumed dead.
* Vaiwhyll, burned.
* Siegfridr Huijsson, slain in battle.
* Mathild Cleartide, shot.
* Tuuma the Destroyer, infection.
* Ulx, presumed slain in battle. Only crater was left.
* Tusk Facegore, slain in battle.
* Carnanon, missing, presumed dead.
* Ulrika Siegfridrsdottir, sought death. Felled many before she fell.
* Runt Redmauler, left behind, presumed dead.
* Ogglun Grawl-Slayer, infection.
* Black Spinesnapper, slain in battle.
* Toghalla-Strides-Swamps, fell.
* Helmi Sivassdottir, loose gas mask.
* Brick Greatmauler, slain in battle with his warband. They could not find Runt.
* Six Foemauler, slain in battle.
* Almar Fyrsson, burned.
* Crush Jawmauler, slain in battle.
* Pound Mousemauler, slain in battle.
* Blast Shipcrank, sickness.
* Ripper Guttmauler, infection.
* Fae Cliff-Brave, slain in battle. Body not recovered.
* Ikitik War-Skritt, slain in battle. He was the greatest among giants.
* Verril the Steelrider, slain in battle, leading the charge.
* Burunk, slain in battle. Saved my life.
* Unger, slain in battle.
* Bjorn Hakonsson, slain in battle.
* Elfyr Kurnsdottir, missing, presumed dead.
* Fury Hardmauler, slain in battle.
* Turic, sickness.
* Lander Dragonslayer, infection,
* Crush Rangecrank, missing, presumed dead.
* Sigurd Sigrasson, slain in battle.
* Tiloomoo, slain in battle.
* Li Jo Han, drowned.
* Anna-Victoria Vineyard, sickness.
* Akxxi, drowned.
* Muller Reavers, drowned.
* Arbaea, drowned.
* Satsuki, missing, presumed dead.
* Xherili, missing, presumed dead.
* Vanholm Snowshield, deported.
* Isabeth Nixon, slain in battle.
* Gutt Cindertail, slain in battle.

[At the end of the field book is scribbled the following: *"26th Scion 1325 - 15th of Scion 1328, account of the wars as written by Tzahr Davidsson, able and serving in the Ashen Chapter of the Vigil as a Crusader at the time of this writing. If lost, please return to, in order of preference: Freyja Tzahrsdottir, Usha Snowbanished, Warmaster Alleshia Willhem, General Almorra Soulkeeper."* ]

[The preface is a block-printed text made in low-quality ink. It identifies the owner of the field book as "Tz. Davidss., Volun.", a member of the Ashen Chapter. It also specifies some medical data, and next of kin. The book, as of yet, is entirely blank.]

# 15th of Scion

Pearl Islet. We've been here a while now. Wind north, strong and refreshing. Weather still hot, but noticeably cooler that previous, which is good. Mithra going around to cool down the plate of the heavies, which is helping immensely. Nothing like the glowing hot steel suddenly becoming cool on the skin. I'm surprised no-one has had their brains cooked, I damn well feel like it sometimes. Always tired and exhausted at the end of the day, and I'm drinking gallons of water to keep cool. Sometimes still sneak off for a soak in the beach. Sand still an issue.  
  
Surprise gear-check today, seemed to go well enough. Meadows suggests I get my armour replaced. Don't think so, though I might bring it all in for extensive repairs at the keep next leave. The old set has too much sentimental value. Also need to replace the firing pin on the rifle. Can do that myself with the engineering tools and some tinkering. Shouldn't take more than a few.  
  
Tricky went haywire, for some reason, command had to put me on guard. He kept bouncing around, ended up having to point a loaded rifle to his chest. I would've pulled the trigger too, if he forced me to. Lucky I didn't have to, don't need that sort of blood on my hands. Not because he's overreacting. Stood there in withering company. Discussed Celdric a little, but the talk wasn't really in there. Command eventually brought him over, and he was put on trial for his stated attempt to kill Celdric. Went smooth enough. I spoke for the lad, briefly. Warmaster remanded him to Calder, who essentially allowed him to go free if he committed to his duties. Happy the outcome wasn't too harsh. Still care for the lad, in a way.  
  
New Sylvari Crusader, one Prydwén. Nice, cheery sort of Sylvari, though probably the oldest in the Chapter with her twenty-two years. Seemed solid enough. Offered around toffees. Weird, Marcus did that too, and apparently one Gillian before my time here did a similar thing. Seemed weirdly symbolic, hearing it like that.  
  
Got a new fieldbook. Scribbled my last notes in the other one, and then it was filled up. Had to go through all the dead ones. Grim task, made me feel hollow at the end. Long, long list. Stories to each of those names, too. Perhaps I will recount them at one point, but not today. Had to focus to get all their names down in order. It's been some years, and maybe people died very shortly after one another. I hope this will not continue. Would prefer not to add many more names on there.

# 16th of Scion

Position: Owain's Refuge, Southsun Cove. Weather: overcast, occasional rain. Ambient heat still present.  
Tactical assessment... problematic. For all intends and purposes we're stuck on this rock. Only bridge off leads directly into a plain infested with karka, and in direct sight of the main hive. There is no terrestrial supply line, unless you plan to cross the karka fields and pass through Steampipe. Nearest outpost, Camp Karka, is utterly and totally overrun. Seaside supply is extremely tenacious, as they'd have to be hauled up a cliffside that is difficult to navigate. Generally speaking, we're cut off. If anything hits us, we'll be dead. Spirits, if the fresh water keg ruptures, we'll have to start setting up manual filters or we'll have to ration it all out.  
At best, this place cannot sustain us for very long. At worst, it's a dead trap.  
  
Moving here was problematic enough. We got pulled through a route that was entirely unsuitable to pull a full Chapter through. Scouts fucked that up, as far as I'm concerned. We were stuck with a full Chapter, hopping between half-sinking rocks, backs to the cliff, relying only on Knight Calder to create portals to pull us through. Had anything happened to Calder, or had we come under attack at any point, we'd have been slaughtered. No-where to go, no room to maneuver, and at risk of slipping off and drowning if you stepped wrongly. I'd rather have cracked through the Karka fields, to be honest, at least Blade has proven we can take apart a karka in formation with little issue. Why the hell didn't we use the storm boat, for that matter? It's designed *specifically* for crossing troops over short hops like that. Band of idiots. At least no-one got hurt, though that might have been different.  
The old Charr, Kaela Skullcrusher, refused to use the portal. She was stuck out, and we sent a scout team back for her. Of course, by the time they got to her last position, the old war animal had trekked around, and simply showed up at camp. Had to go back, and tell the scouts they could pull back. What a clusterfuck. Sana didn't seem to happy either, I think she underestimated the amount of boots she was pulling through that passage.  
Bad call, far as I'm concerned.  
  
New camp seems nice enough, surprisingly sheltered, even though the karka are all around us. Sort of feels like we're under constant siege. You can see some of the scuttling out north, past the barricade. They don't seem interested in coming close though, which I find surprising. Easy to get nervous though, the scuttling is constant, and you can certainly hear it grow louder at night. You can see the hives and eggs if you look down the cliffs, and across the bridge, huge webbed structures loom. Starting to worry if there's enough solvent this side of Lion's Arch to melt it all down. At this rate, simply shelling the place into dust with the fleet might be a better idea. Spirits knows, that actually might put a dent in the Karka, we sure as hell seem to be struggling dealing with just a handful. Warmaster better have a plan up her sleeve.  
  
In other news, the norn huntress I spoke to yesterday was back in camp, one Kristen Wolfsbane. Rather short, blonde hair, red spirit markings. Suitably impressive woman, coming out here hunting karka on her own. Seems she's been trailing us a fair bit, interested in the Vigil. Weirdly, she said she was sent out over here by a certain Cleartide. Used to know a Cleartide. But Mathild Cleartide was shot for ~~cowardice and desertion in face of the enemy~~ being afraid, all the way back in '25. Must be someone else.  
I offered the huntress some of our food, and hospitality.  
  
On that, I made a small field oven out of an empty golem casing we had lying around, and some stones. Several people seemed immediately interested in the notion. Have flour, sugar and powdered milk, so all I need are some eggs. Leugers, Bjorn and Rotarn said they'd make an effort and poach some bird eggs when they went out ranging with the scouts. Could serve. Lyralii was willing to donate some of the chocolate bars from luxury rations, and I can use the tinned fruit we have. If it works out, could whip up something pretty tasty. Would be a nice morale boost, I wager. Army marches on its stomach, after all.  
  
Long discussion on faith and belief, too. Leugers and Lyralii, all different viewpoints. I found myself, oddly, in line with the Quartermaster's thinking about the Eternal Alchemy. A magical constant, in which entities live on various scales of power. When they perish, their spirit passes on back into the whole, and is reborn. Like how a body turn to dust on the earth, and into a tree years later. I don't think it's about belief either, more an acceptance that it exists as a process. It makes sense. The dragons devour all magic in Tyria, so it can be reborn. In a sense, they are not truly evil in this, if not for the fact that we are fated to perish if they are allowed to continue. It leaves us little choice.  
  
I'm sort of feeling alone, these days. I see friends everyday, but they're all... at arm's length. Not had a chance to talk to someone about anything really meaningful for a while, or unburden my mind a little. I miss Sima and our occasional regulation-breaking evening drinks. Hope he's doing alright. Can't speak to Kath or Sana. They're too... I don't know, wound up. Sana's having rough days. Can see it; doesn't eat enough, doesn't sleep. Wish I could comfort her a little, but I can't, really. Sooner we're out of here, the better.  
  
Beautiful sunset today. Sylvari, Prydwén, told me I'm a romantic. Sort of liked that, in a sense.

# 17th of Scion

Owain's Refuge, weather clear, though grayish clouds around the horizon. Seems to be skirting over occasionally, bringing a cooling breeze with them, a few minutes at a time. At least we're not staying around for long, from what I can tell. Warmaster said that we're moving over back to Lion's Arch sometimes in the next few days. Probably the day after tomorrow, even. Final push already. I'll write Freyja on the morrow to tell her she can come to Lion's Arch and visit me. It will be good to be able to see her. Ruthford said something today, about visiting Hoelbrak with Freyja and one Grace, once. Apprently, this Grace is very fond of my daughter, and she of her. I wonder if this is the flower she mentioned.  
  
Today's duties were hectic. We hit Camp Karka with the intent to scuttle it, before blowing the place clean. Ran into several really big Karka, and had to co-ordinate with Forgewood and her scouts to plant all the charges we brought. Two-stage detonation. Used incendiaries to flood the area with great flaming balls of fire that cooked off the secondary high-explosive ones. Went up with a good whump, first major demolitions mission we've pulled through with me as acting head. Forgot to bring my cigar, though. Ironside would have been disappointed.  
  
Got back in camp. Sana's not well. Not at all. Heard her yelling at Rotarn. Looked angry. Had to resist with every fiber in my being from going over and just holding her a little. Wanted to tell her everything is alright. Stopped myself. Not my place, never was. Much as I wanted. Besides, Sana looked like she could use some breathing room. Went out of my way to get her her food away from the others. So she could be alone with her thoughts. Bah. Should have done something. Been a while since I've felt so powerless.  
Kath seemed to spend some time talking to her, though. Hope she at least sleeps a little.  
  
Warmaster put me on a late-evening mission. Took a team out to check up on some Vigil megalasers on the attack approach of the main hive. Kraxxi did most of the work, though. Turns out one of them might still be functional. If not for the amount of female karka stomping about, we would've been able to get a closer look. Saw the hive itself up in the distance. It's going to be a long, long day tomorrow...  
  
Norn huntress, Kristen Wolfsbane, and I spent some time talking around the fire. Seems she's somewhat impressed by the tales I have to tell. Getting to the point where I don't have to boast anymore, but can just tell plain truths. Praised mine a as a true legend worth telling. Not sure how I felt about that. Liked it well enough, I guess. Especially from the lips of a nice looking norn lass, can't say that was a bad ending to an evening. Got her interested in the Vigil, certainly. Tried to repay us for the hospitality of the fire and the meal in karka shells. Couldn't accept it. Good company is its own reward, after all.

# 18th of Scion

Sana's hurt. Badly. Got mauled by the karka queen we engaged out in the Hive. Marcus says she'll likely keep her arm, but if he doesn't guide the recovery well, it might be lame. That would cripple Sana as a warrior. She'd never be able to draw a bow again.  
Torched the entire place. For her.  
  
Got really angry. Took risks. Couldn't... couldn't stand the idea of them carrying her out without knowing if she was going to be alright. Rushed the explosives. Knew I was doing it too... dangerous. I armed all the bottom ones on my own. Four charges in fifteen seconds. Ran the rest of the fuse, like I've never ran before. Could feel the shockwave in my back as I sprinted out. Don't know why I did that. Just wanted to do it myself. Make it personal.  
  
Got back in camp. Let everything get to my head. Should've walked it off, let the rage bleed off. Couldn't, kept staring into medical. Raven better watch over one of his most loyal servants, or I swear, before all the spirits, I'm laying siege to the Mists themselves, and I'll devour the shoddy bird whole for not [pencil point breaks, break in page].  
Punched Kaela Skullcrusher. Said that's how Charr used to deal with things like this. Old bat took it like a brawling champion. Knocked a few teeth out. Calder saw it all. Bad.  
Didn't get better. Lyralii was handing out drinks. I took the entire crate, too angry to think. Threw it at Ruthford. Hard. Think I injured the lad. He was only trying to help. Spirits...  
I even threw away the cake. After all the effort everyone put into it. It seemed so perverse to have cake while ~~my San~~ a friend lay badly injured mere meters away.  
Kath's been taking it like the officer she is. Putting everyone to shame. She's strong. Stronger than I am.  
  
Wynn's sister was in camp today. Forced Wynn and I to set things straight. She smiled. It's... good. Get that behind us. Not sure if I could deal with it all.  
  
Small light. Kristen Wolfbane, huntress. We shared a smoke, one of the ration cigars. They're not half-bad. Company distracted me for a bit. Hunts karka on her own. Strong. She was very comforting, for some reason. Someone of my own kin to talk to, freely. About moots, ale, wagers, boasts. Told me to send her a letter. Could crack a keg together, someday. Wouldn't mind.  
  
Exhausted. Day took all the punch out of me. Sentences getting shorter. Can feel my mind grinding to a halt. Sana will be alright. Has to be.  
  
Sleep.

# 19th of Scion

[The page is stained in numerous places by blotches of liquid, likely ale, puke and spatters of blood and dirt. The scripts is irregular, and some of it is smudged. It becomes progressively worse, and the last lines are only barely discernible scrawls.]  
  
Failure. Duty and honour. Failed it all. I failed all of them, all sixty-four. I've failed Kath. I've failed the warmaster. I've failed Sana. I've failed Freyja. Should never have stopped being a baker. Fool. Stupid, bloody, fool.  
All you've done... for nothing. No result. None. Just abject failure and dishonour in front of your peers.  
To disappoint everyone. All those recruits that looked up to my for an example. Let down, because of... fuck it all. I swore to myself I didn't love her. I don't. I can't. Then why did it all make me so angry?  
  
[break]  
  
Demotion. Warmaster didn't even allow me to take the discharge. Just want to drink. Forget myself. Forget everything. Damn them all. Damn them all to hell, after everything I tried to do... To fall short. Need more whiskey. A lot more whiskey, I can still hear myself think. I hate it. I hate it all. Wish it would go away. Stand in line, stop trying to... stop trying to be a soldier. Stop trying to be anything you're not. You've proven you can't do it. Sink your legend. Daft fantasies that get youths killed.  
  
[break]  
  
What have I done? I've marched off to war for three years. Three years! I feel sick. I didn't even have the decency to die properly, like Verril. Should end it myself. Rifle cartridge through the bottom of the jaw. Watch the lead expand and snuff out all this... futility in one thunderclap. I could see my golden Freyja again.  
Spirits, I even failed her. She died in my arms. Couldn't save her. I barely even remember what she looks like anymore. Can't recall the sound of her voice.  
  
[break]  
  
I'm a coward. I'm a coward, coward, coward, coward, coward, coward, coward.  
  
[break]  
  
Need more whiskey. Still writing. Don't know why. Can't remember. Keep thinking about more whiskey. Wish there was something here I could kill. Feel like I need to. Angry. Don't remember much why. Can barely read.  
Something about the Vigil. Hard to focus. More whiskey. Almost out of coin. More whiskey.  
  
[break]  
  
Where am I who am I what am I doing here  
Cant remember all the faces  
Theyre trying to tell me to stop saying I am going mad  
Help me spirits am lost  
Sana not here pity  
Whiskey is here  
  
[break]  
  
Help help me help me me  
Tried take book fought book mine  
Hurt  
Please help me am fraid  
Dont remember who am  
Vigil  
  
[break]  
Throw out  
Ditch  
Sleep  
Sana okay  
Sleep

[Continuation of entry]  
  
Woke up. Feel like shit. Emptied my stomach several times. Just bile. Throat's sore. Tired. No-one passes by here. Just hear the footsteps overhead. Head throbs like an anvil. Face hurts. Can't remember what happened. Split my lip. Ribs are sore. Not sure if that's the drink or something worse. Don't want to move.  
  
Wrote down some things yesterday. Reading hurts my head. Spirits, what am I doing? Only letting myself splinter more. Where is the warrior that received hammerblows that could split an anvil? I have weathered worse. Need to get it together. Not wallow in failure. It is not a cloak that protects me from blame.  
I cracked. Pressure just... split me apart. I asked for this. I know it was going to happen. Owe up to your mistakes. Do better. Dents in a shield.  
Guess they used a piercing weapon this time...  
  
Freyja. Need to send a letter to Freyja. She'll come looking for me, soon. Wish everything was better. I want to see her again. Spirits, my girl. My little girl. She can't see me like this. Not... not broken. I owe her more than that. I'll send her a letter. Meet her tomorrow. Or the day after. Not now.  
  
Hm. Flower still in my vambrace. Curious. That's Elizabeth's. I... I'd forgotten about it. Guess even the karka didn't get to shake it loose. Praise her kind heart.  
  
Ugh. Hurts to move. Think I might have fallen from somewhere. Not just hangover soreness. Do remember being afraid. Think I might have crashed off the slope. Looks like someone dragged me around here. Don't remember that. Weird, no-one comes here. Not since they tore it all down.  
Spirits, it hurts just to sit. Where's a medic when you nee-  
Shit. Sana and Xeyia. Hope they're alright.  
  
Wonder how Kath's doing. Must be hard. Spirits damn it, and I've run off because of my shodding anger and pride. Both of them. After Gutt... No. This will not do.  
Stop failing people. Now.

# 20th of Scion

Fort Marriner, clear Krytan skies and a soft sun. Better weather than Southsun, in a way. Staring to get quite a suntan, if only on my face. The rest is pale, still. We're heading out into the swamps down south soon, I hear. That's going to be... different.  
  
Past few days have settled. Woke up, sore. Couldn't move much. Then Freyja showed up. Didn't want her to find me, but she did. With some small human girl in tow. Freyj got real angry at first, until the human asked her to calm down. And she did. Never seen anyone calm Freyja down like that. Normally she'd just try to punch your face in. Turns out the human is her mate. I was a little surprised, but accepted it. Sana and Kath make it work, why not Freyja and her Blossom. Hah. Blossom. I hope she understands what weight snow cherry blossoms carry for Freyj and I.  
  
Freyj and I made amends. She's tired of being angry. I think she realised she no longer needed her father. Not anymore. But she forgave me for what I did. We'll speak again tomorrow. She looked beautiful. Everything I expected, and more. Tall, strong and terrifying to behold.  
  
Decided to head off back to Marriner. Courier dropped by, two letters. One from Mithy and one from Ruthford. Knew I was doing the right thing, then. Crusader, recruit, it makes no difference. I have the respect of the soldiers. Ranks means little next to this. I'll do better, prove that I'm worthy. I can do it, well enough.  
  
Sana woke up. That's good. Already cracking jokes. Seemed buzzed on painkillers though. Guess that's needed, with that wound. Medics better treat her right, or I'll devour them. At least she was awake. Kath was watching over her. Good. Never left her side, I think. Worthy of her.  
Meadows lost her memory. Not sure what's going on. Pity, she seemed like a strong enough warrior, even if she seemed perpetually insane. Hope she recovers. Losing one's mind is a special kind of suffering.  
  
Talked a while with a number of people. Most just seemed happy I was back. Mithra missed me. Funny that she wrote that I seemed like a father to her. In some way, Mithra always reminded me of Freyj when she was younger, and more wide-eyed. Regardless. Special day, all in all. Feels good to be welcomed like that.  
  
Wrote some letters. Might spend some time in Hoelbrak. Maybe catch up with Kristen, or Hrist. Old and new friends. We'll see.

# 21st of Scion

Day of leave, going to keep it short.  
  
Had a lovely day with Freyj and her friend. Usha was there too. Combative and forwards, as ever. She disapproves a little, I feel, but doesn't show it. Not yet. Guess she doesn't want her disdain for humans to shine through and spoil the happy reunion. We've aged well like that, Usha and I, get some parental wisdom. Spirits, I feel old saying that. And we're not, not even close. If all goes well, barely a third into my lifespan, and already I'm becoming an old man.  
Bah.  
  
Everything was well. Usha's travelling a lot, seems business is booming. Found her in her office, looking over stacks and stacks of supply orders with a snarl. Didn't stop her from bounding up straight over the table and tackling me back out the doorway. Greetings by way of full frontal headbutt. If my eye wasn't still swollen, I would have laughed at that.  
  
Freyja has changed. Not a lot, but still. Confidence, and pure, unwavering directness. She's still stubborn, of course, but that's not surprising. This Grace that follows her along is, surprisingly, the opposite. Shy and prone to being embarrassed, especially between the two norn and the North-Charr. Apparently it is a very important hazing ritual for a potential mate to meet the parents of their chosen companion. I suppose *'Auntie Usha'* qualifies and well enough. I wonder if the this Grace understands that Freyja would probably physically enforce her right to choose her mate if Usha or myself tried to meddle. Freyj is fiercely defensive about her, and she seemed pre-emptively defiant. Told them about how it is in the Vigil. Seems they didn't expect me to be so understanding. Good. This Grace seems kind enough. She can be part of the family. Pity about the grandchildren though.  
  
Freyj apparently swore an oath of vengeance on some human raiders that once hurt the little one. I accept her oath as mine, and will swear wrath upon those that touched my daughter's love. I shall not knowingly cross their paths and allow them to live.  
  
We all eventually headed off as friends. Freyj and Grace rejoin their expedition, and Usha returned to her work, making ready to head to the Black Citadel for business. I made my way back to Marriner, check up on Raven and Blizzard sitting in their tent. Walked by Meadows on the way. She was out of it, forgot we were having a talk mid-sentence. I didn't know she wasn't allowed outside of the Fort, so I didn't stop her. We found her later anyway, so no harm done. Gave me a scare, though.  
  
Sana is recovering, very slowly. At least she's cracking jokes, and Kath's been at her side incessantly, so it seems. This makes me happy. I wish I could do more for them. Sana ordered me to have some fun, though, instead of lingering about camp. Decided to wander out back north again, might as well enjoy the homelands a little. Bumped into Ruthford and Rotarn on the way. We went for a quiet drink in Hoelbrak, peaceful chat. Ran into Bjorn, as well as Wolfsbane. Good company, that's for certain. Also another of the Priory expedition.  
Eventually set out to the hot springs, relaxing enough. Wolfsbane made the sight worth it, at least, though we didn't get to some hunting, like I hoped we would. Maybe next time.  
Oh, as I mentioned earlier, we ran into Meadows on the way there. Made sure she was returned to Marriner safely.  
  
Not sure what I'm going on the morrow, though. Might just go for a wander.

# 22nd of Scion

Last full day of leave, it was interesting. Decided to go to the Reach early, get a drink, maybe bump into some folk. Wolfsbane came with me out from over Hoelbrak, sold her karka shells off to some noble lord that trades in exotic wares. Probably dodges some Consortium taxes.  
Bumped into Meadows there again, surprisingly. Had a good enough chat between us three. That is, until some fireworks went off, and set alight the building to the side of the tavern. Seraph mustered the public into helping with extinguishing it. Being Vigil, Meadows and I naturally volunteered wholeheartedly. We got the fire down to a more manageable size, before the Seraph managed to extinguish it completely.  
  
After our good deed for the day, we decided to head out into Queensdale towards the Freeholds. There is a monastery out there that apparently made some excellent ale. When we go there, ran afoul of some centaurs. We cleared them off well enough, and the monks repaid us with two kegs. Good, brown beer. Encountered a cynical mercenary that was content to drink with us. Seemed to know a thing or two about the surroundings. We had a nice enough chat before Meadows, Wolfsbane and I ventured into the swamp, seeking out some of the underworld daemons that apparently roam it. Found some, big malicious spirits, but we managed to slay them well enough. Seems like they were no match for two norn and ~~a human~~ whatever Meadows is supposed to be.  
  
Split up after, Wolfsbane went out looking for more hunting grounds. Can't say I mind the sight of her walking away, though I'll miss her company. Seems like I've made a friend, at least.  
Meadows and I headed back to Marriner, went through Gendarren. Meadows felt like sport, so we tracked down a large risen abomination along the road, wandering in a bog. Ancient specimen, the size of a mansion. Slow, though. Meadows and I took it apart. Exhilarating! Meadows knows how to fight and kill. Fought like a warrior worthy of my own kin. Pity we weren't able to take a trophy. Wouldn't have minded doing this sort of hunt with Wulfsbane either, come to think of it.  
  
Eventually reached Marriner, and bumped into some of ther others in the Crow's Nest, drinking ale. Fun enough. Had a talk with Ruthford about some sort of date they were planning with Leugers. Don't see why not. Could be interesting. Then Devin came along, and tried to 'show how it's done' on Wynn. She disagreed with the notion, and almost exploded. Marcus had to step in eventually. Was able to stop him from dressing her down in public, at least.  
Devin hitting on some Lionguard lass. On a date. Will have to talk to Aldoven about that, I don't readily appreciate that sort of thing too much. But then, Devin's a free man. Bah.  
  
Return to the keep, finally had a good long chat with Sima. Unburdened my mind. Was needed to just say it all. Talk about what happened, Sana, how I feel about it all. He understands. Also talked about Pryde and Zara. Seems Sima's with me on the 'if it works, it work' camp. Refreshing. Hope he speaks to Alleshia about it, get her mind accustomed to the idea. If anyone has her ear, it's Sima alright.  
Also talked about my demotion. He sounded bitter in my stead. Said that apparently what I did was equal to stabbing a fellow soldier in the eyes of the officers. Bad blood about the entire Celdric thing, I wager. And when he puts it like that, it does sort of feel skewed. ~~That reminds me, I need to~~  
  
Lionguard ran an alert in camp today, apparently had a hostage situation. They refused Vigil help, much to my annoyance, though we gave them a flare gun to signal us if things went south. They returned some time after, apparently having rescued the hostage, but letting the scum escape. Pity. I wish they'd have accepted our aid, we could've sectioned off the approaches and trapped them in like rats with nowhere to go once the Lions were done. Wouldn't have minded cleaning them up the hard way either. But it's always about jurisdiction in this stupid city. You'd think that for pirates, they wouldn't give a toss as long as there were swords keeping the house clean. But no. They have to be difficult about it. Their problem, I guess.  
  
Had another chat with Athelstan and Prydwén. Athelstan seems to be in good spirits, far as I can tell, getting closer to Cheery. They seem to be developing a thing, slowly and steadily. He wants me to continue dawn drills, formally under his authority, if nothing else. Says I do good work, and should keep doing it, recruit or not. Appreciated that a lot. Had a more private chat with Prydwén after Athel went to rest. Seems she's genuinely interested in our smooth talker. Would be interesting to see. Also asked her if I could join in on the emotion-control meditation thing she does with Mithra. Spirits alive, I've realised I need help with those in the past few days. It'll do me good, control my worries and anger.  
  
Anyway, new day calls, and we'll be back to duties soon enough. Ever onwards.

# 23rd of Scion

Easy day, return to service. Been assigned to Lyralii as a trainee. Alright, I guess? Not sure what we can work on, but she seems willing to give me some help with archery. Admittedly one of the weapon classes I'm only roughly proficient at. I'll also be doing meditation training with Mithy and Cheery, learn to control my emotions. Stop outbursts from happening. We'll see tomorrow, first round of training exercises.  
  
Didn't happen all that much. Had a long chat with Sana while Kath was out running her duties. First time I've seen her alone for a while. Good to chat, make jokes and jabs, as usual. She's going to stay behind for this tour, though. When we get back, hopefully she'll be a scar richer, and that's it. Don't like seeing her hurt, though I can be happy she's alive and well, after all that. Sometimes wonder if I'm still too close to her. Probably am, way it all shook me.  
  
Kraxxi shouted at me for getting Ruthford hurt. Funny, yelled at the top of her lungs, several times. I managed to set her to work to get her off my back, but she's right. I knew that already though, owing up to my mistakes. Learn from them, and move on. Only thing I can do, really.  
  
Spent the rest of the evening playing truth or dare with some of the troops. Some things best not mentioned, we weren't even drunk. Things got a little out of hand. Ended up writing love letters to Devin, Cheery signing very explicit and rowdy songs, me stripping for Xeyia, and more. Some of the Lions joined in, they were nice enough company, though they must have found us odd.  
Even the Warmaster joined in, though I get a feeling she was a little uncomfortable with how... uh... special it all got. No matter, fun enough evening. Something to keep the mind occupied, and fill the barracks with laughter, at least. Athel and Cheery ended up smooching behind the corner. Guess they deserve some comfort, hm?  
  
On a more personal note, seems people think that Wolfsbane and I were a thing. Sana seemed pretty certain she wanted something, and so did Athelstan. It had occurred to me, of course, but still. Didn't realise it was that obvious. Wouldn't mind, truth be told, she's a strong hunter and a beautiful woman. Perhaps she'll go hunting out south in the swamps while we're on deployment, hm? We'll see. Sort of weary of getting my hopes up after the entire debacle last time.

# 24th of Scion

Spirits, what a weird day. Still at Fort Marriner, going through some training exercises. Blade squared off in a capture the flag scenario, had lead of the defending team. We gave them a good fight, but lost in the end. I was locked in a melee with Skullcrusher almost the entire time, we were brawling at the end, just pure close order punching. Nearly got her to yield, but the old bat managed to hold out just long enough. Can respect the old lady for that, though as a boulder.  
Still think Mithra should have used a heavier spell to control the other team's movement, but she's so afraid of using the heavier ones in fear that she'll hurt someone.  
I'll tell you what hurts, Lorma kneeing you in the groin, and punching your face in. With a drill like this, people need to remember its about attaining the objective. The mission is what matters. All the rest is secondary. It's why I don't pull punches.  
  
New pair of boots, called Duwatt. Old, old Asura that used to run in the Peacekeepers. Gathered that he's here because he lost a Progeny somewhere along the line. Seemed reluctant to talk about it, which I can understand. Wondered what happened, though. He's fairly pleasant, as far as Asura go, old enough to know babbling about doesn't get him too far. Wears powered armour from what I can. Links to his helmet. Probably packs a much larger wallop than you can tell from the size alone.  
  
Evening was hectic. I spent some sitting out on the pier out, when I spotted that criminal the Lionguard were looking for across the bay in a rowboat. Alerted the Lions, took off in full force. Got into a major scrap, seemed the scum were well prepared. They set of a big bomb which probably spooked the entire city, and sent half the Commodore's into a panic. Ended up giving chase to one, but got blindsided by a second. Pointed guns at me. Thought I was going to die there, two shots through the chest. They didn't, though. Managed to create a diversion, and fire off a flare. Expected to be shot then. Hoped maybe the cuirass would take some of the impact, and buy me enough time to be rescued by the might of the Vigil. They knocked me out instead. Head still hurts. But from what I hear, Kath came down like the fury of the North with a squadron in tow, and pulled me out. Owe her a life debt now. I'll have to talk to her about that.  
Woke up in medical to Marcus leering over me. Not the best hangover I've had. Seemed all my bits are there though, except for a sore skull. Have a bruised eye, swollen jaw and a welt on my temple now. Helmet took most of the impact, but still. Smiling hurts.  
  
I'm surprised how easy I accepted the fact that I might have died then. Guess I've been in tighter spots, but still. I was defiant. Wouldn't budge. One of them, masked Charr, tried shooting me with my own rifle. If I hadn't discharged the round loaded prior, it would have perforated me. Would've taken a fair amount of tinkering from the medics for me to come back from that. Feel sort of angry I allowed myself to be overpowered at all.  
Regardless. Seemed the Lionguard captured some of the scum. Hope they shoot the lot. I'll volunteer for the firing squad. Probably eat the Charr's fingers after.  
  
Had a brief chat with Prydwén again, told me some things I didn't know about how the Sylvari experience things like love and loss. Runs deeper than with other, it seems. According to her, they will love once, and they will love deeply. But if that gets shattered, so will they. Seems cruel. Why be afraid of love? Imagine how it would have been with me... after losing my golden Freyja, to be split apart with grief for the rest of my life? Perhaps it is more like how I love my little Freyja, unconditionally. I sometimes wonder if the Sylvari understand how much you can love your own child. I guess not. I pity them for that, in a way.  
  
Sana's been shipped off to the Vigil Keep. She'll be fine. I'll have to bring her back a trophy from when we kill the ugly hiding out in the swamps.

((The writing on this page is small and squared off, comprised of dark, charcoal letters))  
  
~~Thank you. For everything. -65 "Tricky", Fell~~  
  
65, Akern, I failed you and so many others.  
  
Tzahr. It is entirely possible you will never notice this message, but I will write here anyway because I feel I must. I am not good with spoken words, nor people, nor sharing.  
  
I am good at hiding, and running. I always have been, and likely always will be.  
  
I have tried to apologise, and failed. In a way I feel that makes this passage even more pointless.  
  
So I will write what truth I think I know, and never bother you unasked again.  
  
I loved Celdric, once. I wanted nothing more than to help him, I saw it as my Wyld hunt. A noble pursuit, that filled my very being with purpose. But I was wrong, I am no Valiant, the hunt did not choose me and Celdric could not be fixed.  
  
And my heart... if I truly even have as such, broke.  
  
But I do not share. And when he left I was confused, I wanted to follow him, I did not want to be followed. At the same time I hated him and wanted to cut him from my life forever. So when an asura on the rooftops offered me a way out I accepted it willingly, and I walked out of Vigil life and into the shadows of the order.  
  
My brother was lost to nightmare. I regret not killing him, only failing to be there to save him in the first place, he was always better than I.  
  
As for the events in Frostgorge. I warned the warmaster. I tried to deal with him myself. He would not leave me alone, so I baited him. You know the rest.  
  
I hope you liked the brooches, or disposed of them if they offended you.  
  
Stay Vigil and stars guide.  
  
*Rotarn.*  
  
You gave me a my favourite name and taught me much of the world. In me your legend will never be forgotten.

[Next page, spotted with drops, and an occasional smear of ink.]

# 25th of Scion

Rotarn is dead.  
  
Jumped off of Phoenix Roost. After I told him about Celdric. Previous page is-  
Last words, I guess. Want to go over and tear down the blasted lighthouse. Lad had enough to live for. Everything to live for. He's gone now. Athelstan fished his body out of the water. I carried him.  
Seven hundred and thirty kegs, Tricky. Hail to the Fallen.  
  
I don't know what else to say.  
  
Guess I'll just go through the motions.  
  
Drills with Blade. Lorma had us run some hostage rescue wargame, but I apparently misunderstood some instructions, or something or other. Apparently, I wasn't allowed to disengage when our position came under assault, only when I was personally engaged... which is sort of too late for me to disengage from a foe, so that makes no sense to me. Regardless, might have misunderstood. We won the game easily though, as the hostage-takers, since the rescue team seemed about as organised as a pile of loose rocks. Tricky had to- [abrupt end to paragraph.]  
  
[Break in page]  
  
New Chapter in the Fort, apparently a section of Winter Chapter. They're woefully under strength, though, commanding officers is a Knight. Called themselves the Luckless Lions, a name earned during Scarlet's attack. Had a friendly talk with the Knight, an Asura with a bright-red hairdo. They seemed competent enough, pity I didn't run into some of their boots. Always worth making some friends.  
  
Saw the Lions do something weird with a pair of owls. Watched them a bit, didn't have anything else to do. Strangely calming, seeing the two animals hoot back and forth. Talked to the Chief Inspector of the Lions, told her about what happened to Tricky. So they're aware we'll be doing funeral rites soon, and they don't need to get spooked when we light a pyre. Such a waste.  
  
Spent almost an hour digging through my effects, reciting Cheery's calming mantras. Kept my mind on things that calmed me down. Thought about Freyj, when she was younger. When she'd bumble about as a toddler in the fresh snow, throwing clumps of it after rabbits and hunters. Usha would come along and play peek-a-boo with her while I was kneading dough for dark, rough-grain bread. Or I remember that one time Hirst, only just ceased being a girl herself, stopped by for a pastie, but ended up making braids in Freyj's hair the entire day. They got so complex in the end, we had to cut it all off. Oh, Freyj cried about her beautiful brown hair, but only for a while. Used it to stuff a dolyak doll I'd made out of an empty sack of flour. Ugliest thing, but she fell in love with that little stuffed mongrel toy the moment she saw it. She laughed, and called it 'Uppie'.  
  
  
  
  
I'd like another child, one day.

# 26th of Scion

Spirits. Fort Marriner. Day's been blurry.  
  
Spoke to the Warmaster. Had to tell her about Celdric. Couldn't have kept that hidden, and it at least helped us understand what was going on. Warmaster was angry I didn't bring the letters forwards as soon as I got them. Guess she's still looking at it as the soldier that stabbed Sima, and deserted. She must realize nothing would have changed. I didn't know where he was, or how to find him. At best, they'd have tried to coerce me into finding out where he was, and they'd have failed.  
They should understand when to leave well enough alone. They could arrest Celdric if they managed to find him, a soldier they didn't want anyway. And then what? Detain him when they'd rather not have him around? Punish him? On the sheer worth of the principle? There is nothing left to do. Celdric is already a broken man.  
  
And he's coming here. I... have no choice but to tell the officers. It is my duty now. I ask of the Spirits to grant them wisdom, that they allow Celdric to pay his respects to Rotarn, and simply leave. There is nothing else he would come for. Let them turn a blind eye to those that wish to honour the dead.  
  
Went around the Phoenix Roost with the Warmaster. Through the area. She seemed to be thinking it was some sort of accident, or a murder. But... everything points towards a suicide. The note in my field book, made in the same charcoal he used to make shadow traps, seems to indicate he knew was going to die. You don't predict your own accident. Never seen Tricky fall before. No chance he slipped.  
I think I believe I know what happened, though. Celdric and Rotarn were always close, but... it never made sense. The violent reaction Rotarn had when Celdric first left, the confusion, the aimlessness. Rotarn may have loved Celdric, though the word does not adequately describe what I intend to convey. There was a connections between the two. With one gone, the other lashed out, wildly, irrationally. Rotarn might not even have realized himself. If what Prydwén says is true about the way Sylvari experienced love, it would have been maddening.  
It is the only explanation I can think of.  
Did Celdric realize?  
  
What a blur.  
  
Need to sleep.

# 27th of Scion

Not a lot to say today, spent most of my time on guard duty near the north gate, good away from everything and everyone else. Fellow guard wasn't much of a speaker, unfortunately, just stood there chewing tobacco. Kept my thoughts to myself, just focus on the duty. See the troops pass through, check anyone not in uniform, the lot.  
  
Plenty of time to think, at least, mind went wandering. Not dark places, though, just memories and errant thoughts. Meditation lessons from Prydwén have been helping a lot, keeping it all under control. It's been rough days since Southsun. Fear for Sana, the humiliation of a demotion, anger, reconciliation with Freyja, a two pistols at my chest and a rifle to my temple... And now Rotarn dead of his own hand. I always wish I'd have known the fallen better, but not this time. Tricky I wish I knew less, so it would be easier to say that I could never fathom why. Instead I am left wondering what passed through his mind moments beford he made that leap.  
  
I hope he has many friends in the Mists who will aid his passage. Suicides pass rarely trough unscathed, from what I know. A lost soul kept wandering in the Underworld, unable to pass on into bliss and reunion... It would be too cruel a fate. I aks of you, spirits of fallen warriors, whom I have always honoured, take Tricky in among you so he might find peace from whatever drove him to his fate.  
Har'varanar, and drink seven and hundred and thirty kegs of ale to the recount of his tale.  
  
I wish I could become cold like stone. A terrible, unforgiveable desire, but it is so. Like the Dwarves of old, to become like sturdy granite, and remain unwavering. It would make me a better soldier than I am now. I would still be a Crusader, and my mind would not be so troubled, thoug it would destroy who I am and what I believe in. Is that worth it? To lose the love I hold for Freyja, so I can fight for her future, and her children's future better. I am not sure if it would be too much. When looked at like this, I cannot help but feel the deepest respect and gratitude for the Dwarves. They were always fellow mountain kin, and tales of their craftsmanship and magic are known to the Skaalds... Yet to perish as a race in order to face the Dragons head-on, for the future of all others... It is noble beyond words. Perhaps theirs is an example to follow.  
  
More thoughts about Freyja. Not the little one, but her with the head of gold-spun thread. I have been trying hard to remember her, but it is difficult. In the scope of my life now, we only knew eachother very briefly. She perished younger than our daughter is today. A sad thought. Our little one told me that she visited the mount on which she was buried near everyday when Usha and I were out at war in the South. The snow cherries that grew there are strong and tall now, no longer the sprouts they were when I first planted them. She sleeps where she died, one with the earth and sky both, gazing forever upwards into the stars.

# 28th of Scion

Still at Fort Marriner, though we'll be moving out on the 30th. Soon, anyway. From what I know of the bogs, I'll miss the relative dryness of the Lion's Arch beaches. Can't be helped, I suppose.  
Have some ideas for training tomorrow morning, better make sure everyone is prepared for the wetlands. At least I've gotten the second storm boat ready and paid for, and I'm hoping the other Engineers come back to me with project reports soon enough. Still have field test plans for tomorrow, make sure all the experimental equipment is at least approved for field use.  
  
Duties today took us out to Gendarren fields, Ascalon Settlement and surrounding area. Calder had us sweep the area for foes in three groups. Mithy got a small field command; good to see they haven't forgotten she's a Crusader too. Rest was routine, had a close run in with a centaur raiding party, but the Knight veiled us right quick before anything happened. Nebo Terrace still besieged, and the warlands north towards Harathi looked rough. Most everyone wanted to bring down the Chapter and just clean out the pests for a change. Bottle them up through that chokepoint. Nice centaur steak in it as well.  
  
Thistle was here. Disguised. Saw him talk to Kath. I talked to him too, but briefly. Not much to say. Told him what I think about Tricky. That's all, really.  
Also had a chat with the Asura, Duwatt. Told him about Verril. He seemed very impressed by the tales I told of the Asura Tactician. Didn't know he'd go for that sort of warrior ideal, seems a tad old to be sentimental about such a romantic notion of heroics. That, or he was simply respectful of the fallen. Also told him he can stash the power crystals for his armour with the Engineering Supplies. Means they get moved by the Vigil, rather than have the elder walk around with a crate of volatile power cores.  
  
Saw Kath and Ruthford spar. Interesting to say the least, Kathleen can wield a sword decent enough. Fights physically, more than I expected. Ruthford needs confidence to press home his attacks, and could use some lessons on how to fight, not just to fence. Footwork was excellent, quick as a viper. Lad seems to have some issues, though. He blew off Leugers, despite the woman clearly showing an interest, and the entire thing with Skullcrusher seems to be getting problematic. Needs to be dealt with sooner or later.  
  
Freyja came to visit. Surprise, too. Just came up to me and gave me a hug. Told her when we're leaving, before turning in. I can hear her talking outside while I'm writing this. She's... well, she's Freyja. Not much else to say about it, I'm afraid. Now I'm going to sleep.  
  
[break in page]  
  
Bloody hell, Ruthford... that's one way to make an enemy of my daughter...

# 29th of Scion

Fort Marriner, last day of the station though. We're moving out on the morrow to Bloodtide. Have a fairly good idea where we're going, don't think we'll be that far from Lion's Arch for the first few days. I'll put up a position analysis entry when we get there, might as well.  
  
Engineering tests today went well, though I took a risk with the diving suit. Came to close to the ruptured ley line, popped some blood vessels in my face. Underwater, made me panic. Had to have Kraxxi pull me out of the water with a golem, because I couldn't see anything. Kraxxi checked me over, said some things about lingering magical energy that sounded worryingly. I've got this weird little itch behind my teeth now. Apparently that sort of magical energy is highly volatile, and I could have been sucked into a hole in reality or something. Not entirely sure what that entails, but it doesn't sound very comforting. Nothing permanent, though, so that's good.  
  
Had a drink in the mess when I spotted some mercenaries arguing. It seemed petty enough, until one of them cracked the pommel of their sword into the back of the other one's skull. Saw it happen with my own eyes, just smacked her across the head over some pesky argument, in the middle of Fort Marriner, right outside the door of a mess brimming with Vigil soldiers. They just picked her up and tried to wander off. Alerted the troops well enough, Warmaster dispatched Athelstan and some troops to find and collect them. We moved out, but were quickly approached by one of the mercs, who explained that the person they attacked was in fact part of the same mercenary group. They led us to their hideout, where we were able to get them to co-operate. They allowed us to take back their wounded and treat them accordingly. Poor lass was in a coma, though we managed to wake her. She'll speak soo enough, and we can see if these mercenaries didn't simply attack someone for no reason. Either way, we had little desire to keep the mercs themselves locked up, so they were allowed to go free. Not without some yelling and shouting mind. They weren't exactly smart mercenaries, that's for sure.  
  
All went quiet after that. Hrist was around, woman's out to go hunting to keep herself from going rusty. We had a nice chat over some ale, spoke about a number of things, including how Hoelbrak's apparently out of decent bakers ever since I've left off. Still calls me baker boy. She's not changed much. Gotten stronger, certainly. She's looking for worthy foes to fight, seems hanging around the Lodges has made her go softer on herself. She could use some soft fat, actually, but regardless. We had some fun. Been a while, and we're about to deploy. Might as well, right?  
  
Anyway, I need to pack up the Engineering supplies, and try to get those flotation canisters added up to the standard kit for our troops while we're out in Bloodtide. Second Storm Boat was delivered earlier today by a number of Vigil troops from the garrison that I was able to pay off as well, so we're all looking shipshape and ready to go.

# 30th of Scion

Stormbluff Beacon, Stormbluff Island, Bloodtide Coast. Weather, overcast with rain. A lot of mud and wet sand, and strong coastal winds on the battlements. It occasionally shifts, and blows down through the fort itself, turning into a biting cold, especially at night. From the climate, though, this should improve come morning when the sun rises. I pity the humans and Asura, they are not made for harsh weather, unlike the norn and Charr. My kin just shrugs it off, used to worse, and the Charr have their thick coats to insulate them.  
  
Fort approaches faces inland, with the north route going up Lion's Arch by bridge. It looks sturdy enough. Even if it should be blown, the water it bridges is not insurmountable, as there are plenty of shallows.  
South is a beach that leads into a stretch of Skelk-infested shallows. From the looks of it, it could easily be crossed, even on foot, all the way to Laughing Gull island on the other side. Laughing Gull itself seems festooned with shipwrecks, and I heard that it's a den for pirates and other scum. Might have to clean it out at one point. In itself, it might prove a threat to any seaside supply lines, even though not a great one.  
  
The biggest stumbling block is the Inquest base that is apparently shoaled up underwater just outside the fort. They've launched attacks on us our position several times, essentially firing themselves into the fort's walls using some technological device of theirs. Unfortunately for them, there's more than just Lionguard on station here, so we were able to crack them back into the sea pretty easily. Some poking around revealed some Order of Whisper agents lurking about with some broken Asura tech. Never a good sign. They were typically tight-lipped, but let us know well enough they were there for the base.  
Warmaster decided pretty quickly it needed to go, so now I'm readying up detonation putty to reduce whatever is down there to rubble. Bjorn went out with Mithra on a scouting missive, gave a rough outline of the facility. Not quite enough for me to work with fully, but more than I knew before, so there's that.  
Inquest bastards also shocked Mithra down, and they apparently held Meadows in captivity for some amount of time in the past, to a degree that made it clear she was badly abused. Can't have that.  
Never had Asura ears before.  
  
Duties aside, set to work fairly quickly. Force took a sapping detachment out and entrenched the fort's approach, which was horribly open. Just earthworks, but enough to help us keep the enemies out easier.  
Kitchen stocks are filled up with some game Zara and I went shooting, so we've got fresh eating these next few days at least. Might want to set to fishing as well, get some variation into the menu.  
  
Spent some time in medical, mostly because it's one of the few sheltered spots. We talked a lot, especially Prydwén and Athelstan. Seemed a good enough mood. Also, the lass we pulled out from that idiot merc groups decided to jump ships over to the Vigil. We brought her with us, and she's recovering from the smack to her skull well enough. Kath's been... real friendly to her, for some reason. Unlike anything else I've seen before, to be honest, but that's that. Maybe Sana's absence is causing that? Eh well. I suppose it's good Boom Moon crawls out of her shell once in a while. Took enough coaxing before.  
  
Bloodtide. Not the way I expected it to be, honestly. Seems like a nice place to sail a ship through, strong wind, clear water and colourful islands. We're not near to the bogs yet, so maybe that'll change rather quickly. Looking forwards to going more South. Spirits, we might pass by the site of my birth, and I wouldn't even realise. Strange that.

[This is a folded piece of paper stuck in between the pages of the journal. The writing on it is very tightly wound and the letters are small. Despite the discipline of the script, it is riddled with spelling errors and missing letters, the hallmarks of the heavily dyslexic.]

# 31st of Sion

Hello friend norn,  
  
I am Sistter Jasie, devote of Dwayna. I fund your book under yuor vambraces when I washed you, and put it to the side for latter. Don't ~~worri~~ worry, I didn't red it, becase the letters are ~~dificullt~~ hard for me to see.  
But, if yuo cary it under your armour, it must men a lot to you, so I wrote you this note. That way you are not confused when you wake up, and maybe yuo can write something nise abot me in yuor book, too!  
  
From what I hear ~~Predwin~~ ~~Predwan~~ Prydwin say, you took a canonbal across the chest. It was glansing, and bounced of yuor chest shield, so your verry lucky, but it cracked your sternum, and crushed your longs. They had to heal you with magic by the grase of Dwayna, or you would have remaned in terible danger. It will likely take twoscore seven dais for you to recover fuly, if not longer.  
  
The red silvari, Mittra, was very worried, as were several of the ~~rekroots~~ rekruits. I asked Dwayna to watch over you while you slep, even doe I don't know if you believe in my Gods, or the spirit of Live. I hope you undersand this, and will not be angry.  
I also left a skin of water, and some crakers for you to eat. Try not to move too much when you wake during the night, or yuo may hurt youself. Breating will be painful, so we keep some of the pink vayls arund. I will be nerby, watchin out for the wonded.  
  
Sleep the deep rest of recovery, now.  
  
Jasie

# 32nd of Scion

Stormbluff Beacon, medical. Woke up in medical, apparently took a cannonball across my chest. Note left by the human monk lass says it caught me glancing across the chest, apparently bent the metal roundel on the breast-strap of my leathers all the way in, before the ball deflected off spirits-know-where. Cracked the sternum, which is the pain I'm feeling right now. Coughing up blood and red spittle all the time. If it wasn't for Cheery and Blue Bark telling me I'm doing well, I'd think I was slowly dying. Hurts really bad to breathe.  
The monk lass can't write very good, but she did me a service. Will thank her for that, and her blessing.  
  
Just getting my bearings. I've been out for a day, apparently. Meadows took over the demolitions task for which I prepared the putty charges, and did admirably, from what I hear. Who'd have though it, Xeyia, a solid soldier. Well, pleasantly surprised. Like the lass, has some kick behind her. Still, mad a as a hatter. Can't help that though.  
Anyway, that means the Inquest were blown out of the water. Good! Pity I wasn't there for that. Heard Ironside's coming back. I'll have to draft up a hand-over report on the morrow, make sure he's aware of the goings-on so he can resume his duties. Better than having a recruit running Engineering anyway, I wager.  
  
From what I hear, I'll be spending some time out in medical, recovering. Cheery said she's going to talk to Marcus about seeing if they can safely accelerate the healing process. Hope so, wasn't planning on sitting out here for half a season trying to not-die. Besides, I want to have a go at hunting that dragon out South.  
At least the company is good. Prydwén and Mithra are playing about on the floor here, like children. Funny to see, guess the youth of the Sylvari never fades. Good to spend the evening laughing though, even if the physical action stings terribly.  
I'm too tried, and in too much pain, for anything else. I'm just going to watch those two lasses joke around for a bit more, before I fall asleep again.

# 33rd of Scion

Still in medical, so not much to write about. Will have to keep it brief out of necessity.  
  
Marcus and Prydwén seem to think they're able to adequately heal the fracture in my chest with sustained healing, even though I risk rampant regrowth. Might cause a deformity or worse. Well, I'm prepared to risk it. Better than being sent out back to the Keep or Marriner while the others go out dragon hunting. It's just a bone break, shouldn't be too hard to keep that lined up, I hope.  
  
Ironside is back, totting a flamethrower. Spirits, it was surprisingly good to see the old beast, though I'm sad to see my job in the Engineering Corps fade back into the background. Just recruit again. Well, I've just written him a very long hand-off, so he can get up to speed about everything that has been going on in the past half-season. Make sure he hits the ground running.  
  
Kristen showed up today. Spirits, wish I wasn't slumped back with a crack in my chest. Even more so when she all but made it clear that there's room for something between us. We spoke about dragon-hunting, and building a lodge in the skull and bones of a slain elder dragon. What a woman. She'll linger around until we head south to hunt down the champion. She was a mite disappointed that the immediate prey around wasn't really worth anything, but still. The prospect of food and rest while tracking down a dragon excites her, visibly. She lives for the hunt. Well, I hope we'll be able to chase this one down, then. Carve her a worthy trophy from the remains.  
  
That's it, really. I'm going to take a painkiller before I try to lie back down, chest still hurts, but at least I'm coughing up blood anymore, so that's good. Might write some more tomorrow when I wake up. Wonder when the healing starts.

# 34th of Scion

Stormbluff Isle, can't go outside to check on the weather. I've started counting the stones on the ceiling because there's little else to be done. Wish I could go out and run dawn drills again. Not sure if anyone's been taking over, can't have the troops go soft in the morning. Spirits, I wish I could just go up and have a walk. That'll take another few days minimum, though, that's for sure. Cheery keeps thinking I'll puncture my lungs if I move too much. Bah. Won't even have a nice scar to show for it, just a dip in the sternum. I guess at least the tale is worth telling. Surviving artillery fire's a nasty enough ordeal.  
Hm, it's getting to the point where I'll have to start telling my deeds as they are, no-one will believe them anyway. No point in boasting.  
  
So yes, slow days. I heard Boom Moon giving some instructions for the Guardians, some interesting things. Wish I could put things on fire when I got angry. Probably would have torched the entire Karka hive. But then, control seems to be an important lesson. Cheery's been helping me with that well enough, the small meditation tricks to focus and channel emotions away. I'm not good at describing it, but they helped with Rotarn's death. Guess what happened before was just... Anger, boiling up from powerlessness. Always want to do things, help people, slay their enemies. And when I can do nothing but stand to the side and watch, it's difficult. Slowly changing that, though, bit by bit. Control.  
  
I've been going through old and older letters while I'm in medical, some curious ones. Seems I like writing folk, but they don't like writing back a lot. Pity, I do like getting letters. Usha and Freyj only write me sparsely, which I find sad. They're my only real family. Actually, so are Fuse Cannonclaw and this Grace human, now. Doubt Fuse'll write.  
Hm. That reminds me of a letter Mithra sent me when I stomped off when we got back from Southsun. Said I was like her father. Guess I took that to heart, since Cheery remarked that I've been treating her like a child. Mine. I'm not entirely surprised, the lass has always reminded me much of Freyj she was a stripling. Besides, she's in the Vigil, that sort of already makes her family. I wonder if-  
Might need to talk to Freyja and Mithra.  
  
Spent some time talking to Athelstan. Seems Cheery and him are getting close to the point that they are clashing over small things. At least, that's his side of the story. From what I could gleam, seems they had a small falling out over Cheery's toffees. Athel's taking it hard, and it seems more serious an issue that it should be. I've managed to talk him into making his chocolate bars for her as a reconciliation effort. Gave him instructions and everything. Guess we'll see how that turns out. Spoke with Cheery right after. They're both nice people. Used to have my doubts about 'Don, but those have proven wrong, by and large, which is good. Cheery's... well, still hard to read her at times, but she's got a heart of gold. She has her doubts about going forwards with Athelstan though. Weird, I wasn't expecting that. Well, if she isn't ready to commit, that's that. Curious to see how it all works out.  
  
Anyway, it's late, and everyone is asleep.

# 35th of Scion

Stormbluff Beacon. Still in medical, recovering slowly, though they have now started to magically treat the bone break in my sternum. It's going to take some time, but unless things go bad, it should be strong enough for me to walk around a little soon-ish. Might take another score days before it's worth anything even coming close to combat duties. That is, if I haven't gone mad from being unable to exercise or do anything.  
  
Heard the squads exercise earlier, apparently missed a spot of entrenching a lower position. Figures that I'd be out for the count when we do something like that. I enjoy my fortifications. Anyway, heard Force did a respectable job of managing the efforts. Iron Legion charr should know their way around with a spade well enough. Might have to talk to Ironside about inducting him as an engineering sapper, he leads a work team pretty good. Probably means we'll be moving camp down south. Wonder if they'll keep medical up in the fort or not.  
  
Not a lot else going on. I've asked Freyj to come visit me sometimes soon. I don't think her Priory expedition is moving at all, so that shouldn't be too much of an issue. We're close to Lion's Arch. Besides, I'd like her to talk to Mithra a little. Apparently the two met in Fort Marriner, briefly, and she left a favourable impression. Mithy has always been a reflection of my love for my own daughter, it's only fair they get to know each other.  
  
Athelstan and Prydwén still unclear on where they stand. Seems like they both want it to be more, and it almost sounds like 'Don's been slowly falling for her, but Cheery's... well, reluctant to commit before she's sure. Can't blame her, in a sense, but I feel some sympathy for 'Don in this case. Must be hard to attempt to please a woman as casually flirty and playful as Cheery, and being turned down. He even made those chocolate bars, and seems intent on making them better. Told him adding some hazelnuts and chili, or even some lavender could help. Make some truly delicious chocolate.  
  
Also got me thinking about myself these past two seasons. Sana... of whom I am still very fond as a friend. Then 'Kay, which just... proved how happily I was willing to fall head-first into some stupid spun tale I had made up myself. And now, perhaps, Kristen, the huntress whose company I so enjoy. Not sure what to think, afraid to put my hopes too high, even though I want to. Let her become Kristen Dragonsbane first, and we'll see. Perhaps hunting this mighty beast together will bond us closer, like the norn of old hunted in the Far North. The interest is there, at least, and it seems mutual. Should not let that go to waste.  
That, of course, and the fact that she looks beautiful and hunts karka and dragons. Sort of a good match for a Vigil soldier that takes cannonballs to the chest.

# 36th of Scion

Another day in medical. At least it's dry in here. Medics making progress, and the bruise is starting to yellow. Pain is still there, but it's lessened. Sternum is holding the ribcage somewhat steady now the medics have at least started mending the fracture directly. Not sure how long I'll still be in here, but I hope that they'll let me try and walk a little soon. Have to make sure it doesn't break again, however, or that could put me out for a long while.  
Medical did a brief rehearsal about their tools or something. Woke me up from resting.  
  
Freyja visited. She was fast, apparently got the letter this morning, and promptly set off, only stopping in Lion's Arch to buy some spices I asked her to bring for Athelstan. She was in good humour, seemed happy, if a little concerned. We talked, briefly, about what happened. She was a little concerned about the cannonball hit, but thought it somewhat amusing I lived through it. Said I was either lucky, or blessed.  
Also talked to her about Mithra. Freyj approves of her, if anything.  
  
Kristen stopped by for another long chat. Dearly wished I could stand up and go out to do things with her. Should let a hunter hunt! We talked, though. Nothing of note, just idle chatter. Sort of looped out into jokes and jibes with Prydwén and Enrista in the end. Seems Cheery is convinced Kristen and I are something already. I'm not sure myself, yet. Difficult to have private chats about that sort of thing in the medical ward, and I can't leave. Not yet anyway. Hoped Cheery would let Kristen help me up and go for a stroll. Could've made that pleasant. Alas, no walking.  
  
Enrista got Cheery to chase him around the fort. Sylvari lady was ticked off by some of the comments he made. She eventually cornered him, and had her way with him. Which apparently includes pinning you against the wall, and threatening you into giving her compliments on the pain of crushed kneecaps. She's a very charming lady, aside from that, of course.

# 37th of Scion

We're still at Stormbluff Beacon, probably getting ready to move camp sooner or later. I can walk a little, though everyone's throwing a fuss. Got tired of sitting in that one room, waiting for people to stop by and say hello. Sort of got on my nerves, and against the usual advice, I decided to go for a wander. Of course, that got folk up in arms about permissions from medical and so on. Bah. Worst that could happen was that my sternum splintered under the pressure when I tried standing up, pierce my lungs, and drown me in my own blood. But I'm not dead, and the bone weld the medics have been weaving seems up to the task. Probably should get someone to actually allow me to leave the medical ward for a breather once in a while. Else I'll go mad.  
  
Got woken up earlier by a distant bang. Arca thought it was the Chapter scuttling a pirate operations base. Turned out the Chapter stormed a pirate lair where they were keeping prisoners. The entire thing blew up, and they're not certain why. Might be the pirates rigged the place to blow, or something. All the people inside though. They died. Made me angry when I heard. Protect the innocent. We failed in our duties today, as a Chapter. A black mark.  
  
That's it, though, seems everyone got hit by it. Made them quiet. Well, perhaps that's good, make them think a little on the value of a life.

# 38th of Scion

Needless to say, still in Stormbluff Beacon. Healing is slow, but I managed to walk a little more, just to stretch my legs. Marcus and Cheery would have a fit if they saw me, but they're just worried for me, as they should. Want to ensure I don't, you know, die. But that's one thing. I'm able to walk, albeit slowly and carefully. The pain in my chest is still there, but pain I'm getting used to pain these days. So there's that.  
  
Chapter went out and raided a pirate outpost. Could hear the feint bang of cannons firing for a good while earlier. They've apparently been using the storm boats extensively, both of them. That's good! Excellent even. *Tiny Shark Sloop*, the original, named after our encounter with the sharks in Southsun, and *Kath's Buoyancy*. Because Boom Moon can't swim, ~~and the canvas hull is stretched about as taunt as that ass-hugger of hers~~. Weird, weird thought.  
Anyway, the storm boats are serving their use, which is excellent. Good that Engineering has been producing functional equipment for the Chapter. Hope Kraxxi will pull through on the flotation canisters, we could use those here. Should at least stop the heavies from sinking entirely if they slip or if the boat capsizes. Anyway, I'll have to have a chat with Ironside once I recover, make sure we hand over the flotation canisters to the Chapter in general before long.  
  
Talked to Mithra about naming her my daughter-by-choice. She seemed to like the idea, give her a place to belong, even outside the Vigil. A family. She need to think it over, of course, and talk to Athy, too. Not a light step to make. But I'd embrace her as my child, if she truly thinks of me as a father. She is old enough to stand on her own anyway, but she can become part of the clan, and become part of my family's legacy to this world. We will see how it fares, she may yet refuse, of course.  
  
She helped me walk outside for a bit, as I mentioned earlier. At the same time, Devin, the bleeding idiot, tried to impersonate an officer to some pretty lass that wanted to see an officer. Resulting antics nearly started a row between the recruits. Rajani and Wynn seem to be out for his blood as well. Almost spun out of control if I hadn't seized the situation by the horns, and just *told* people what to do for a moment. Thankfully, they were smart enough to respond, and not to argue too much. "Recruit" Tzahr, my arse. Four Crusaders, and it took the wounded recruit to tell them to disperse the gawkers. Force and Cheery at least took care of the problem. Had it resolved before Marcus even had to show up.  
Bah.  
  
Pryde decided to resign. Asked me a favor, to watch out over Grim and Rajani. I promised him well enough, even though I'm currently not fit for service. Zara must have taken it hard as well. I hope she'll stop by and have a talk soon, or at least find someone to talk it over. Raj and Grim might help, they seemed to be close friends.  
  
Write Lyralii and Cheery about resuming my training routine while I'm still mostly confined to medical. Quartermaster should be able to dig up something for me to learn. Maybe the basics of some sience, bookkeeping, or even the fundamentals of the Eternal Alchemy. Spirits, could see if what I already picked up makes sense in the greater theory. Just hope she doesn't star calling me Bookah. Hate that term.  
Cheery's going to make time to come and some private meditation sessions with me, until I can rejoin the general practices anyway. Bless her, she knows I value them and they help me a lot. Also helps to keep my mind occupied a little.  
  
Tried to look for Kristen, briefly, but I couldn't find her. Probably off trying to see if she can find something worth hunting, Leopard guide her hunting instincts. Ah well, guess I'll have to be contend looking at the walls for a little more, then.  
  
[EDIT: holy, thirteen pages.]

[Continuation of entry]  
A lot of time to think over things here. Guess that counting the bricks in the walls counts for something of a passtime. Surprised people don't go insane being cooped up in buildings this long. Always found that weird about humans. Does bad things for your head. I mean, I spent a good fair bit of my time in my bakery, but I'd spend equal amounts of time out wandering or trading. Would have gone cross-eyed elsewhise.  
  
Regardless. Kraxxi stopped by to bring me up to speed on the Engineering Corps. Babbled a lot, but I've got a feeling she meant well enough. We spoke about foghting dagons, so I told her about that time we rammed that ugly with the *Ramming Speed!* over Orr. Gave me this cube with coloured sides, that I'm supposed to align correctly. Damned things has been eluding me for the past few hours. Just cannot get it to line up. Everytime I get one side good, I have to mess it up to get the others right. Kraxxi said its a toy for Progeny, of sorts. Probably means its a logic puzzle or a pattern recognition thing. I'll bend my mind over it. Must be a trick to it.  
Also babbled on about megalasers again. Nothing new as far as Kraxxi is concerned, but it did gave me an idea. Mini-lasers. Not sure what their use would be, though, but still. Maybe target markers?  
  
Been near two seasons in the Chapter now. Time goes fast. Still a recruit, damn it. Have half a mind to just ask Calder to restore my grade. Mistakes were made, and they're being corrected, true, but anyone with half a mind can tell you I'm hardly still a recruit. Spirits, half the other recruits still call me sir, and I've taught the other half how to fight in dawn drills. Bah, I've thaught half of the Crusaders how to fight as well, come to think of it. They even had me running Engineering. As a bleedin' recruit. Sort of getting ridiculous at this point, they probably had done better just throwing me out if they wanted to make a point. Eh, we'll see once I recover. Just got to keep showing them what I'm worth I guess, and keep the rest to myself.  
  
On that, no idea how long I'm still out for the count. Medics not telling me anything, and they're being very vague. At least it feels like the bone mend in my chest is going well, so there's that. Holds up well enough up when I sit, and I can sort of stand for some periods of time. That's good, right? Probably should have asked about that, but couldn't find anyone. Eh well, at least I can get some fresh air now, despite the incessant rain. That seems to be affecting moods, by the by. But it's just the coastal climate. Right out to sea, and the winds are harsh. Must be a strong ocean current running through the bay for that. Strange, though, pretty sure it used to rain less this close to the Arch. Or that might just be me getting old.

# 39th of Scion

Still in Stormbluff, as per usual. Operations out on the nearby isle from what I hear, clean-up and patrols. Apparently risen wash up this far north. Surprised, didn't know they came this close to Lion's Arch these days. Igri got wounded, saw her flailing about in medical. Lost a lot of blood. She's strong though, should recover easily.  
  
The Rubixx Cube Kraxxi gave me is taunting me. I stopped trying to crack it for a now, but I keep wanting to just solve it. I wonder if there's something inside when you finally get it. Like a little trinket, or a bauble. Sounds a little silly, but it's supposed to be a toy, right?  
  
Seems medical was the place to be today, though. Devin got tied up because they think the lad has finally lost his marbles. Looked like it, I'm afraid, was spouting nonesense. Well, more so than usual, that is. Heard him shouting outside, to Calder. Who shouted back. Now, I'm not claiming to be an expert on old-mesmer-charr, but something tells me that when Calder starts shouting, it doesn't end well. At all. Had him thrown into medical.  
  
Ruthford is back as well. Good to see the lad, he's recovering. Was assigned to guard Devin pretty fast off the cuff though, didn't have a chance to talk well. Devin rubbed him all the wrong ways though, got into a fight. Ruthford lost his temper, struck Devin twice. Second one knocked him out. Well, at least it kept Devin from jabbering, but not really what the lad deserved. Eh... maybe a little. Still, though, don't think I'd have done anything different. Have a feeling Devin is about to be discharged.  
  
Kristen was here as well, came bearing me gifts! Skins and hides, to keep me warm. The skins were nice enough themselves, even had a great bear one, but I value the gesture much more. Feel like I need to do something in return for her. It's a good enough thought, maybe carve something? Had a nice enough talk, felt the spark between us flare several times. Pity we didn't have the ward to ourselves. Oh well, can't have it all. Ended up getting some ration ale, and a tin of moa. Think the humans call it 'a drink and some light supper'.  
Need more of this. A lot more of this.

# 40th of Scion

Quiet day, still over at Stormbluff Beacon. Getting some rest in, which is good. Khil came by and did some tests on my injury. Says it's okay for me to stand, but I shouldn't leave medical. At least not until it stops to hurt in order to breath deeply. Well, at least now I can wander around and sit in different corners of the medical ward, so that's something.  
  
Had some visits from people. Rajani dropped by, talked a little. She's managing the cook's duties well enough on her own, it seems, which is good. Misses Pryde, was confused as to why he left. Grim's apprently taked it badly, and got angry. Don't know how Zara is, haven't seen her yet.  
Force also asked Raj and Grim to pick join his warband. Seems like he's determined to increase it again. Guess that's fair enough. Had some chat about other things as well, fairly pleasant visit. Force and Ruthford, as well as Mithra, joined us for a bit towards the end. Spent the rest of the evening chatting about this and that before everyone headed off to rest.  
  
Small note, apparently Vethrir employed an implosion device yesterday? Must be something Asura tech, because I'm not familar with any convential explosive that does that. Might have to ask what it was, genuinely curious.  
Lyralii's technical lesson earlier didn't help, Asura technology is pretty nifty. Hugely complex, yes, but it's a nice challenge to at least try and comprehend it. Bit of a technobabble, though that is hardly surprising. Appreciate the effort she pours into it, though, shows that she cares. Kraxxi too, the surprise visit some time ago was nice. Guess we sort of got along in our own way in Engineering.  
  
The Rubixx Cube. I tried solving it again, and I think it's a pattern thing. Must be a key set that rotates you through all the combinations in turn. Just have to find it. Made some notes on paper to calculate it, but didn't find anything that worked yet. Will have to try tomorrow again. Better be something nice inside it.

[continuation of entry]  
  
We landed just south of the Cathedral approach. Sky was thick with uglies, but that wasn't our heading. We veered away from the *Skybound Fury* and the *Absolute Zero*. Remember that well, we dipped and jibed across the wind current, and drifted sideways under their hulls before we completed the turn. Beautiful maneuver. Could read the letters overhead as the two escort vessels turned broadside, and started firing off layers of flak fire to cover our landing. We were trouped on the fore-deck, packed up for a rough landing, carry lines ready to be cast over and rope us down. We weren't going to make it on the regular approach angle, so the engineering crew trimmed the gravity anchor. Crashed for some ten seconds, feeling out stomachs wrench, before they released ballast and pulled us level. We were signalled, and then the lines were out and on the ground.  
  
Mauler warband hit the ground first. They were already fighting their way up Karst when I got my boots dirty. Confusion, a lot of risen. Miasma too, so we fumbled with our gashoods. Just made it worse, no-idea where we were going, everything was muffled and constricted. Spotted Toghalla, somwhere, with Helmi, Black and Fae Cliff-Brave. Trying to assault an incline leading to one of those broad stairways, covered with risen. We battered through them, and stormed upwards, intent to take the position. Saw movement in the fog ahead. Toggy was leading, but then just vanished. Dropped away. We thought she'd been hit by a hex or a spell, but no. Cleft in the staircase, about a Dolyak wide. Went down deep into a crevice. Toggy broke her neck. Must have. Angle was unnatural. Didn't move. No time to check. Were in the middle of an assault.  
Spirits, I hope she was dead, and that we didn't leave her to die trapped between the rockface.  
  
Cleared through over the incline. Fog was less bad, seemed to drift down into the plains behind us. Found the Maulers, locked in a melee with several rotters and an abomination. Had to charge in, fought hard for... no idea how long. Black Spinesnapper died, abomination crushed his spine through his chest by stepping on him. Got worse, became a fighting retreat. Runt Redmauler took rearguard, fought hard as nails. Suddenly, supporting fire. Turns out we'd strayed out east instead of west, and ran into a supporting advance near Wren. We realised Runt was no longer with us. Brick Greatmauler, warband Legionnaire was arguing going back in to find him with the assault group's Tactician when Helmi started coughing. Loose gas mask. Blood just... it came out of her nose and mouth, bubbling with every breath. She was in so much pain in the end. We stopped it.  
  
Then we went back into the meatgrinder with the advance. Too angry to retreat.  
Eight more died. We didn't find Runt.  
Took the position though.

# 41st of Scion

Still in medical. Starting to feel like I've been here forever. Walked circles around the walls earlier. At this rate, I'll have served the majority of my tour in this drum-turret. Bah! At least the pain is lessening everyday. I need to get out of here, this is driving me insane.  
  
Some Order of Whispers agent barged into medical, gunwound in his abdomen. Was difficult about his goings on, as per usual with the Order. Wish they'd just stop having this secret cork up their collective arses once in a while, it gets so tiresome. Claimed he was returning from a mission, but then headed south. Guess that means he's not heading to Lion's Arch, where I know they have a place. Given the Order spooks on the beach before we blew the Inquest base, and that one lady that came asking about the other day, have I feeling they're nervous about something. Wouldn't surprise me we're camped on top of one of their forward operating bases. Bah. Only known two decent Order folk, that being Usha during the campaign, and Mippl.  
  
That's the gist of it, though. Everything else is rather quiet.  
Lyralii brought on my books, though they're hilariously condescending. If you strip out all the insults, though, they're pretty niffty. I've already managed to reconstruct a basic concept about crystal energy retention from my notes on Lyralii's lessons earlier.

# 42nd of Scion

Stormbluff. Get the feeling we're about to move along fairly sure, though. Don't usually stick around in one place this long anyway. Rain's still there, seems to be a near-permanent state of things. Guess the water evaporates out to sea west and south, and then gets run along a current north, where it breaks between Claw Island and Stormbluff. Makes some sense, weather patterns like these were why we'd fly over the land routes further east when ferrying through to Trinity. Swamp monsoons shook up the ship so bad, half the unit puked up their meals.  
  
But that's neither here nor there, though. Still locked in medical, but Prydwén gives it another four or five days before I can walk around with little issue again. Hope I can get cleared for duty soon after that, would be good to step back into the line of duty. Been some things going on. The two Whisper's agents came back, the lady looking for records on the latter. Apparently, Mithra was asked not to talk too much about, and it spooked her a little when they came questioning her. Cheery and I handled it, though. Didn't like it much, truth be told, Whisper agents acting up usually means all sort of a trouble. And, typically, you never know what sort of trouble it is until it's right on bloody top of you. Didn't see them again after, so I hope the officers sorted it out, and sent them on their way.  
  
Cheery asked me to run another Chapter Ball come next leave. Should consider asking Kristen to show up. Might not be norn-style, but it will be fun regardless. I'll have a look, source some things. Thankfully, if we return to Marriner, it will be easy to source things from the city itself. Spirits, Usha could deliver directly to Marriner using the gates, might muster up something truly good. Will have to ask permission, though, before they decide to 'fine' me again.  
  
Rubixx Cube, going through some workable iterations. Might be close, but there's one side that keeps messing up. Not sure if I'm starting it correctly. At this point, I'm almost certain that if it even contains anything, it's not worth it. Curiosity is a bitch, though. Considered just smashing the thing and re-assembling it, but felt that would have been cheating.  
  
Managed to get some food from Raj at the fire. Seems she's been picking up field cook duties rather well, though she says she could use an extra hand. Size the Chapter's been growing, might ask for another apprentice. Anyway, the food was fine. Little rough, but it goes for camp fare.  
Also had a talk about learning from your mistakes over the meal, with Mithy, Cheery and Athel. Some good words.  
Another rest day, for the remainder. Blade got a collective bath, but that's it. Hardly news.  
  
Oh yes, and they tied up Devin like a pig. Don' approve, but there was little else to be done for him. Kept on yelling and running. Truly think the lad has lost it. Bah.

[continuation of entry]  
  
*Of the North*  
Beast's thundering breath carried on  
Unsure what lied behind hill's crest  
Heavy hooves beat up clouds of snow  
It could not escape the hunter's aim  
  
Little to do but write and think. I can dwell on past events, but it brings back unhappy memories. Exulting the glories of the past always seemed so noble and honourable when the Skaalds would sing sagas of great warriors and mighty hunters. Only later, tempered by your own experience do you start seeing the bitterness, the hidden vein of melancholic anger that runs like a red thread though the fabric of every song and dance. Hail the victorious dead, aye, but it still means they are dead. At least there is some comfort in the knowledge that all great souls come to rest in the Hall of Heroes, amongst worthy friends and worthy foes equally. Sometimes I wonder how that would be.  
  
Better to think on the here and now, then. The war engulfs of all, totally, like a storm. And it is truly a Great War, unlike any our kinfolk has seen before, yet so little people see it as such. They fail to realise Tyria itself is besieged by powers that would devour us totally. For them, it is always someone else's conflict. The Pact and the Vigil understand, at least, that this is everyone's battle. We'll have to turn the tide, and we've shown that we *can* beat them on their own ground. A great triumph of a great battle, surely, but only the first. I see us here, the Ashen, a handful of soldiers, many of whom only now understanding how much we will ask of them before the end. We live, day by day, hoping to see the next dawn, wishing for no other comfort than a good meal, dry feet and a place to rest our eyes. How many battles must we yet aim to win, or risk losing all we stand for? How many of us will perish before the last few stand victorious?  
Questions to which I may nor hear the answers to in my lifetime. A sobering thought, in a way, to realise that, no matter how mighty I might stand, I am but one grain of sand on the beach, and the tide will roll on regardless.  
  
*Of Spring*  
Through a glade once wandered  
Laughter of the kindest sort  
She sang an ode to joy  
And left all hearts in bloom  
  
It is quiet. Think it is mere moments to dawn. Cannot be elsewhise. Can hear the rain patter down on the top of the tower, and splash down over the staircase gently. I think Igri and Devin are asleep. They stir gently in their rest, while I sit here with a pencil, writing in near total dark. Only the glow and crack of the guard fire outside casts a mild orange shadow through the entryway. Shadows dance along the floor, with no words but their own form, barely visible. The bear skin keeps me warm at least, even if the cold never really bothered me. It smells of pine, smoke and bear fat. Familiar, in ways.

# 43rd of Scion

Where to even start. Ruthford got into a fight with Freyja. From what I can tell, he sent her a bottle of whiskey, which Freyja saw as an invitation to settle a dispute they had through drink. Brash girl that she is, she demanded Ruthford drink the entire half bottle of whiskey, despite knowing that this would render him drunk. From what I can tell, Freyja tried to leave when Felix refused. He then, out of anger, called after her, calling her a coward. Grave insult, far as they go.  
  
Woke up to that. Folk raining insults on her for doing as she did. Got angry, tried to resolve the issue with Ruthford directly, perhaps hope to reconcile. Just... spun out of control. We were nearly at each other's throats. Threatened him, should he insult Freyja again. Shouldn't have. Unforgivable.  
Came inside... Mithra saw us fight. Crying. Broke my heart. Had to make amends. Begged forgiveness. We settled it all, in the end. Best... best not mentioned now, but learnt from. Nothing is worth that much strife and hurt. And it's certainly not worth seeing the flower cry on her own birthday. Selfish, foolish and foolhardy.  
I can do better. Need to write to Freyja too. So we can end this madness before it begins.  
  
It was Mithra's yearday. She didn't even know herself, but we're going to celebrate on the morrow. Make her a cake! Ruthford is going to forage some moa eggs. I'll have to improvise an oven, but that shouldn't be too hard. Give her a day to remember.  
  
I'm too exhausted from the emotions earlier to write much more.

# 44th of Scion

Mudflat Camp, wind mild, weather is clear and quite warm. High humidity, close proximity to a saltwater bog. Insect life is going to be an issue, have to hang mosquito nets, and sleep inside my tent. I'm sure Marcus doesn't appreciate me leaving medical, since he now has to deal with my snoring again. Pretty sure he'd happily consign me to the bloodsuckers to miss out on that, hah.  
Campsite itself is problematic, we're nestled on a mild incline, but not in a defensible position. First task we got was to shore up the emplacement as well as we could. We need to, land approaches are horrific. There's an old Hylek campsite nearby, apparently occupied by trolls. Land supply line is non-existent, since you have to treck through a stretch of bog to get here. This was proven by several discarded supply caravans we found. Sea-side supply might be viable, but you need to navigate the isles, and we'd have to find a landing deep enough to take a supply vessel. Mostly bog around the coast here, so that's an issue. At least we're only getting some harassment from the local pirate gangs. For the rest, seems to be a quiet enough corner.  
  
I managed to make the move on my own two feet, even fought off some pirates while doing so. We took the long-route around from Stormbluff Beacon, and ran into some pirate scum on the way. Dispatched them with little issue. Spent the rest of the day working, and it's not done yet. Ironside's letting me take the work team lead on the fortification efforts, which is good. Need to do a lot, though, so we're not out the woods. I'll take another field team and continue work on the morrow. Also need to get the kitchen set up, and send out a foraging party. Rajani should be able to lead it, lass knows her stuff. I'll talk to her about rotating kitchen duty between us regularly.  
  
The Rubixx cube. I tried calculating all the possible ways to solve it, but the numbers got so high I'm not sure if they exist. Had to use sheets and sheets of paper to help me as well. I do think I have a clue on how to solve it, though, will try more tomorrow evening, before I go to sleep. Must crack it. It's starting to taunt me.  
  
Today got me really tired. Walking around, even one or two bouts of unexpected fighting, wore me out. Pressure in my chest now, need to sit down and rest for a while. I got so exhausted, I could swear I could see Kristen at the edge of my vision. Would be too good to be true for her to drop by now.  
Hm. Do care for her more than I expected.

# 45th of Scion

Mudflat camp, weather warm and humid. Sweating, have to keep drinking to keep lmyself cooled down. Not cleared for hard work yet, so I'm mostly consigned to lighter duties. Suits me fine, even though I occasionally feel like I want to dip in. Busied myself with engineering duties, was a long evening of hard work. Spend most of the time supervising, though, since my injury means I can't exactly run around lugging wooden breams. Meadows and I built us up a nifty enough bridge to cross the Firth of Rovanion here. Was actually quite pleasant working with her, though she got her leg nabbed by a drake. Anyway, filed a report again.  
  
Heard the rest of the Chapter went into a risen-infested dredge mine. Some of the folk sounded pretty shaken. Getting trapped in a corridor with risen rushing you down on both sides is probably not a pleasant experience. Know that sensation from the Penitent Path in Orr, though, so I can associate. Folk apparently almost got lost, or something. Not sure what's up with the scouts, things like that shouldn't be happening. Sana should get back, did a good job in Orr. She's missed, in more than one way.  
  
Cheery kicked up a small fuss because I had to strain myself a little when we were building the bridge. Nothing too bad, though, says I'm healing well enough. That's something. I can understand her worry, though, even though I didn't really do anything except lift a cart for a whole ten seconds, and hammered in some nails. Oh well.  
  
Gave the flower her yearday cake. She dug in like a happy pup, and just devoured the thing. Good to see her like that, especially after the day before yesterday. She's not yet decided if she wants to be kin or not, but I guess that's fine too. It's her choice, after all.  
  
We're closer to Hylek territory now, so I hope I can get that clay oven. Would allow me to make these pasties and pies more often, instead of having to dig pit-ovens. They're not that hard to make, but they're slow to heat, and slow to cook. That reminds me, we should send out a foraging detachment, and stock up. I think I can start making some more time for kitchen duties as well, now, with most of the engineering duties around camp being resolved.  
  
That's it for today's account.

[Continuation of entry]  
Things have changed. Well, no, I have changed. The entire... Let's take it from the start, I think that might be best. Try to see what happened, what I felt, where I... strayed.  
Felt the need to defend Freyj for what happened with Ruthford the other day. I damn well knew Freyj was wrong, but I couldn't stop myself from standing up for her. Didn't want to give any ground, because, well. It's my daughter, my kin. Never had much besides that. Felt like I needed to push back for her, despite the fact that she makes her own choices, fights her own battles and makes her own mistakes.  
I don't know, I guess I was thinking I was doing good by her. Spirits, I threatened to *kill* Ruthford over it.  
  
Didn't realise how far gone over the side I was until I saw how distraught Mithra was. Made me stop. If this was what was best for my kin, then why was this lass I see almost as my own daughter in tears? Just showed me how wrong I was, how far I had strayed over this spat that was not even my own. I have a duty to do right by my kin, but so do I to my brothers in arms. I had to beg forgiveness for an unforgivable insult. I felt like I would never be able to stand proudly among my fellow warriors ever again if I did not. So I supplicated, offered my sword, and was absolved. There is a debt still owed, but I will repay it in time.  
  
Honour. My understanding of the word has been tested. I always believed that there was honour to stand for what you believe, and to stand for your kin, regardless of what happened. That to be devoted, above all else, to the ideal that you will fight to your last breath for them and theirs, was in its own worthy of the greatest praise. But perhaps not so. Perhaps, it is just that, and ideal, where striving towards it is admirable, but to be bullheaded to the most literal term is still foolish. I never made claim to being virtuous, but perhaps I thought myself too much so regardless. I assumed I was above reproach because I believed what I did was honourable. It made me blind to the notion that I might have been, and was, wrong.  
  
Family means much to me, and at times it has proven too much. I left Freyja over a want to protect her, and now I nearly destroyed the bond of trust that binds me with my companions. This is not the way it is supposed to be. I love her too much, almost, in that I reach for my sword in her defense when there is no need. Usha would have laughed, she always knew that Freyja would resolve her own troubles, in her own way, at her own pace. She is young and brash, and would draw her sword over an insult rather than to think it through. And yet, she is no longer a child. She will have to learn that not everyone is as she is, and that the meaning of patience is more than just being patient.  
  
Meanwhile, I myself have found a lesson to be learned.  
  
[Also, fourteen pages? Holy hell, going fast.]

# 46th of Scion

Position remains the same, weather is mild. Mosquito's seem to have swarmed up to us in force, happy to have a bug net, at least makes sleeping somewhat comfortable. Outside, however, the damned bugs just ambush you. There's leeches, ticks and all sort of other nasty critters lurking in the water, crawling up all sort so of places. At least the place is teeming with life, which means foraging is easy. Made some food for the Chapter again, though it seems we're populated mostly by Charr that prefer to just have their meats, and skip the rest. Pity, I boiled the last batch of fresh cabbages we had in the supplies, seasoned with vinegar and bacon crisps. Well, guess I'm eating the leftovers for breakfast with some of the tack. Might have to shoot a surplus of critters and smoke them over a fire pit to preserve it all, make sure we have enough meat rations to feed all those Charr. Also urgently need to get fishing. There's drakes a plenty near the Firth of Rovanion just south-west, which means the water's filled with fish. Could span a net along our crude bridge?  
  
Apparently Blade got disciplined after the Warmaster made an unfavorable note in a report about a chatty-squad? Surprised. I'm gone for two-score days, and suddenly folk don't know how to shut their gob? Probably just a bad day. Calder worked the squadron down into the dirt, though, they were so knocked out, some just sat down where they stood after dismissal. Sort of annoys me I'm not around for that, feels like I'm getting distanced from my squadmates.  
Asked Calder briefly if there'd be a chance for me to earn my grade back sooner or later. Called it an 'executive decision'. No idea what that's supposed to mean, but I guess it comes when it comes. Doesn't change much these days, I'm still doing what I'm doing. Most of the Crusaders know I'm their equal in all but title regardless, and they treat me as a peer, not as a subordinate.  
  
Had a pleasant enough chat with Force, Ironside and Felix. Just chatter, talked about humans and their cities. Almost everyone around the fire seemed to agree that they're not doing well. Interesting point as well: admiration for their tenacity. The Ascalonians in particular, but humanity in general too. As Ironside put it: takes a specific kind of bravery for a human reared on a farm to charge head-first into a dragon, especially compared to norn and Charr, who are at a natural advantage. Also, notable, saw Rajani and Grim sneak off to the side, and come back with very particular looks plastered across their faces. Know that look, even with Charr. Guess they're a thing now. Force's also still going hard on inducting them into Shield warband. They're deciding on new names and everything. Somehow, I feel it's a pity Roeland wasn't still still us. Grim seems like he'd be able to get along with the lad much better. Between Force and Grim, he might have come out more prepared for the Vigil.  
  
As we get further south, the land only seems to get rougher and harsher. It's been quiet, and only the chance encounter with the Risen and some pirates hiding out here breaks the illusion that we're utterly isolated away from the rest of the world. I can imagine the Oddwalker trawling through the swamps, seeking out the fabled and terrible Hejja, who stalked the saltwater marshes and lurked in the crooked mangrove trees, hanging the tails of slain Krait from the branches as warning, painting herself with Hylek toxins that poisoned whoever bit her. She must have stood feral and terrible before the Oddwalker when they finally met. The Forever-Wanderer and the Cannibal-Witch. An unlikely match, but my parents nonetheless. Sometimes I wonder if I will measure up to them, or am destined to fall short of their great tales. It was always said that the Dark-Eater and her blood were bound to spirits that blessed her with phenomenal powers. It is true, I stand tall and mighty, even among my own kin, but I sometimes feel like I lack the will to achieve true greatness, as in the days of yore. Or I am being foolishly sentimental, and aspire to be as is told in the tales; an unobtainable ideal. Cheery does always say I am a romantic.  
  
And then, of course, there is the notion that soon we will be fighting a dragon again, and I will do so at the side of worthy and mighty companions of arms, for whom I would gladly give my life. I long to carry my shield into battle again these days, too much time spent sitting at the sidelines. I want to crash through the lines of the enemies again, trampling them below my armoured might. I want to stalk great and terrible monsters with Wolfsbane, and carve a trophy from a mighty beast we've slain together. Spirits, nothing would please me more this day. Alas, fettered down by the commandments of medical.  
  
Solved the Rubixx cube, finally found the pattern. Blasted thing was empty. Didn't even contain a piece of candy or anything. So disillusioned. Asura have no idea how to make good toys. I do have twenty pages worth of algorithms that I had to calculate and flesh out to crack the damned thing.  
They've already helped me making sense of one of the carry-weight equations the Asura gravity-modulators use, so they're not all wasted. Hurt my head, though, had to think in abstracts well beyond what I was used to. Asura apparently use undefined and 'imaginary' numbers that are written using letters, not numbers. It is ridiculously complex, there were numbers on there that I don't even know how to pronounce. Is a "thousand thousand thousand thousand" something? Lyralii's book is only being helpful in the most rudimentary fashion. If I ever find the time, I will find the author, and smack him in retribution.  
  
Time to swaddle myself in my bear skin and rest. The smell is still comforting, especially now the night has fallen, and I can see but little except the feint shadows thrown by the watch fire of the pickets. In my mind, Kristen smells like this too, of the untamed north, free and mighty. Almost imagine her nearby.

# 47th of Scion

We remain at Mudflat. The place is becoming more and more of a weird limbo, as if we're frozen in time. We are hidden away in a nook between caves, bogs and rivers, as if no-one would ever think to wander here for any reason. More so that this is a temporary station on our passage down south. It feels like there is little reason for us to be here, which adds to a sense of lingering listlessness. Perhaps this is just because I am missing on duties, and remain in camp. No wonder it feels like time stands still when others work and toil, and I am forced to sit here, waiting for the bone in my chest to heal. Few more days. Few more days and it should be over.  
  
I've been pouring my mind into dawn drills, dredging up old lessons and knowledge from things I've learnt from books, Verril, training and experience. Condense it into lessons and theory I can pass on. The recruits could use some broader education, instead of just learning on how to swing a sword. Got two more new ones, one noble. Both human, Alessa and Elamros Darksbane. They're eager enough, at least. Drakemoor and Athelstan took them out foraging earlier, a good enough early task for them to tackle. I hope they stick around.  
  
Not much else to say. There was some camp chatter, seem Khil went out with some volunteers to cull trolls, but not all of them had gas hoods. Sparked a minor discussion. Ruthford and Athelstan butted heads over it, though it really didn't seem that much of an issue to me. Just a mistake that had to be corrected.  
  
Also spoke somewhat with the two flowers, it was pleasant enough. Athy seems fully and totally supportive of whatever Mithra will choose in the end. I was afraid that what happened some days ago would make her doubt her choice, but she seems to have forgiven me that as well. I wouldn't be surprised of she decided to refuse it, in the end. Would sadden me, though, I must admit.  
Cooked again, made a simple but tasty dish from some raptor cuts the foraging group brought back for me. Seems most people enjoyed it, so that's good.  
  
Also thought I heard Freyja just now. That's worrying. First I thought I saw Kristen, now I'm hearing Freyja. If these delusions persist, I might need to seek a medic. Maybe that cannonball shook my head a little more than was healthy.

# 48th of Scion

Lingering at Mudflat, seems like we've been her for a while now, though it can't be more than a few days. The entire place has an aspect of timeless isolation, which fills me with both wonder and some sense of fear. Like I'm going to be trapped her forever while the time around me continues moving forwards. A baseless fear at worst, of course, but still. The evenings at the campfire do bring back recent memories of the quiet evenings we spent in Meddler's Point in Orr, thinking about how we were going to spend leave. I think back at dancing in the sand, Celdric inebriated, surrounded by war, and still making the best of it. Mudflat doesn't feel so pressingly urgent, but the same sense of twilight is abound.  
  
Where Orr was dead, though, Bloodtide is alive, and beautifully so. At night, the bog comes alive around us, and you can hear insects buzzing, and the slow movement of distant water as beasts prowl around. Even the great north was never quite so alive with the whispering tremors of ice and stone. It pales in comparison. I do wonder what has happened of the Hyelk that used to live here. I did hear stories of how they were driven away by the oncoming risen, but I was not aware the displacement was so great that it had emptied all these lands. Perhaps once we have cleansed it of the dragon's influence, the frog-folk will return here in time.  
  
Apparently Freyja passed by the other day. I assume she did so to speak to Felix, and make peace as I asked of her. She did so late in the evening, and didn't think to wake me. I am not surprised she came all the way, and left again after that, she takes these matters serious, as she has cause to do. Seemed they settled matters without further trouble. Perhaps she is not as stubborn as we all thought her to be. It is good, either way. There are more serious matters to feud over, with folk who more readily deserve the ire of me and my kin. Woe to them when that time comes, but it is not now  
  
On more mundane matters, there was more guardian training by Kath. It seemed to go well, saw them summoning spirit weapons while I was seasoning the drake flanks I served for the evening meal. Don't know much about spirit weapons, but eh. Drank flanks were good food, and people seemed to enjoy it, cracking jokes. Should think about putting up some sort of boxing tournament within the ranks, there should be a few pair of strong folk willing to swing their fists about to some effect. It was all pleasant enough until I made the wrong joke to Xeyia, and she shut off. Wasn't ware that was all still so close to home for her. Shouldn't have do that, but we live to learn, I suppose.  
  
I spoke some words to the new recruit, Darksbane. Almost like a norn-name, that. Explained the basics and dispositions of the Chapter to him, and the two squadrons. Best he knows something about it before he shows up tomorrow, and flails around without purpose. During our discussion, I caught myself out on my own discontentment. Growing feeling that I am pouring my sweat and blood into an endless pit, and am doomed to tussle with the eternal reprimand. Bah.  
I need to *do* something, this idleness is driving me insane.

# 49th of Scion

Mudflat Camp, weather is still humid. Damp is affecting my tent canvas, saw some questionable blotches on the side. Cleaned it off in short order, and let it dry for a bit during the morning, up from the ground. Seemed to get rid of it well enough. Hopefully it wasn't mold, if that sets in, I'll have a real issue. At least it's drier than here than in the bogs proper, but only barely. Change my footwraps evey morning, and leave my boots out to dry every night, prevents you from getting Orrian-Foot.  
  
Had Darksbane and Alessa spar against each other, see what they could do. Alessa, surpisingly well appointed in her arms for a peasant hand, actually had the noble lad on his backfoot for a good while. A lot of efficient and to the point swordsmanship, apparently instructed by the local town milita out in the Ascalonian Settlement. Knowing the amount of Centaurs that pass by there, that means she got trained by proper veterans. Darksbane, on the other hand, seemed to struggle first, with his shield. It was only when he ditched it in favour of a focus, and started putting his magic into the fight, that he managed to win some advantage. Seemed to have some small issue modulating the strength of his spells, but that's it. Ended up making Alessa blind for a few minutes as a result of that, but thankfully nothing permanent. At least they both showed promise.  
  
Apparently, Calder did something weird on duty today. From what I can tell, Blade retreated away from one of those giant wurms they encountered, but then... the Knight just handed command over to Lorma and walked off, not bothering to explain why or where. Order is an order, though, so Lorma took the squad back to camp. Paced around restless when she just barged off, apparently having talked to the Warmaster, as a solo-rescue party, leaving the entirety of Blade with no acting field officer, and no clue where both their commanding officer, and principal yeoman officer went. Not sure what they were thinking, that was an exceptionally bad plan. Obviously, this caused one hell of a confusion. I informed Kath of the situation, who took the matter up with the Warmaster. They eventually headed out try and find them both, stumbling on them reporting back at Firthside. Beaumont wasn't happy though, and I can understand why.  
  
New recruit, female Charr called Jynx. Seems eager, interest in the scouts. I took Alessa and her to the side, and went over the Chapter basics for them. Just ranks, what they mean, and how they function. Also instilled the salute into their heads. That was problematic, apparently, but they got it right in the end. Scouts got an operation on the morrow. Athy seems to be taking some charge of the situation, to good effect. I hope she'll step up like Sana did in Orr.  
  
Fair enough evening for the remainder, I spoke with Athelstan and folk into the evening. Pleasant company, Mithy, Cheery, Zara, the new faces. We'll see how it goes tomorrow, I think.

# 50th of Scion

Starting to feel pointless mentioning this, but we still are at Mudlfat. I'm still injured and out on light duties only, which only makes me more acutely aware of our current position. Apparently, I'm not the only one who finds this place eerie, Ema expressed a similar concern earlier. Despite our isolation, though, we had two Whisper agents drop by on the same day. That one helmeted lad with this strange sense of familiarity about him that I can't place, and then another one going by the codename 'Glass'. Latter was talkative enough, spoke in rough and thumble Reacher dialect, and was pleasant enough talking at the fire.  
  
Still, with their activity in Bloodtide, I'm convinced we're right on top of one of their operating bases. Never seen this amount of them wander through what is supposed to be a quiet sector. At best, there are some Priory encampments out here, but not more. Wouldn't be surprised if several of the Whispers are getting antsy, and overplaying their hand by making sure we're not straying too near to them.  
I'm also still fairly certain something is up in Lion's Arch, in that regard. That tavern is suspect, and by extension, so is a certain someone that helped name it.  
  
But on to more immediate matters. Cheery did her medical lessons today, saw her entertain a gaggle of eager medical personnel as they crowded around individual 'volunteers', explaining treatment techniques. It was an interesting enough listen, even if I wasn't devoting my entire attention to it. Always something special about the art of healing, but somehow, I feel like I would be uniquely unfit for it. My shield may protect, but my sword and my strength destroy, and they are unkind. Even if War, whom I have come to respect more and more as a presence, would make way for the softer touch of Life and the kinder guidance of wiser spirits, I would rather avenge than nurture.  
  
Wolfsbane showed up again, to my pleasant surprise. She was in good spirits, though I could see the hunting here has bored her already. Wish I was more able, give her a good run for her money. I am more of a warrior than a hunter, but against a mighty enough foe, this line becomes blurred. If anything, the damn woman has awoken in me the desire to impress by skill at arms and personal glory, as if I was some youngling again. I can't deny it would please me to impress her. She issued me a challenge too, but scorned me for being wounded. She'll drive me mad. Hah, seems that, as opposed to her, I do have found a prey worthy of conquering.  
  
I made apple pie, on Athelstan behest, and it turned out pretty well! I had shared some of it, but then the hunting pets of my dear companions took to trying a bite themselves when my back was turned. Still, it wasn't too bad. Mithy, bless her bright-red head, happily scoffed down the rest. If she was even half as ferocious in fighting dragons as she was in devouring apple pie, she'd be the Terror of the South. Table manner of a starved Charr. She's worse than Freyj when discovered that bucket of zhaitaffy Usha had hid under her bed. At least Freyja was slowed down by the candy wrappers.  
  
Athy also took the scouts out on their planned mission. Happy to see her take lead in absence of Sana and Forgewoord. From what I can tell, they all performed well, and their attained their objectives with little issue. Hope that means that the lull in scouting activities was just that, a lull, before a reprise of their formal duties begins, headed by Athy. At least until Sana's back fit fer service. Did highlight an acute dysfunction in the scouting team's current leadership. I hope Athy's smart enough to address that with the officers directly, and not just serves up a temporary solution. Spirits, I might just outright talk to Athy about it, see what her thoughts are on the matter. I'm not a scout, but I understand the need for a functioning scouting division. If we go into terrain blind, it's the regular boots like me that will pay the price.  
  
Aside from that, everything seems to be going well. Rajani helped me out in the kitchen today. Lass has now decided to go with her warband name, Moonshield, which suits her fine. I wonder what Grim will take on. They're two of our better Charr, I think. Young, heart in the right place, not yet jaded by some of the High Legion nonesense the older Charr occasionally spew out. Means they've seen how the Vigil works, and will always keep an open mind to it, instead of constantly comparing it to 'naturally superior' Charr doctrine. I'm prone to echo Usha's idea on that; if we'd raise more Charr like norn, their race would be much better off, without trading in any of their might and ferocity.  
  
It's getting late now, again, to the point that the camp outside has mostly fallen silent, and made way to the sounds of the land. I can't help but listen to it, once more, and marvel at it. It strikes me every time. Life goes on, despite so many fortunes and misfortunes. Moments like this, coupled with inspiring and stirring people like Wolfsbane, or even Knight Beaumont, make me have little doubt that we will win this Great War. How could we not, aye? It seems so easy now, and I know it is but an illusion. Even so, it is good not to be gripped too much with doubt, and feel purposeful. A fire in my heart and in my soul.

# 51st of Scion

This place must be haunted, or cursed. People seem to find us with disturbing regularity, and we are neither on a major passage, or close to anywhere of real importance. How, and why, are these people managing to show up? I can understand Kristen, and even some of the Order of Whisper agents peeking their nose about, but spirits alive. Wanderers, trailblazers and even a lost Vigil Tactician trying to get to Claypool. Claypool!  
One even stepped foul of the Knight, and ended in getting into a fight. Nearly had the rest of the Chapter down in their neck for it. Pickets must be doing a shite job, letting everything through. Next time I'm on picket, I'm shooting first, and challenging later. This is getting too eerie.  
  
Apparently a taxing day, Kath took the entire Chapter out on a patrol duty to some Sylvari grove. Painfully apparent in line-up to see that the senior, *and only*, Blade ranker was Lyralii. Meanwhile, Lance was staffed with Kathleen and Ironside in the field, and Athelstan remained at camp with me for the duration. I just hope that this is not symptomatic of a larger issue, or something that could have easily be prevented. Times like this that I wish that I was fit for duty, and able to shoulder some of that, instead of being forced to sit at the sidelines. Bah. Seems like I've been repeating that over and over and over again these past few days. I'll talk to Cheery again, see how long she still thinks I'll be out of order.  
  
Had Alessa help out in the kitchen today, made a dish of her own homestead. Had to dip into the luxury wine rations normally reserved for the officers, but only for the sauce base. Aside from that, people really seemed to have enjoyed it. We both decided to pick her up in the field cooks, so she can pitch in with Rajani and myself. Between the three of us, we should have an easy time of providing the Chapter with food.  
  
Azzis rejoined us, quite a surprise to see the troublemaker show up again, we all thought she had transferred out after Orr. Guess not! She was almost too tired to stand, though, so we'll talk more on the morrow. She'll meet with a changed Chapter, that's for sure. Wonder if she has any good tales to tell of what happened in between.  
  
Aside from all of that, Khil seemed to have had some 'fun' by throwing down a fireball into the middle of the campfire and the cooking pot, causing a minor panic. Questionable wisdom in that, and caused one hell of a ruckus, not to mention it wasted a good part of our leftovers. I wasn't very amused. In fact, no-one was. Kath was stood right next to it, and didn't even reprimand him, let alone levy any sanctions. If a recruit discharged a fiirearm near camp borders without permission, they'd have them running laps until the end of the century, but a Crusader starts conjuring bloody *firestorms* and puts half of everyone on alert? Better gloss over that. Sometimes I do wonder...  
  
Xeyia got wounded badly as well. Apparently had one of the risen bloaters explode on her, but shooed away any medical help, despite being fairly badly injured. She just wandered off, of course, and keeled over, having lost a fair amount of blood. Kath found her, thankfully, and called for a medic. They treated her, and she's now knocked out in medical. Hope she pulls through okay.  
  
Tense day, for some reason, everyone was tired and drawn out. I'm not sure if it's only me, or collectively felt, but morale isn't all that good. Not much chances to improve it either, means it'll just get chipped away little by little until everyone is sick and tired of being in this damned place. Already affecting me. I've been doing nothing but trying to keep this fire going.

# 52nd of Scion

Eventful day today. We're still at Mudlfat, but the little illusion of isolation was shattered rather abruptly. Force and I took out some of the troops for some rifle exercise, and some formation training. Force can't fot shite, by the by. Zara joined in with her heavy weapon, and made such a racket with that big bore weapon of her, she was almost unwilling to continue to fire. Not entirely sure if that was smart, it served little purpose to actually discharge weapons, even though we had some token target practice. Worth was virtually nill, in the end, aside from some theoretical knowledge, and a quick review of a rifle-butt drill we didn't have a chance to rehearse.  
  
Seems the noise drew out some pirates, which disrupted our exercise. Luckily, we were on point, and we managed to to form a perimeter around camp before they reached us, beating them back. They legged it soon enough, though, guess they weren't expecting to run into a Chapter stationed out here, but more for an easy raiding score. More fool them I suppose, though we set more pickets out.  
  
We also had a thief steal a keg of our tinned moa, and a few cans of apple slices. This happened somewhere during the rifle drill, so our group didn't even realise until afterwards. Apparently some troops pursued the thief, an Asura from the sound of Kath's shouting earlier. Damn thief dumped the food, and then blew himself up. I guess they mistook us for pirates, and hoped to avoid capture, but we'll never know. Another theory is that they did it to draw some of our troops away from camp prior to the pirate raid. If that was the point, they achieved their goal, even if the attack didn't actually carry. Got Knight Beaumont in a fury, though, she was dressing down the troops that pursued pretty angrily. All together, it made for a hectic evening.  
  
We finally had a chance to relax a little afterwards. Kristen showed up, and we shared a cigar and a talk. We shared some signals, I think, made it clear in no uncommon terms that we see value in eachother, and not just merely for the necessity of it. Good, I'm happy. Almost relieved, in a way, though there's still a ways to go. We spoke of the 'lodge of the Dragonhunters', a joke between us about settling in the fallen corpse of a dragon. Excited for the hunt, though, we both are.  
  
Spend the remainder of the evening with a dizzy Cheery and Ruthford, both dosed on painkillers with what looks like concussions. They were funny enough company, and making some jokes at their expense was worth a healthy chuckle. They're good people, and I'm fond of them both. It helped to sooth the tensions of the day down a little.

# 53rd of Scion

We've moved camp, now situated at Deadman's Reach. A bleak name, but the encampment is solid enough. Weather is mild, humid and warm, but there is some wind which makes it more bearable. We're set on an island on the western side of the swamps here, which means we're isolated from our land-line supply routes. Our relief position for seaside resupply is more flexible, but supply vessels would have to cross bodies of water infested with risen to reach us. Seems like we're essentially operating on our long-duration rations, and whatever fresh forage we can gather. That doesn't seem to be an issue, though, the Hylek maintain farm fields right outside camp, and there are grubs and boars out. At least we'll eat comfortably, and foraging will keep the troops busy.  
From a military standpoint, the encampment is quite solid, we have a palisade wall, even though it of questionable building quality, and a single ingress and egress point, meaning we won't have trouble with people trying to sneak up on us. There's a short killing field outside the gate, the watchtowers have clear lines of sight for a fair spot into the distance, overlooking the water and the southern parts of the island readily. All in all, barring an open supply line, the position isn't bad.  
Despite that, though, we were attacked by a force of Risen shortly after we arrived, and they managed to force two breaches before the holes were hastily patched. Nothing we can't handle, though.  
  
Was cleared for active duty again! Finally. Khil made me do some exercises to see if I wasn't still suffering some hampering or aftereffects, but he seemed content with how it went. Immediately reported to Knight Calder to resume my duties, which we enjoyed to full effect. Turns out Blade had a demolitions mission scheduled for some krait outpost, which we undertook readily enough. Force, Lyralii and myself made up the demolitions team, and we had a signal system worked out to ensure everyone got clear of the blast. Hardly needed it, in the end, we managed to sneak up on them, and wire up the structure with little difficulty. We pulled out smoothly, barring some minor confusion, but ended up blowing the structure cleanly. Had a chance to observe the damages when we crossed, they were considerable. Chapter made use of the storm boats and the flotation canisters today. Happy to see that those tools are getting into their own right as far as employment is going. Certain amount of pride in it. Have to look at the canisters, though. They tend to drift to your back, dipping you at an awkward angle. Might be better fitting them into so sort of harness.  
  
Regardless, I had a good smoke after a job well done in the new camp. Can't say I'm sad to leave Mudflat behind, that place was irking me immensely. Good spirits, as a result, there was some good chatter around the campfire, and people were swapping jokes and stories, as well as Athy singing songs. Alessa and Rajani had kitchen service today, and they cranked out a respectable meal between themselves, with little oversight. They even called and served the meal themselves. It was quite good, though Ruthford apparently doesn't like his greens. Pity, they were tasty. Layfon reminded me of this tale about that sailor who ate spinach to gain enormous superhuman strength and beat off pirate raiders, before returning home a warrior-king. Always found that a good tale, even though it's for children. Perhaps we relate; eating some things both gives us great strength.  
  
We must have entered the old hunting grounds of Hejja by this stage, gauging by the Hylek and the Krait. I admit, it is different from what I had imagines, there is more open water, and less actual overgrowth, at least this far north. I wonder if we will find anything left of the places where she used to live. Others might have seized or destroyed anything of worth in the long years since her perishing. I much would like to venture out and try and find something. I'm sure Freyja would already have set off in search of the Dark-Eater, alas, we are now too far south to be easily reachable. It will be some time more before I see her again, I think.  
  
The Hylek themselves are curious folk. The ones directly south of us are green, and gentle enough. They seem to live in the fields, and hunt and eat larvae. I've seen them go about their business, spearing fish and eating up the fat grubs that dig around in the dirt. I hope I can find some way to trade one of them for one of their ovens, maybe by offering something of worth that they like. Spirits, maybe we could set some people to work for them as payment. I'll have to ask Lyralii again, maybe she wants to negotiate with the tribe elder of the grub-eaters about it.  
  
Now that I'm fit, I should also want to see if I can get permission to venture out with Kristen at one point or another, though I doubt they'll sway to the notion unless I give them a good reason. Ah well, if not we can always see what the dawn brings us, and live with what we are given.

# 54th of Scion

Deadman's Reach has proven to be a reliable enough camp, though the risen infestation is much worse than we imagined. We beat off an attack, and sent out a probing patrol on my suggestions, headed with Mithra, to find out where they were coming from. Seems that the risen are lurking just beyond the Hylek fields, sprawling out across the isle entirely. Whatever that means, it isn't good. We also found a tower out in the middle. Saint Clair said he's heard about it before, claimed that it was inhabited by a powerful wraith of some sort. If anything, that makes it a priority target. Hopefully Mithra forwards her report, and we can deal with it sooner or later.  
  
Rest of the day passed in relative quiet, as far as you can claim that with two risen assaults happening. They seem to be probing us irregularly, before breaking off once we start resisting, however. Probably intent on wearing us down. Given the risen, they'd probably a win a war of attrition. It only confirms that they're still high on manpower, while we're eternally struggling to gain footholds. Spirits, they're this far north in such numbers. That is troubling indeed, and it'll only get worse and worse the more we move south, and get close to Orr proper.  
  
We found a wounded civilian out near by, claiming to be a shipwreck survivor. They were wounded pretty badly, but we patched them up. Managed to interrogate them pretty thoroughly, but they turned out to be less than co-operative. Decided to place them under arrest and confiscate their weaponry until an officer can figure out what to do. Not much choice anyway, we're on an island, for all intents and purposes surrounded by risen infested waters. Not exactly the sort of environment you can set people loose in if you expect them to survive. Saying that, from their weapons, I don't think they would have had much issue dispatching a few score of risen on the way.  
  
The rest of the evening passed quietly enough. Listened to Mithra and Athy tell horror tales about tremites. Seems the Sylvari are terribly icky about the bugs, because they apparently burrow down into their skin, which isn't an exceptionally pleasant notion, after all. I do think it's a little silly, they're just insects. The Hylek seem pretty happy about them, I've seen them treat the hives with chemicals, and eat them as snacks.  
About the Hylek, seems their territorial nature has imposed itself somewhat, they keep neatly to their fields, never straying to our camp. I can only guess they see the palisade as a territory marker. Meanwhile, they work and plod through the fields. I've seen some of their hunters spear-fish, and use lures to catch giant mosquitos and spiders, which they seem to devour happily. They're an interesting, if primal, folk.  
  
Tomorrow, I'll be going back to basic fight school for dawn drills, get our new folk ready and able to use their weapons. I'll also be spending some time with Darksbane, who needs to have his skills with his shield looked at by someone who knows how to wield one. He's been complaining about having issues, saying it hampers his combat abilities. If it's something physical about stance or usage, I'll iron it out.  
  
I haven't seen Kristen yet, though that helmeted Order fellow did show up. I hope she manages to track us down based on what the Priory folk told her at Mudflat. Pity the move cam so short notice, she could have joined us for it. Only sparse hunting to be done on risen, though, now I think of it. Might have to think of something else to pass the time. [short break]  
That was more suggestive than I intended.  
I think I'm going to sleep with that thought.

# 55th of Scion

Deadman's Reach. Eerie name for a place, put I guess that's how sailors and pirates name these sort of things. Water probably used to be thick with privateers and corsairs before the Risen swamped the entire place. The swamps must have been foreboding places, the shallow waters the spawning grounds of Hylek tribes and the deeper, darker, corners plagued by krait slavers. For the more northern folk to bring ships and vessels here must have been brave. For us, now, it feels foolhardy, as if it only becomes more and more difficult to traverse the untamed lands, and the wildlife makes way for risen and death. At least it feels like we're truly on the frontier, here. I wonder though, if anything but the final goal is even useful. Our lone camp stands far away from civilisation that it is hard to imagine what good we can do here, except hack and swim and wade our way all the way south to this fearsome dragon we are to slay.  
  
I am looking forwards to that, however odd that may sound. I'm aware that few others share the sentiment, but I am too much a man of my species to not relish the prospect an exceptionally hard and challenging fight. I stand ready to meet and overcome this foe, an ultimate test of my prowess in battle. Few can claim to have fought and killed dragons, and it would be an honour and a feat I gladly claim. Wolfsbane too stands to earn herself a new name, if not more. I think we have seen our side of Tyria's worst enemies, barring the monsters I hear tell of out in the West. It will not be long before there will be nothing left to make me sleep ill at night!  
  
Today was quiet, all in all. I saw Boom Moon do more of her guardian training, and paid some attention this time. Plenty of spirit weapons being summoned, could feel my hands tinging. Burns healed, but the skin will never be the same colour as it was. The trainees did well enough, except the monk girls, who sent hers flying off. Darksbane seems to be entirely unable to conjure one. The helmeted Order man, apparently going by the name 'Bastard' seems to have taken an interest and tried to get Darksbane to train. Seems the lad suffers from a haunting legacy; the spirit of his father badgers him about how he should fight, impeding his potential. I'm set to help him out with his shieldwork, but I'm afraid there is not much more I will be able to do except tell him he needs a lighter one. The less I talk about magic, the better, too. Freyja might have been able to teach him something if she was here.  
  
I do sort of my miss her now and again, but I have other companions and friends here. Kristen, when she is around, helps a lot to provide a memory of home, and Mithra can always count on some manner of fatherly affection from me. I do miss Sana, though, as I do her quips and smooth smugness. Been a while since I've written, might do so on the morrow. If we're lucky, it'll get back to a message relay point sooner or later. Damn morass has cut off all communication and supplies.  
  
Rajani and Alessa have been doing sterling work in the kitchen. They seem to work well together, for some reason, taking much work out of my hands. It's not unwelcome, means I can get to rest easy from time to time, and let those two knock their heads together when they try and conjure up a nice meal. So far, not been let down, they've been using the forage and supplies pretty smartly, even though they do seem fond of making stews. I have nothing against stews, but there is always a risk of making too much of it. Variation and texture!  
I might whip out something myself tomorrow, send out another foraging party.  
  
The prisoner I mentioned yesterday was interrogated extensively by both Boom Moon and Calder today, and from what I can gleam, it's not looking pretty for the Charr lass. Seems she was up smuggling some sort of Orrian artefact out north to Lion's Arch. Claims it was all legal, but that's hard to verify. Seems most everyone who could speak in her favour is either dead or missing. If anything, the entire thing smells of Dolyak manure. Wonder what we'll end up doing, setting them loose here is pretty much a death sentence, and we're not really set out to deal with captives out here. Guess we'll have to see what becomes of it in the end.  
  
Aside from the above, camp's been at ease.  
  
[PS: enjoy these fifteen pages of daily free content? Leave a commendation! I appreciate my positive feedback and the accompanying rush of pleasant chemicals released in my brain.]

# 56th of Scion

Seems to be the definition of a slow day today. Ventured out of Deadman's Reach twice today, once on a mostly uneventful patrol with Lyralii, the other a foraging forray with Marcus.  
  
We did pass over a remarkable stone bridge, and more old remnants of stone buildings, including passing by that tower Raphael mentioned the other day. Guess there must have been roads or keeps here, long, long ago? Maybe the remnants of ancient Kryan holdings, now long given up on. Wouldn't surprise me, the human kingdom was a fair set larger when Lion's Arch was still its capital. That was all so long ago though.  
The moss-encrusted masonry looks decrepit, but the construction still holds, despite mold and rot likely having eaten into the cement. Half expected the thing to collapse, but it carried my weight well enough.  
  
There also was a tiny human encampment further down south, and several Hylek villages scattered across the island. Risen stalked the undergrowth, though, so it is hardly safe. The forgman-warriors must be fighting a constant battle to maintain their territory. Wouldn't surprise me if we were to conduct supporting operations for them in the next few days. Might even be part of the deal Lyralii can suss out.  
The smaller encampment was right next to some sort of hollow passage through a rock, filled with bats. Had some sport cleaning them out, but nothing of not. Surprised why no shelter was made there, though, it looked more inviting that settling on the beach, especially with these short but cold rains that pass over once and again.  
  
Foraging went well, nearly got gored by a boar when we spooked it. The norn mesmer woman, Marthe, was quick enough to stop it, thankfully, blinked out right past and skewered the thing on her blade. Better than spending another few days in medical, I wager, I was only just released.  
As revenge on the wild proker, we had boar cuts for dinner. Alessa helped me with the preparation, and the troops seemed to enjoy it well enough. Will make skale fin soup tomorrow, something simple but hearty.  
  
Anyway, Lance had physical labour duty, so they all came back exhausted. Not much talk happened, as a result, and most people took an early rest. Suits me fine, means I can go over my notes for tomorrow training and review my engineering duties.  
  
Regardless, as I said near the fire just now: a slow day is a good day for a soldier.

# 57th of Scion

Deadman's Reach weathered another Risen assault. Seemed a bit more committed this time, but the troops rallied well enough and we threw them out by retaining the defensive positions. The wall had to be patched up again, though, some abominations smacked right into it again. Thankfully, there's a supply of timber ready, so bracing it up was a trivial enough task.  
  
Aside from that, the day passed with little of note. The soldiers were quiet, and aside from a minor gender related incident between Alessa and Voxkk, all was quiet. I made some skale fin soup with noodles for the evening mess, hope people enjoyed that. Oh, Lyralii has told me we might be heading out near to some Hylek sooner or later, so we can do that trade for my field oven. That'd be nice, allow some more versatility in the cooking and the meals. Besides, with some fresh eggs, I have all I need for some quality pastries and pies. Better keep a quart of baker's supplies to the side specifically to that end.  
  
Wolfsbane came by again, had to track us down, though I think she enjoyed that. Her humour was good, though she was a little tired. We had a pleasant chat over a bowl of the fin soup, before she went to sleep. Didn't bother me, though, I enjoyed the presence in itself. It was impolite to linger too long, so I retreated myself shortly after. Wolfsbane, though. What a woman. I find it difficult not to just act out on the desire. But then, the playful boasting and grand-standing is its own fun too, and we're both happy to play along with the tension. Oh, you golden-haired warrior women!  
Wonder if she'd get along with Freyja at all. Something tells me they would either become great friends, or dire enemies.  
  
Aside from all that, I've been given new tasks by Engineering. Should get started on that, Ironside wants me to do a review of our engineering equipment, for the benefit of our officers. I'll go over the projects I oversaw myself first, before picking through the stocks and contacting the other engineers. Might be a bit of work, but nothing major.  
Lyralii and Kraxxi, on a related note, are thinking over my mini-laser idea. Lyralii didn't instantly shout me down, which is a plus, so I hope they have some valuable input. Might even be able to sell the concept to Vethrir wholesale. Oh, he also wants me to arm the storm boats. At this rate, I'll have to design a portable battleship, and we can become the Ashen Fleet, headed by War-Admiral Willhem. It did get me thinking about improving the storm boats even more, so I'll go over that shortly. Might even come to a Mk. III before the tour is out.  
  
It's been a while since I've felt properly and deeply inspired. It seems Orr, that weirdly distant magical place, lit a fire in everyone's heats, and drove us almost mad. I feel it draw me again, as if my spirit and my mind desires the brutal and passionate inspirations that were inflicted on me there. As if I, above all else, thirst for madness on a secret, hidden level in my soul. And it is true, I do feel as if I am drained of the lyrical power and near-divine fury and melancholy that gripped me then. Spirits, not even Wolfsbane, about whom I would certainly feel inclined to become impassioned, doesn't light that same flame as was lit in the beachside camp in Malchor's Leap. Somehow, after that, it feels like it has all come crashing down in the most banal normality.  
  
Or I am being melancholic because I am idle, and itching to get into a good fight. It might be that. A warrior without war is not much, after all.

# 58th of Scion

Deaman's Reach, weather clear and open for the time being, even though some mild rain has been falling. Some mud and muck linger around, but when it passes, the sun dries it up right again. It's surprisingly dusty; the rocks here keep a lot of surface dirt, which we keep kicking up. With the humidity, it just means it clings to all the uncomfortable spots. Spirits, I'm happy I'm not wearing the plate armour here, would have clean it near daily.  
  
Vethrir seemed to be in good humour today, decided he wants to create a rifle for me? Knowing him, it is either something with a unhealthy caliber, or it includes copious amounts of white phosphorus. I'm excited, as opposed to terrified, which should tell you something about how infectious Ironside's madness actually is. Looking at some of the designs they've been making, it's a surprise we haven't all just exploded into varying sized clouds of fine pink mist.  
  
We took action against that tower we spotted earlier. Boom Moon marched the full Chapter over to it with a demolitions order. Getting there was easy enough, despite a growing number of risen opposing us. Blowing the entire thing sky high only brought forth the wraith. We managed to fight it well enough, which should throw a wrench into the risen's planning for the next few moments. We sweeped through a fallen Hylek village, before pulling it all back to camp. Had to help beat off a risen attack that had crept up around us, but that was little effort.  
They came at us one more time, but we managed to hold the defense line again. Drakemoor and Darksbane broke the line and ventured out of the fort proper. I tried calling them back, because leaving a fortified position with a height advantage is just generally not a good idea. Doubly so because it gave us a chokepoint against the risen, meaning their usual numbers advantage was nullified. Then Athelstan, the bleeding idiot, decided it was a good idea to reprimand me for that *in the middle of combat*, instead of dealing with the two recruits breaking line, claiming I was "giving orders" because I told them to get back in the defense line. So now we're no longer allowed to give fellow soldiers vital advice in the field, because that constitutes as giving orders. Landed me two days of morning duty; the same as Darksbane got for causing the entire bloody mess. Makes no sense, what-so-ever.  
  
Far as I am aware, making sure your unit cohesion remains intact takes bloody priority. If one of those two morons had gotten injured, the rest of the unit would have been forced to leave their position in order to recover them, leaving a gaping hole in the camp's defenses. But no, better to immediately subvert the person trying to prevent that by giving them an admonishment! Wouldn't want someone to prevent two recruits to put the entire camp, and thus the Chapter, in jeopardy, would we?  
  
Bah. Incompetent lout. Little to do but accept the punitive duties, though, even though I will have to cease my dawn drill instructions until I'm done with those. Can't do both at the same time. I told Alessa as much, suggesting she practiced with the blade on her own, or find another tutor. I hope she'll pass on the news, so that the trainees don't show up with their greatswords ready in the morning, only to be dismissed. She didn't seem amused by the notion, though, and took great issue with it. Hope she doesn't do anything stupid, not worth it, really.  
  
Anyway, aside from that spike of annoyance, the day passed well enough. Have a feeling we're about to move camp sooner or later, not much else to be done on this isle, unless the tower wasn't the source of the risen here. The Hylek tribes should have some breathing room to fight back.  
Regardless, another day on the morrow.

# 59th of Scion

Don't think I would ever say this, but we're now camped out at the Zintl Holy Grounds. Possibly one of the most religious sites the Hylek know, from what I understand of their sun-worshiping culture. One of the largest Hylek villages I've seen, set in the shadow of a large tree, the roots of which dig through solid rock. They have erected a large temple building in the middle, and have put down elaborate mosaics made out of clay tiles around the floors. They are beautiful in their simplicity, and while primitive, betray a richness that none of the human temples in the Reach can match these days. They're a proud and stoic folk, the Hylek, in their own way, and my respect for them has only grown now I have passed by here.  
  
The site itself is fortified, and surrounded by a hardened earthwork wall about as tall as I am. It is a surprisingly sturdy, and has so far managed to hold the risen at bay. There's gates to the south, north-west and north-east, each leading to a forwards watch camp. There are Hylek warriors throughout from different tribes, fighting the risen off daily.  
Supply wise we're not great. I think, at this point, we're closer to Fort Trinity than we are to Lion's Arch, and this place is virtually unreachable by land or sea. Luckily, though, the Pact air-supply line between Trinity and Lion's Arch runs almost directly overhead. If push comes to shove, we could get relieved that way.  
  
As it stands, though, the risen are at our door. The soldiers of the Chapter that is already stationed here, Horizon Chapter, claims this has been ongoing for as long as they've been here. Sometimes the Hylek gain some ground, and there is relative peace for a few days, but the risen always return to harass the outposts, and occasionally make a push to the Holy Grounds themselves. We got there at such a point, with the risen battering down the gates, and rampaging around the inner yards. Those Hylek that could not fight had locked themselves in the temple, while the warriors and the Pact soldiers here tried to repel them. Our timely arrival allowed us to roll them back out, and we quickly managed to drive them out.  
  
Warmaster tasked engineering with doing a defense assessment. Meadows and I went around south, and spotted some risen krait attacking the southern watchpost. Xeyia rounded up some troops, and set us off south. We were already engaged when she mentioned we didn't actually have an officer's permission for this foray. At least we got away cleanly. On the one hand, I am pleased we were able to take action quickly and cleanly without any formalities, and on the other hand I am annoyed that we put ourselves in a position that would have caused the ire of spirits know who.  
  
Major item worth noting is that there is a giant tunnel going through the northside of camp, down to the beach. It goes through solid rock, below the tree I mentioned earlier. Looks like it used to be a water bed, or an underground waterfall. Regardless, despite the initial notion, it was more secure than we expected. There's a natural bend near a narrowing of the tunnel that creates an excellent natural strong point from where we can defend it. We thought about creating it into a minefield, but the Hylek use it as a hunting path. That, and there is tiny village set in a hidden nook right outside the cave. There was an especially fierce looking red Hylek warrior sat near it, who regarded us with hostile curiosity. I suspect he is some sort of Sun Champion, or a great warrior, who keeps watch there. Knowing how Hylek like their tribal fighting, he must be a formidable opponent. Maybe I will find a chance to speak with him, or even test my strength against his!  
Regardless, Engineering decided to fortify the bend with some light siege engines. Meadows seems to be interested in working those out. If positioned correctly in the tunnel, two men could back a legion of risen there. So that's a whole we'll get plugged right quick.  
  
Camp itself is agreeable enough, Horizon Chapter has already set up accommodations. We have our own Vigil corner here. There's also two Priory historians wandering about, but they keep to themselves mostly. Quartermaster managed to get me my oven, so that's brilliant. Hope to put that to use sooner rather than later.  
  
There was this curiously cheery Sylvari sprout around, apparently a refugee herself. From what I can tell, she used to captain a ship, but was marooned. Or at least, she was forced to come here, and seek shelter with the Hylek. I have some mild suspicions about her, but I don't think it matters much anymore now. Was another Sylvari, wearing a hood, and under a vow of silence, too. Apparently delivering messages. Suspect to say the least, but I lost sight of him after the meal was served.  
  
Wasn't all for today's excitement, we were called in to repel another two attacks on the south and north-east watch camps. Fought hard enough to push them out, though Darksbane took a minor injury. Have a feeling this encampment is going to be eventful.  
  
Spent the rest of the evening talking, mostly with Alessa and Cheery. It was good, actually, been a while.

# 60th of Scion

Zintl Grounds.  
Observed the Hylek perform the greeting to the sun at dawn. They were assembled before the temple looking east, standing over the sun mosaic with their heads raised towards the horizon. We could see the faint red glow bleed over into the sky, heralding the arrival of Zintl, the great sun god of the Hylek. It was the shaman who then spoke the greeting, heralding in the new days as the first rays crested the distant peaks of the Steamspurrs, drawn up on the horizon. The frogmen, separating themselves by tribe, and brandishing spears, welcomed the first rays with some sort of dance, croaking and inflating their chests. The red kin of the Sun Champion were the fiercest, and theirs seemed to be less of a dance than an ornate weapons drill, hoping and lunging, fighting the shadows as they were slowly banished by the rising sun. It was over soon after, and the assembled tribes dispersed back to their respective corners of the Holy Grounds. It was an impressive sight, I think, and perhaps part of why the frogkin's resolve has not yet faltered. They are blessed daily by the arrival of their deity, in whose fiery wrath they find energy to stand against the risen. All which touches the sun is theirs, and they will not let the darkness take it. I spoke with one, a yellow skin, who told me that above all else, he fears the day that a new dawn comes without a sun. Paradoxical, perhaps, but it reminded me of the old tales, where heroes of old were afraid of the day the sky would fall down on their heads. The Hylek, a Tlamatini called Ocuatatl, imparted me with a final greeting: *"praise be to Zintl! It is proper to praise him."*  
  
I have never consider piety a virtue of my people. We are too practical a folk to value faith for the value of faith itself, and we readily heap scorn on the humans for their empty gods. Why worship that which does not answer? It is why the lodge of Owl stands empty. We much prefer adhering to the lessons imparted on us by wise and noble spirits that guide us in what we do, who we are, and what we aspire to achieve. Those worthy reap the rewards readily enough. It is when you see the chosen of bear lift dolmen with their bare hands, or when those blessed by wolf are able to track prey for months on end that you wonder why the norn have not yet achieved greater things. Had we been more like Charr or humans, the world would have trembled indeed. Fortunately, we care more for good ale and a good hunt than we care for the conquest of land. Besides, we have never known a king or lord, and I doubt we ever will.  
And yet it is in moments like those I described earlier that I see glimpses of what faith brings out in people. The human adage that faith can move fountains might well be true in that. The most stalwart and determined people I have known have always believed in something.  
  
Chapter itself did little today, just some perimeter patrol duties to outlying camps. Risen infest the area, and they're under constannt siege. I hope our patrols at least relief some pressure, and buy some vital time for the frogmen to recover. Rather not consider how bad it would be without out assitance. The Hylek are well enough as warriors, but when it comes to killing risen? A Vigil Chapter; accept no substitute.

# 61st of Scion

The siege of the Holy Grounds continue. The risen stalk around the encampment and raid us constantly. We're like an island, kept afloat by the watch posts. The situation is dire indeed, and it's becomming clear why the Vigil has sent us out here. Buffeted in the south by Trinity, the risen that wash ashore in the bogs here are all driven northwards. Trinity cannot control both the Orrian strait, and the hintherland that stretches north. And so it has come to pass that a monstrous dragon champion has taken the lands here, and corrupted it. The Hylek tribes and villages, once many, now all shelter here in the Holy Grounds, a place where even territorial differences are forgotten. I spoke to one of the red-skins, who said that he would normally have tried to slay me, if his chief had not told me doing so would be counter-productive to their very survival. In their own way, they have seen the value of the Pact, and the notion that standing together unified against a single, greather, threat is ultimately what is needed for Tyria to survive.  
  
I have decided to talk to them more. Especially Ocuatatl seems keen in knowing more about us, and is thus willing to answer my questions, if I answer his. He asks me about weapons of war, and how we have fought and killed Zaithan in the past. He was impressed about the tales of tanks and airships, though he did not quite seem to understand the scale of our war. He himself has 'travelled far', but seemingly has never ventured much further than a score days march away from his spawning grounds, and keeps asking me about the Vigil tribe, and why so many of us are so different, yet coloured the same. It was good talking. He was impressed by our fighting prowess, having seen Hoirzon Chapter and our own in action several times. He says that for their kin, I am a Tlamatani, an armoured warrior, and asked if I would train for war with the warriors of his tribe tomorrow. I agreed, of course, though I am not sure what to expect.  
  
Today's duties saw us return all the way to Mudflat for some supplies. We found the camp in shambles, seems the pirates picked off the Priory folk wafter we left. Spirits, that was bad. We managed to recovered the supplies, though, more or less, and made the treck back with little to no issue. Still though, blasted pirates.  
  
Today's camp fare was good. Spoke with the Hoirzon cook, called Kurve. Seems the Hylek are more than willing to cede some foodstuffs to us in exchange for what we do, provided we show proper respect to the sun god. Managed to get some tunas and a pot of honey, which I baked in the new oven. People seemed to like it a lot, so that good. Oven itself was brilliant. Simple, yet effective. The tuna steaks were still juicy and absolutely delicious.  
  
Wonder where Kristen's been. Hope she didn't run afoul of the risen, and is still tracking us. Getting close to that dragon, after all, and I'd like to ask her if she can show me some tricks with a bow.

# 62nd of Scion

We remain at the Holy Grounds, though the siege seemed to have abated a little until at the very end of the day. The weather remains in some sort twilight, with alternating bouts of rain and sunny weather. We've been able to settle in more or less, however, which is good. The Hyelk do not seem to mind us much, and the fact that I did praise the sun god before making food the day before has engendered us some more good will. I trained with Ocuatatl and some of his Tlamatini this morning, and they showed me how they usually use their spade-spears. They're broad-headed, and as much a slashing pole-weapon as they are stabbing spears. The frog-folk use their powerful jind legs to leap up and jab down with them, putting their weight behind it. The wounds caused must be grievous. I showed them how well I could wield sword and shield, and how I fight with my size and weight as well. They were impressed enough, and have agreed to teach me more tomorrow. I also spotted one of the red skins watching us with some curiosity. I've heard they're the most fierce warriors of the Hylek, but also the least cordial.  
  
Sana's back, which is grand news. Just casually sauntered into camp, and went straight to Kath. Good to see her again, can't say that I haven't missed her. She looked good, too, little slimmer than previous, but the red cap was back. Didn't have too much time to talk, she seemed tired, and I'm sure Kath wasn't going to let her go for too long. Still, a lot of people were happy to see her again. Also means I might be able to tie her down to help with dawn drills again, when it comes to archery. Not to mention that scouting can really use her hand again.  
  
Aside from that, today's duties were comparatively light. We headed out for a perimeter patrol past the watch camps, and engaged some risen while out there. Nothing exceptional, until we bumped into Wolfsbane tussling with an abomination. Tried to light it on fire, and it just swiped at her. We killed it off in short order though, so nothing to worry about too much. Spent the rest of the evening chatting together, joking about. Even dug up a flask of the good stuff when no-one was looking, though it was empty far too quickly. Kristen's still looking forwards to the dragon-slaying, as can be expected, though the lack of good prey around here does mean she'll be sticking closer to us here than before. I don't mind at all, though. Helped her set up her camping spot, and decided we'd watch the Hylek greet the dawn early tomorrow. Sight worth sharing with someone, I'd wager.

# 63rd of Scion

The Zintl Holy ground. Starting to feel more like impromptu garrison duty here, though the accomodations are sufficient, and the Hylek are curiously gracious in allowing our presence. If anything, I find myself looking at the with mounting respect every day. Ocuatatl seemingly has decided that he will teach me how to fight like a true *Zintl Tlamatini*, loosely translated as 'one that knows of the sun', which seems to be the Hylek way of the warrior for his tribe, the Ni-tlacua, under the chieftain Necuamtal. Their tribe has long helped hold these grounds against the risen, which they call the sunless, and they take great pride in their martial skill. We will see tomorrow, I wager. In return, I will teach his warriors how to operate the engines of war Meadows has been building for them. A fair trade, I think. I've also learned who the red-skins are; they are a tribe called the Occuintl that live east of here. It seems they make war on the other Hylek as often as they do on the risen, and not all of them understand the need for unity we see in the Holy Grounds here. The Bogotl tribe, who claims this territory, only admits them reluctantly. Ocuatatl has mentioned that one of the Occuintl chiefs, Calatl, has taken an interest to the Vigil troops, which explains why the red-skins seems to be watching us. Nothing to be worried, though, the interest seems benign.  
  
Today's duties were kept easy, Ironside was put into squadron command today. Bit unusual to have someone from Lance take over, but I don't mind overly. Ironside's less overbearing than the other two cats that usually run the show. We went through a repeat of that one exercise in Malchor where everyone tried to break through my defense. Didn't get very far, though, Mithy managed to jolt my legs with some electricity that sort of clocked me out of it. Wasn't entirely expecting it, truth be told, always thought electric magic was more of a pure combat aspect. Eh well, not a mage. These spars grate me, though, because I'm not allowed to move much. Sort of makes it hard to do anything aside from standing there and keeping your shield up.  
  
Aside from that, camp seemed quiet enough, though we should set out foragers tomorrow, just to be sure. Kristen also brightened up the evening a fair bit, joining us at the fire for a late evening chat. Got talking about running another Chapter Ball to mark the end of the tour; she seemed interested enough. Got talking about dresses with Cheery; the idea of getting her a Sylvari grow dress. Can't say the idea of Wolfsbane only wearing leaves isn't an exciting prospect. Asked if I'd wake her again come morning, so we could breakfast together again. Couldn't refuse that, of course. As we say; the best sort of company, that.

# 64th of Scion

Last day here at the Holy Grounds, heard that we're moving camp soon enough. Pity, the Hylek have proven to be an interesting folk to be around, at least. Their warriors are brave enough to still retain the grounds here after all this time, and still mount a meaningful and dedicated defense. There is something admirable in that, at least. We fought alongside them again today, another risen assault on the main gates, shortly after we had ventured out to check the area. Ran into some resistance in the north-east, probably probing parties trying to determine how solid the defense was. We beat them back, but it was followed soon by a more determined storm on the north-western and north-eastern gates perhaps half an hour later. Warmaster had to muster the Chapter to arms to hold back the line entire. Did manage to retain the field line as well as could be before the attack faltered again. Typical risen assault, though, grind us into dust with waves of lumbering beasts. If the frogmen didn't breed so quickly, this place would have been overrun long before.  
  
Managed to finish the siege engines in the northern passage with some help of Horizon's sappers. They managed to cut down some respectable timber for Meadows and I to work with, and shaped up the weapons into the strongpoint there with little issue. Took a fair bit of work though, but both weapons are operational. I took some Hylek volunteers from different tribes aside, and showed them how to operate them, and how they could fashion munitions for either. They seemed eager enough with their new toys, which was a little worrisome, but ultimately not different from giving a cannon to Vethrir.  
  
Celdric showed up in the middle of camp, was just stood there talking to Mithra. Apparently, he was the mute messenger I encountered some days ago. Could have fooled me, but then I am not very good with Sylvari anyway, especially not if they're hooded and shrouded. I came back from readying my equipment for the duel tomorrow, and spotted him. Given he was talking to Mithra, and Athelstan was mere meters away, I was a little confused as to what he was doing here, but didn't stop to question it. In all honestly, I just assumed he'd been here to talk to Boom Moon anyway. And of course, then suddenly I was supposed to have arrested him on sight because desertion, and people were throwing a fuzz over very little indeed. Still can't wrap my head around that; what does desertion from a volunteer army even mean? From what I can tell, the only difference between desertion and discharge here is writing a note. Ah well, let them be pedantic about that sort of thing if they like, there's very little to say. Athelstan let him go anyway, and only asked he'd pass by the officers on the morrow. So I don't understand the issue.  
  
Oh, and Calatl, the Occuintl chieftain, has challenged to fight me for in the eyes of Zintl come dawn. From what I can devise, training with Ocuatatl and his warriors has made some of the Hylek to see me as Zintl Tlamatini, or one that knows of the sun. In doing so, I've become a contender for the favour of Zintl, and other tribal champions are now free to challenge me to prove the strength of their tribe. In that, I'm standing as the champion for the 'Vigil tribe'. I've agreed to fight the chieftain for this. Never been one to back down from a challenge. I'll have Mithra around, though, with a medical kit and some antitoxins in case something goes wrong. It'll promise to be a good fight, if anything, and I'm looking forwards to seeing the warrior fight at dawn. Calatl came to remind me earlier, he seemed confident. We'll see who is the true champion, the norn warrior or the Hylek spear-singer.  
Hah, should get Wolsbane to come watch. Nothing like a good fight to impress a lass.

# 65th of Scion

Moved camp, now garrisoned at Fort Cadence. Place is suitably grand, with walls that rise up above the bay, even though much of it has crumbled into dust. Don't know how long the fort's been standing here, but the battlements are old and worn down, so that nothing of the crenellations remains beyond the vaguest forms. The curtain walls are thick and high, and guard the entrance to a haunted keep. Lance ventured in there earlier, and confirmed that there are indeed restless ghosts wandering through the halls. It adds to the nature of the fortification, which has gained a slightly ghastly aspect, despite the comparative mundanity of the actual spirits that haunt it. To make matters worse, the risen seem to be pushing up from the beachfront, and are sending in small raiding parties to wear us down. They herald a great assault, as we are gearing up to fight a bone ship that has been spotted in the waters. It will be a though fight, but both the Ashen and Horizon stand ready to oppose it, and the beachfront has been heavily fortified with war machines. We won't go down without a fight, and the fort is an excellent defensive position. My principal concern is that we are too few to man the fort, even with the full Chapter. Horizon holds the beach, and Ashen does its best, spread thin across the fort walls. If the risen gain a foothold, we'll be stuck between them and the haunted keep, with no place to fall back on. Just as well means we need to make sure we don't lose the beach, and hold our position.  
  
Found an old shield while out on the beach with Ironside and Meadows. Looked like it had been there for a long time. Some sod had scratched something into it. I've copied the inscription here:

Quote:

"I will hold back whatever evil comes to claim me. I will shield whoever stands behind me. I will not let my post fall. I will not let my people die."

Not that different from the Vigil's Oath, in a sense. From the way the shield was discarded, I fear the bearer has since then perished into the Mists. However, given the fort stands, and is in the hands of the Vigil, I can only assume they did their duty, and stayed true to their words, even in the end. Hail to thee, unknown soldiers fallen so that we may live. Your legend will remain mute in this world, but may it resonate loudly in the next.  
  
Supply lines remain extremely tenous, though I managed to attain permission for some forage earlier. Headed our east, and found some stretches of unspoiled jungle. The risen are probably being held back by the barrier formed by the Holy Grounds and Fort Cadence. They're both not inconsiderable fortresses, and it seems they have been keeping the risen at bay. It was good, we even encountered some two norn settlers and a Hylek, housed in what looked like a small norn steading. It was a curious sight to see this far south, but a more than pleasant surprise. I took the foragers through the jungle, and through some abandoned ruins. It was good, though. The plant life was vivid, and the sights were suitably impressive. We stood atop one of the crumbling arches, looking over to the great tree near the Holy Grounds into the distance. For once, everything seemed quiet. It did everyone good. It's always good to hear someone tell you how much they enjoyed going out for forage. And of course, the food I served afterwards was delicious as well. Drake and leek stir fry, spiced up to burn on the tongue just enough. I'll have to dig into our last baker's supplies to bake us a blackberry pie tomorrow, if I have the chance.  
  
And of course, I fought Calatl this morning, before we packed off to head north. Damn frog was blindingly quick, and fought with all his weight. Managed to jab me in the shoulder, through the padding. It's a minor cut, though it annoys me enough. I managed to beat him in the end, but it was hard-pressed, and I was on the back-foot for the most part. If he had kept pressuring me, he well would have won the bout. In the end, though, the chieftain made the error of disregarding my sword arm in his rush to push me to yield. Managed to dislodge him long enough to reverse our positions. It was good, and Ocuatatl claims it was a good fight, even though he disapproved about the fact that I chose to fight with a sword and shield, instead of a spear. To remedy this, he presented me with one of my own. It's rather large; the spear head is four times as big as the one Calatl used today. Ocutatl claims that the Hylek themselves only really use these for ceremonial purposes, but that I might actually be able to wield it as a weapon because I am strong enough to do so. It's rather heavy, but I will take it with me. If anything, it can function as a walking stick, and Ocuatatl says that the broad head is also used by warriors as a plate to eat their meals on. I graciously thanked him, to which he said I would do better kill some risen with it. Can appreciate the notion.  
  
As it stands, though, we traded the Holy Grounds for Fort Cadence, though I don't think we'll be staying here for very long. From what I understand, we're only here to bolster the Horizon Chapter in dealing with the risen vessel before we'll undoubtedly turn south again. The dragon awaits! About that, I should go and find Wolfsbane, and get her to talk to the officers about rejoining the attack on the dragon. I see little reason why they would deny her offer to aid us, but still. Not to mention it means I have an excuse to stick around the huntress a mite more. At least the old fort'd got plenty of quiet nooks with a scenic view, and the occasional ghost just sounds like good sport for two norn.  
  
Spent some time late into the night's watch on the battlements with Cheery and Athelstan. Keep seeing those two together, though the overtones of what stands between them is invariably muddled. I mean, for having late night talks under a starry night sky, they do keep a weird sort of difference. Athel seemed to know something about the ghosts, and claims that they're there to guard a cursed treasure of some sort. It makes some sense why they stay inside the keep and don't wander around. Got me curious on the treasure, though. Can the curse be lifted? Also leaves me guessing as to the fate of the old fort. Maybe it was, in the past, overrun by pirates who claimed the treasure inside, only to be cursed by some warding magic? I wish I knew more about the arcane. Perhaps I can talk some to the Priory members camped out here, they might have something to add. Failing that, maybe we'll venture into the keep ourselves, and find out. Either way, it's something to look out for.

# 66th of Scion

Harsh day, this one. The risen ship we expected popped out of the ocean, around where we expected it to do, but everything was not yet in place, it seems. The ship, a vast mass of rotting bone that reeked of decay and death emerged with a shriek that set my hairs on end. Confusion reigned, and it seems the officer hadn't had time to have a response plan in place. We were told to man the defenses, and had to watch for precious minutes as Horizon Chapter on the beach was pressured and shattered by the risen, putrid artillery splattering rotten guts all over the beachside and spreading noxious green fumes as undead things rose from the waters. We finally managed to sally forth and pincered the enemy from our fortified positions. Hammer and anvil, it seems. We were able to recapture the beachfront before Horizon had been fully eradicated, but we let too many of them die because of our slowness. Return fire from the beach batteries forced the ship to retreat. We didn't know if we had killed it at first, though there wasn't near enough wreckage for it to have been scuttled fully. We must have damaged it badly, though, it resurfaced some minutes later. We held the beach this time, and were prepared. Holm and I manned the guns, while the guardians orchestrated one of the most impressive barrier weaves I've witnessed, effectively eliminating counter-battery fire on my position. Not a single risen projectile came even close enough to threaten our position, and the beaching risen were easily dispatched by the field teams holding the flanks. Ironside and I were on it with cannons. No mistake this time, the way it shattered; that vessel is gone for good. A victory, then. Not without the wounded, though, seems like Arca took a bad hit, as did Vee. No fatalities on Ashen's side, though Horizon's burning their dead on the beach below. I guess that's several other old shields in the sand to find. Not all, though, some stragglers still managed to probe into the fort itself, and we had to beat them back one last time. I'm guessing that's going to be all of them for a while, though.  
  
Started to see why we needed to move north to stop that ship. If Cadence had fallen to the Risen, Horizon's tenous defensive triangle between Deadman's Reach, the Holy Grounds and Fort Cadence would have been ruptured, and the risen would've gained a dangerous foothold in the north, threatening the Hylek, and Fort Trinity's northen flank. We'd have become embroiled in another season of siege warfare, trying to dislodge the risen from the area completely.  
  
Chapter seemed to be able use a small boost, even with this victory, so I made pie from the tinned pears we have around, and used the blackberries for some sauce with grilled moa breasts, accompanied with a good pep talk. Load of recruits and young folk that needed a pat on the back, and a 'job well done' that isn't just part of the formal debrief. If that has to come from the field cook, then I'm more than willing to oblige. Give them a spark to light that fire that allows them to face down dragons. Luckily for them, it isn't as bad as Orr is, yet, but it is getting pretty close. If anything, we'll be looking forwards to facing down that dragon.  
  
Azzis, or rather the Charr that has been parading as Azzis since their 'return' to the Chapter, apparently isn't the same we knew in Orr at all, but some legion skulker called Kiryn, hiding away from the High Legions. She confessed as much during the evening mess, claiming she had to go into hiding after she had been ratted out for misappropriating supplies to the renegades. Bleeding idiot. Couldn't make much sense out of it until I realised she wasn't Azzis at all, and not just using a different name. Turns out Azzis is in the Ash legion, while we are dealing with this imposter. Handed her over to the Warmaster, let her sort it out. I'm not entirely sure what to think, though I don't appreciate being lied too.  
  
Hm. Dawn over the bayside; the view from the battlements is worth it. The sun reflects off the water, and bathes the morning in glittering mist. It is not as ominous as that may sound, not even with risen in the water, and ghosts in the keep behind us. I don't think any pf us has tried to venture into the haunted keep, though, and I don't believe we will. I remain curious, though. Wouldn't mind taking a peek, even though I'm aware that's a distinctly bad idea.  
  
Cut in my shoulder healing well, chafes a little under padding, but that's it. Might develop into a thin scar eventually.

# 67th of Scion

We've left Fort Cadence to the remnants of Horizon Chapter, moving down south through the bogs to a Sylvari warden post called Dryground Village. The name is apt enough, it sits in the middle of a swamp, surrounded by saltwater marsh. It's built in the nook of a rock, and fenced off with those curious Sylvari vine things. They don't look terribly effective, truth be told, you could squeeze through well enough at spots. Aside from that, the wardens seem to only have fenced off one side of the village, leaving an overlook open to be taken by an enemy. At least they had the good sense to set up near a fresh water source, with the nearby springs to our north. Just some skales lurking about, and I saw trolls moving about the swamp south of us.  
Campsite itself is plagued by mists, though, and visibility isn't very high. Weather is difficult to read, predominantly gray and overcast, though been keeping relatively dry for a marsh so far.  
  
Supply lines run through a number of Warden camps set up south, warding away risen advances into Fort Trinity. Goods can pass up north through them to us, though we're still an outlying post, and it is tenous at best. The Zintl Holy Ground and Fort Cadence lie a fair stretch away north, and we control the risen movement east and south of here. From what I can tell, only the water further out west, and some islands in the bogs to our north are completely open to the risen advances. Once we slay the dragon holding sway over the bogs, cleaning them out will be a lengthy but not impossible task. Don't envy the Chapter getting that task, however, they will be wading knee-deep through risen-infested bogs for a few seasons at the very least, if not more. If we're unlucky, some other remnant of Zaithan's corruption takes over, and we'll have to contest this region for another few years.  
  
About that, talked at length with Alessa about dragons, and centaurs. Lass is driven almost entirely by hate and and anger against the Centaurs, whom she seeks to exterminate as soon as possible. For her, it's a basic condition without which there can be no safety for her kin. She fights the dragons today in the hope that once they are gone, humanity would finally be able to decimate the centaurs, and reclaim those lost parts of their kingdom. She apparently got into a fight with Darksbane about it; I tried to get her to understand that fighting with your fellow soldier isn't good. They're both soldier of the Vigil after all. Not sure if she understood it, but it's something. Might need to talk to Darksbane too, at one point.  
  
These bogs, though... I am almost certain these were Hejja Dark-Eater's hunting grounds. There are krait and Hylek nearby a plenty, and I feel something in the back of my head that feels familiar. I cannot have been born far away from here. An odd sensation to look over these peculiar lands, and to think I was brought into this world. I would like to find where she was burned, if I find the chance, though I doubt it. Freyja would have loved to be here, I think.

# 68th of Scion

The bogs sing at night; a cacaphony of life, the wails of a besieged land that struggles to retain its natural balance. The faint hissing of skulking skales that lurk right outside of sight, and the distant cries and rumbles of jungle trolls. The splashing and croaking of the shallow waters and their crooked and twisting mangrove trees. In the distance, we see the faint glow of the Holy Grounds, the fires lit by the frog-folk to ward away the darkness. The Wardens are less bellicose in that, and don't light fires; instead, their buildings glow with their own ethereal glows as the sun sets, and vines with luminescent flowers shed a mild blue light. I do not like it much, truth be told. It is not so joyful or lively a light as a fire, and it does not provide the same comforts of warmth and good company. Rather, it casts the surrounding fogs and mists into a ghastly aspect, as if the swirling whisps are about to materialise into daemons or evil spirits. The knowledge that there are Risen out there does not help in soothing the mind. Reminds me too much of Orr.  
  
Slow day, not much happened. Sana and Kath went our foraging for food, and that's about the only notable thing.  
  
I have been continuing my meditations, as Cheery has been suggesting, and making some small headway. I sat for long moments into such deep thought the other day I completely lost awareness of anything else but my thoughts for what must have been an hour or more. It felt good, relaxing, as if I could put all my worries and angers into a bottle, and unstop the cork at will. I guess this is not that different from what Guardians learn early, control over their emotions and desires. Wish I had known more about this in Southsun. Might have saved everyone a lot of frustrations.  
  
Wonder how Freyja is doing, been some score days now. Last I knew, she was still out near the Lodges, probably making the countryside unsafe with Usha and that human of hers. Wouldn't surprise me if the foothills have been picked clean by now. Spirits, we let them run around long enough, we'll return and find the Far Shiverpeaks liberated and Jormag slain because Freyj got bored. She'd make a fine dragonhunter, I think, if she learned some patience. If I find the chance, I need to take Wolfsbane north, and get Freyj to meet her. She could learn a thing or two about proper hunting from the huntress.

# 69th of Scion

Dryground Village, quiet as it gets, really, not much happening. Surprising, I think, given we're one of the forwards posts for Trinity, on the edge of risen infested territory. Still, there is no siege such as there is in the Holy Ground or Cadence. Maybe the warden camps westwards of here are shielding us from the worst? It's possible, the dragon looks to over in that direction. We'll see when we head out in that direction shortly, I'm sure.  
  
I'm sat here overlooking the swamplands again, trying to divine what brought the Oddwalker and Hejja here. It seems a weird place for two norn to find eachother, much less for them to bring someone into the world. I tried to imagine trading in the snow and the peaks for the wetlands, but I couldn't. Just too different, I think, though hunting krait is worthy enough. Nasty creatures. Risen seem to have killed off most of them, though, but that just means they come back as undead ones, and end up attacking us.  
  
Guardians did some training, so that was the usual blue lightshow of magic. Sometimes makes me a little envious I'm not abe to do any of that. Meditations, though they are different from what I understand from them. Seems like they are able to assume a state of mind that allows them to cast forth spells. I wonder if I can do the same with my own meditations, perhaps I have some sort of magic locked in myself too? Sounds handy in a fight, right?  
  
Was able to make some fresh bread using some eggs Sana got me. Served them up to the Chapter with some grilled moa, it was delicious. I miss baking bread.

# 70th of Scion

Another day here in the place they called Dryground. Overheads steadily overcast, wind direction due west, sout-west. Smells primarily of rot and mold, the feint tint of pervasive organic decay linger on the air at the back of the senses. Military situation seems in order, Wardens have this place locked down, far as I can tell. For all the lip we give the Sylvari, they're remarkably thorough. Saw some watchmen on patrol, and I think I saw a spotter nestled up in a mangrove tree before. I guess I shouldn't be surprised that a swamp counts as preferred terrain for a people that comes from a place literally called 'the Grove'. Besides, Caledon has its own fair share or morass anyway.  
  
I'm getting pretty sick about it, truth be told, the humidity is bothersome, and I'm sweating a lot, even when wearing the light gear. The fresh water source is a blessing, though, and I drink often and plentiful from it. The skin in which I used to carry firewater during Orr now has been filled with regular water as well. It's needed. Thankfully, it isn't as bad as in Southsun, and it cools down well enough at night, or when it starts raining, usually only briefly. I do think we're nearing our destination, and we'll all be allowed to take some leave soon after. Might take along Wolfsbane somewhere nice, if she's interested, celebrate the dragon-slaying among kin, good ale and good food.  
  
Suddenly felt old today, for little reason. I am not old, not really, at least not in body, but I feel like I've lived too many lives in too short a time, which has worn me thin. As if all the edges were worn smooth by being drop too often. I think about my wounds, many which could have ended a life, but didn't. I've descended into madness more than once, and it has always left me feeling slightly more hollow than I was the before. As if it sapped energy away from me, that left me weakened, and unable to learn from my mistakes, even though I was always willing. I keep thinking, good judgment come from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment, but I wonder if I'm really changing. Perhaps I am destined to remain just Tzahr, son od David, who died in some far off war. I don't want to, but sometimes I feel like my fate has been pre-destined for me, and I will never really amount to true greatness. And at other times I see the folly in even seeking to be distinguished, and reason that I am content with being who I am; a shield to my friends, and a blade aimed at the hearts of my foes.  
  
Ah, I guess it is one of those days, where everything is painfully slow, and the day stretches on for what seems to be all eternity. Seems to be like the old adage about armies: hurry, hurry and wait. Leaves the mind too much room to roam and wander, before it folds in on itself and pops like a balloon. Idle hands breed insane minds, aye? Perhaps this is why people that do nothing but sit around all day invariably end up with skewed ideas about what is, and what should be.  
  
Camp was rough today, for some reason. Devin showed up, out of no-where. Was horribly confusing, in the end we were asked to escort him out. He made a break for it halfway, but there was little point in pursuing him. Scouts went out, had a long debrief that ended with Ruthford and Sana having a falling out that required the knight to step in. Not good, all in all. People are idle, yet strung out at the same time. I hope we move on soon.

# 71st of Scion

Dryground village, slow day. Just some chatter around food time. Turns out Athy's old Warden captain is stationed out here. Guess the world is small, after all. It was pleasant enough, with Mithra, Athy, Athel, Ruthford, and the lot. Most of us are a little idle, but that'll change soon enough once we reach the dragon itself. Scouts spotted a megalaser out west, apparently, and not a small one either. Seems to me we've found our battlefield. Before that, though, there are Nightmare Courtiers around, according to the Wardens. We might end up cleaning house on that front before we move on. It's a pretty nasty thorn in our side.  
  
Wonder what would happen if the norn found a king worth following. A hero, stronger than any we've seen before that could inspire others to follow them into war, an ideal to lead, rather than one we aspire to merely match. The norn are the warriors gifted with incredible strength and endurance, but burdened by who we are in the end. Yes, our greatest will slay beasts that other folk bring armies to bear on, but we are singularly unable of unified action. There is no 'nation', like the Charr or humans, no unified voice that guides our actions. We are as sporadic and knee-jerk in our actions as the fickle illusions of individual glory and fame that we seek to claim. And yet, we have stood before the greatest terrors of our times, and emerged proud and tall. Blodied, but ultimately unbroken. Jormag lost a tooth when it tried biting down, and the Charr Legions left pools of spilled blood behind where they tried to take the passes into the Shiverpeaks. The actions of heroes and warriors, spontaneous, a resistance to those who would seek to claim what is ours. Imagine what victories could be won by a grand army composed of norn warriors, fighting to retake to far north. The thunder of their fury would split mountains. But it will not be so, of course, the old tale tells us this; when the dwarves went to war on the Great Destroyer, when the dread Primordus sought to awake, they called for allies. Armies rose from the peoples of Tyria, to march against this terrible foe. The norn sent three. A fact oft celebrated by my kin: where others needed hundreds, the norn made due with three. They fail to see the tragedy that lies in these words, even though it heralded a great victory, and the tale is a triumphant one. Perhaps one day we will see things different.  
  
A brighter future seems a nice promise to fight for yet we do not quite stand still at the notion of what that entails. What comes after the Elder Dragons? People seem to have forgotten that before the Great War, there were other wars to be fought. I doubt all will remain peaceful in the end. For some time, yes, but inevitably more strife will worm itself into the fabric of the world. Even after the dragons, who knows what Elona and Cantha will bring to Tyrian shores? We might discover, in time. Perhaps I will even live to see that dawn rise over the horizons. If not, then perhaps one day someone will tell the tale of Tzahr, son of David, and people will look north in wonder as a result.  
  
Kristen turned up later in the evening, apparently trekked out back to Lion's Arch and to the Grove for that bet, before heading back. We had moved sites, though, so she had to track us down again, but that didn't take her too long. Had a bowl of stew into the evening, as we're want to do. We agreed on heading outh north when I get some leave, do some hunting and just generally stick together. We're slowly getting there, or somewhere, I think.

# 72nd of Scion

Dryground Village, some mild rain, wind due north, mild breeze. Duty call today saw some people promoted. Notably, made Boom Moon a Tactician, and Ironside a Knight. The Quartermaster has taken Lance SFC, while the Warmaster herself as taken over operational command for Blade. Drakemoor, Storm and Kim made Crusader.  
I'm still a recruit, but apparently there's another round coming after we kill the dragon. Got to say I'm surprised I got passed over. Guess it couldn't be helped.  
  
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Duties took Blade out to Trinity, even all the way down to Thunderhead. Forepost hasn't changed, still getting hit by risen almost on the clock. Their siege engines had been wrecked by a risen attack before we arrived, though their cannon was still operational. Lorma sent back for a resupply. We moved out north again shortly after, little else to remark.  
  
Took a wash, with a kettle of water and rag. Felt refreshing.  
Broke Xeyia with a joke about spectral phalluses, she almost couldn't breath, and went off giggling like a little girl. Funny sight, though a tad awkward to explain afterwards.

# 73rd of Scion

Dryground Village, overcast, wind same as yesterday, but milder.  
Duties took us probing west for a risen knight, and dealing with some other risen infestations here and there. Killed a fair few, went into some old tomb thing, looking for a risen 'knight'. One of those winged things that usually wreak all sorts of havoc. Shifted around tombstone inside, but didn't find anything. We continued on, found what looked like some sort of shrine. Felt a vague sense of familiarity, as if I had been there before. It was overrun by risen though, so I didn't have time for sightseeing. Still... something draws me there.  
We headed back soon enough. Opening that tombstone must have pissed off the risen knight something fierce, because we found the wardens near it dead, with the thing returned to its lair. Hard fight, but not the first one I've fought. Managed to wear it down before Force and I managed to corner the blasted thing long enough for the squad to lay it to rest. Always a hassle to fight those, surprised they're this far out north. Old tomb must have some powerful magical energy, drawing the beast to it.  
  
Boom moon had the squad. It was good to fight under her again, for a change. Tactician now, though. Guess that means she's got more work, and even less time. I hope she still has some time to speak with the regular folk, though. Her drawing more into her shell would be bad, I think. Did see her join the others during the evening mess, so that's good. I can't help but think we've drifted far apart these days.  
  
Spoke with Storm, who is now my 'mentor' for some reason. He at least realized how strange it was, and we talked about it, deciding we're best off seeing this as a mutually beneficial training relation. He's going to build on the meditations I already learned from Cheery, see if I can use it more like guardians do it. Storm spoke about finding some purpose, and using it to perform magical feats. I doubt I'll be able to teleport around, but who knows. Spent a good part of the evening talking with him, about our place in the Vigil, the world. Gods and inspirations. Good talk, really. Later into the evening, we talked about the upcoming Chapter ball. I'll get permission from the officers soon enough, start thinking about a location. Some of the troops suggested the Crow's Nest, which is not a bad idea. Close to the Fort, so people can sleep. Only problem is going to be cost, though Darksbane's said his family might be willing to make a contribution. Belmont brought up the notion of doing a masquerade ball, which was an interesting notion. I'll start sending some letters out tomorrow.

# 74th of Scion

Dryground Village, still. Guessing we'll be here for another few days, at least, doing the groundwork for the push out west towards the dragon. We moved against the courtiers the wardens mentioned, holed up in some overgrown tunnels surprisingly nearby. Sweeped through them well enough, aside from one single part where we seemed to have gotten lost with a scouting party, despite the fact that we knew were we were going. Spotted Lorma at one corner, but then every corner we turned, we saw nothing. I was afraid we had run into some gas that made us see things, but turned out we were just this one instant behind them.  
Either way, we cleaned out a handful of courtiers with little issue, and returned to camp soon after.  
  
Nodded off early today, but I saw Alessa run about, had washed off the dye. Looked good, sand-coloured.

# 75th Scion

Dryground Village, Chapter was put on high alert following Mordrem incursions all over Kryta. Worried about everyone back home. We're to slay the dragon, and await potential redeployment back into the fray. We might be in for a major campaign to drive them back where they came from. I hope for everyone that Camp Resolve is still operating, and the Pact is ranging out to quell the invasion. If Kessex is overrun, a lot of people will perish. Hopefully the Charr in Diessa fare better, and can mount a defense. We'll have to see, though, likely means leave is off the charts. Hope the Mordrem don't run into Freyj or Usha. They wouldn't leave any left standing for us to kill. At least it means we'll be out of this mire.  
  
There was some pale-skinned Sylvari wandering about, talking to the prisoner. Seemed harmless enough, just a leaflet that wanted to help. She joined us for some chatter later, was a little quiet. Voxkk had me test some device that produces jokes. It was... special. Apparently, he made it out of Inquest golem parts, and it became sentient. It was cracking horrible, horrible jokes. Insulted Ruthford, which apparently set him off in a bad way. Talked it over, turns out he's been having some problems fitting in. Turn out his break with Sana is troubling him. Lad needed a chat, so we did. Hope it'll go better now. Khil issued him a purple vial  
  
Turns out Blade needed its members to send in a self-evaluation? No idea why this was announced, it wasn't on the main notice board. Storm made me aware of it, though, so I'll submit mine shortly. Still, annoyed that I had to find out second hand. No-one else from blade seemed aware either, last I checked.  
  
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I have always liked the snows better. They're preferable to the mud, gravel and dry sand; at least snow melts away into water, instead of chafing under the padding, or caking over skin. But then I guess if complaining about the weather is a soldier's foremost worry things are going comparatively well. No dead or dying, we are fed, reasonably rested, and looking forwards to the end of the tour. Hopefully we will not leave any dead this time.  
  
The Warden camp is quiet, considering it is occupied by a Vigil Chapter. I woke early today, and found that, without morning exercises, the camp remains at rest. A few folk wake to relieve the watch, or do some brief exercise. I'll set a kettle on and heat some beans and eggs later for morn, see if Wolfsbane is around and about, if she isn't out hunting.  
  
It's sort of soothing, like this, sitting next to the water spring and listening to the trickle and stream of the water, the soft words spoken by the Wardens, and the wakng bustle of the Chapter camp. People talking in that quiet way, too used to being at war to elevate their voice much beyond what is needed. Forgewood is sharpening arrowheads somewhere, with the feint scrape of stone on metal. Jagged arrowheads that will rain down on the heads of our foes. One of the many small signs that we are readying for a bigger battle. There is this sense of anxiety and mild listlessness prevalent. The quiet before the storm. We all feel that soon, we'll be going over the edge into the abyss, or more aptly, the dragon's maw. I trust in my strength and skill to carry us through, but I wonder if some of the recruits are ready for the task. If not, it is one hell of a trial by fire. Let's hope they remember what they've been taught this last half-season, or we will be burying bodies among the first falling leaves of autumn. I do not wish to add more numbers to that malinged list.  
  
After that, and whatever the mordrem have waiting for us, though... Going north again, I think. Hoelbrak first, then the white flanks of the mountains and the frozen lakes of the homelands. See Freyj and Usha, drink copious amounts of ale and strong drink until we cannot stand. Wolfsbane too, I hope. And then we'll have to see about organizing this ball. I've gotten permission, though I have no idea when or where. I will need to start sending out missives when I know how the deployments go. I hope that Wulfbane and Sigrun can come down for the occasion, and that Usha will be able to arrange some affairs on my behalf. She was always gifted with a talent for that sort of thing. No doubt will roll down kegs of ale from the brewery, and try to drown us in beer. Hopefully, coin should not be overly problematic, but you never know in Lion's Arch.  
  
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Heading was going west, trying to clear the staging area below. Can remember seeing other vessels firing on targets marked by bright yellow flares below, planting seeds into the dirt that flowered into brief, but fierce, blooms of destruction, shedding meat-shredding petals around them. The deck heaved as we tried ascending, clearing the collapsed ruins and cliffside leading into the Cursed Shore. In the distance, a vast arc looped up into the dead city, so massive we weren't sure it was real. Despite everything, we piled out on the foredeck, watching up. Didn't see the dead serpent beast until it was on us, ripping a gash into the deck with its claw. Panic, shouting, guns being fired and the crackle of spells. Sanctuary spells bloomed into being around us.  
  
But the beast has passed behind, ripping out one of the aerilons, and setting us drifting. Engineering crews were yelling to douse a fire somewhere, and the ship's helmsman tried desperately to keep us level. Others were grasping at the deck rails, trying to spot the dragon. I was already slamming a flak shell into the breech of a deck gun, calling out to the confused gunner that was still staring at the shredded deck. Snapped out of it just in time to be thrown of his feet, the dragon rocking the trailing ship by clamping to its side. It roared, a deafening blast of noise that carried the stink of hundreds of decomposing bodies among with it. Had to dry heave so hard it hurt my throat. Then the idiot thing popped its head over the starboard side, maw wide open. Some brave idiot jabbed a staff right into, before pulsing a blast of magic through it. Blast tore up a deck plate and snapped a balloon line, shifting the deck sideways. It must have shattered some teeth, because the dragon let go. Freed from the ballast, the ship lurched dangerously, and we flailed, grasping for handholds to steady ourselves on the uneven and shifting deck. I took hold of the cannon I was manning, just in time to get slapped by the concussive blast of the weapon discharging. Took me a good thirty seconds to find my bearing, and shake off the ringing in my ears.  
  
We had drifted dangerously close to the colossal arch that had distracted us what seemed mere moments earlier. The dragon was stuck to its side, claws digging into the surface. It looked like it was about to pounce when another cannon blast smacked home right next to it. Lost its footing for a moment. We were shifting dangerously, and the dragon would recover at any moment. Then the helmsmen did the ship's name proud, and ordered us to drop some ballast, before gunning the engine. Crushed the dragon between the prow and the column with a tremendous smack that bent the ship's prow inwards and sideways. Skewered the flying ugly well enough, though it wasn't dead yet. It was squirming and trying to break free, before we harpooned the ugly through the head before it could tear the vessel up worse. Ship was banged up all too hell, and we were dangerously close to just falling apart. We had to moor the ship to the column, and effect deck repairs immediately. Wouldn't have made it back to a Trinity dry dock in time.  
But aye, the *Ramming Speed!*, and how we kill dragons in the airborne.

# 76th of Scion

Dryground village, still on high alert, with little news of how things are faring with the Mordrem attacks. Wardens here seemed a little on edge, had a chat with Athy's old captain. She was wilting a little under the idea that there's a new offensive going on. I hope they're holding out up there. If they break through to Metrica or Queensdale, it would be a massacre. At least the Black Citadel is fortified to withstand an assault like that. The warden was right about one thing, though. They're attacking everywhere, no longer just the fronts. The assault on the Grove... Time is starting to run out. Sooner or later the sword will fall. Best get the fleet out airborne and westwards soon, then.  
  
On a different note, turn out the Whisper Order agent that's been tagging along with us has been the same fellow Kristen and I encountered in the Freeholds, one Calas. Kept his identity hidden all this while, trying to hide away from us. Guess it worked well enough. I don't appreciate being lied too very much, but those agents don't a choice in some cases, so I guess there's no point in holding a grudge.  
  
First time since a while that I've felt like we're losing our grip on this war. Things like this are decisive points; if we let the Mordrem push home, it could be a disastrous reversal from which we won't and can't recover. Thankfully, the Marshal and his commanders should remember their tactical basics well. At any rate, Calas said they're managing alright. Might be that Modremoth is just smelling his doom, and is buying time. That, or it was a delaying tactic. Either way, means the clock is now ticking.  
  
Kritsen did drop by later today, which is always good. Some white sylvari, the same one as yesterday, was fiddling around with her hair. The lass is a tad young, but it was funny enough. I think she's been sipping nectar as well, making her ricochet around like nothing else. Harmless enough, though. She did ask some pretty oblivious questions about Kristen and me that had to be spelled out for her. In other news, though, things with Kristen seem to be going very well, so that's something to look out for.

# 77th of Scion

Dryground Village, though we're setting out scouts and readying up for deployment. Command also had a tactical meeting while I was cooking, could hear some brief words. Pretty sure we're engaging out west sooner rather than later. Keep morale up and ensure we're all rested and ready for that fight.  
No news from the heartlands about the invasion, though, hope we're not going to come back to another tragedy.  
  
Duties took us out to Trinity today, again. Transporting Arca, who was wounded, and the prisoner, so we can remand her back to the High legions. Relatively uneventful, but we had two gas alerts. No damages, though. We made the trip back in time. Scouts came back, Drakemoor passed on that there's also some pieces of Hyelk artillery being made ready out at the killzone. Good prospect, that, means we have the big guns required to put a dent into the beast.  
  
Rest of the day was uneventful, spoke a bit with Drakemoor and Xeyia. Not much else to note.  
  
You know, thinking about Kristen and then Freyja the other day made me wonder if I ever will want to settle down, like Wulfbane and Sigrun did after Orr, some time past. With all that is going on, the war that is raging with no end in sight, I find it harder and harder to see me ending my life in quiet. There just seem to be too many more battles that will need to be fought for this all to be over, and the chances of living through all of them seems slim. If not, however, I ponder what I would do. Perhaps open a tavern? Selling ale in the quiet, telling a tale from across the counter, dealing with the occasional brawl. Bah. The future is so uncertain. We might die today, we might die tomorrow. Best to live in the now, then, and worry later.

# 78th of Scion

Last day in Dryground Village, also the busiest one, of course. We got an alert that we're moving camp tomorrow, so we're all making ready for that. Seems the dragon fight is mere days away now. Everyone's getting ready for it. Wolfsbane too, got formal permission from Ironside to tag along when we engage. She seems quite set on the idea. Darkbane's brother showed up as well, out of the blue. Turns out Elamros hasn't been keeping up with his family for the last three years, so when he asked for some coin for the ball, they raised some eyebrows back home. Apparently enough to warrant him coming all the way down here. Ironside took issue with it, and all but coerced the man into giving the coin to supplies. He was generous enough to still be willing to fund some of the ball, though. He sees it as a great way to enhance the prestige of his family; sponsoring a Vigil ball is a pretty nice mark on your record, after all.  
  
Spoke at length with Kristen too, while I took a short watch. The idea of going north sounds great; she suggested we take a day to relax, drink, laugh, maybe go to the springs in the Foothills or the frozen lakes. She is a wonderful woman, challenging and strong, and she always makes me smile. I am glad to have met her; she is a gift to be cherished, I think. Seeing the north with her will be good. Really good.  
  
We had some salvaging duty with Kraxxi, took apart a derelict device, looks like one of the one that crazy Sylvari woman, Scarlet, planted down. Cut it open well enough, and were about to recover the emitter and energy cell when Voxkk spotted some Asura in Inquest colour leading off a train of Sylvari prisoners to the north. We disrupted the convoy sure enough, but that means there's an Inquest base around here somewhere, which is bad news. Kraxxi and I think that they were selling the Sylvari to the Nightmare Courtiers we cleaned out some days ago. I hope we get a chance to locate and destroy the Inquest facility too, though that might be hard to find. The Sylvari returned to Brackwater, and we set back to taking apart the probe. Managed to rescue some power cells and an emitter for Kraxxi. Not much else. Humidity and what seems an internal meltdown had wrecked the rest.  
  
The rest of the day passed well enough, I did some meditation exercises with Storm. I don't know what they teach those Guardians, but I haven't felt as relaxed as I do now in ages. Clearing your head, and enterting a state of mind that allows you to think with almost crystal clarity. I'll be talking to the other Guardians as well, see how they do what they do to enter that state of mind.  
  
Rest of the evening passed quietly. Spoke some courage for the others, with the dragons nearing. People feeling good about it, really.

# 79th of Scion

Moved camp, finally, close to the killzone. We're staying underneath a naturally formed tunnel formed by what looks like a titanic boulder falling on top of a gully. One entrance leads back to the swamp and the wardens, the other out into the kill-zone with the megalasers. It looks bad though, marsh ground and pools of water with a lot of sand. Looked like it would heavily impede movement. The laser itself looks impressive, but the batteries were set out awkwardly. Two batteries of Hylek cannon were arrayed as well, facing sea-wards. I hope we're not the only ones on station, though I can't see much more signs of troops in the vicinity. Perhaps a task detachment from Trinity will come to assist? If not, even the full Chapter might be hard-pressed to carry this out.  
  
Duties had us carry out fortification works again; didn't have a lot of options, the entries are annoyingly placed, though thankfully well camouflaged, and we hold the natural advantage of the high ground. Only issue is if they cork us in from both sides. In that case, it'll be a massacre. We improved it a little by webbing up the hanging vines that cling to the rockface above us. Their quality as defenses are rudimentary at best, but they should obscure vision and impede movement of incomming attacks.  
Supply lines look in order, we're open to be fed through Caer Briar and Brackwater eastwards which lie in almost a straight line to Fort Trinity. Asides of that, there are raptors and other critters skulking around that we can hunt and eat. Already threw some raptor into the pot earlier, which turned out alright.  
  
Also had to respond to a patrol alert near Caer Briar where we filed into an overgrown tunnel infested with risen. Normally I'd call such a thing a deathtrap, but Marcus had us sweep through it in shield-wall, very controlled and measured. Must have killed a good dozen and a bit each there, the way they were coming at us. Great control from the guardians, and Marthe had illusions skirmish ahead with Xeyia picking off targets with the bow. Effective formation fighting, it was good. We thinned out a fair bit of the risen, before pulling back to the campsite. Hopefully relieved quite a bit of pressure from the Wardens now.  
  
Ema was looking rough, like she had cried, and needed to talk to someone. Same for Darksbane turns out he is to be put through an arranged marriage against his will, for the sake of some human succession thing mandated by his father. I have a sad feeling the two cases are related, which would break my heart if it were so. Darksbane feels indebted to his father because he caused the death of his mother by his birth. His father must be a cruel man to hold his child responsible for such a thing. It is as if I would blame Freyja for the death of her mother. I find the notion vile; how could I feel anger for this gift that was given to me by her death? How could anyone be so bitter? I have half of mind to find this man, and paint his house with goat blood for his idiocy, and smack him on the head until he sees sense. Alas, it is not my choice, and I must remember what Ruthford said at Stormbluff; I am norn, and Darksbane is a human. Some things are just different, and what makes sense for me, may not do so for him. I just hope he finds balance, and does what he deems is right in his own eyes. It would be remiss of me not to support him in that, after all.  
  
I spent some time after the evening's mess taking with Force about killing dragons and children. He seemed interested in Freyj, and seems to consider having cubs himself at one point. He's got the mass to spawn off a few, they're bound to be physically impressive if anything. It was good, I keep being surprised at how congenial Force can be as company.  
  
Did some meditations before I laid down to sleep, helped me think some things through. Storm's way has helped me a lot, I'm surprised how... mundane it is. Nothing magical, just clearing your mind and coming to some sort of rest. Just contemplated what today brought, and what tomorrow will bring. Thought about home, about Wolfsbane, about killing dragons, and getting old.

*An arrow in flight strikes*  
*The dragon's scales shatter*  
*A warrior's heart is pierced*  
*One will fly, and one will soar*

Hah. If I die now, I'll be sorely disappointed.

# 80th of Scion

Ten days to season's end, and the evening before we plan to face the dragon. Camp is quiet, tense, yet oddly relieved. Spirits are high, and most of us seem certain of the victory. It is good, needs a rousing speech and a cry to arms to set off the spark in the powder, and we'll descend like the fury of the north down on the beast, and break it apart on the anvil of our resolve. Even though some of us may die, we understand that it is only we that can truly stand defiant in the face of death. It is what makes us free, free of fear and despair. Only in the field today shall be measured our true valour; to prove our worth today, and stand where no other could. Glory eternal, the legend of the Vigil, as it shall be recounted countless times before the fires of aspiring heroes who will look upon our deeds and mourn that their time will never again know such men and woman!  
  
It remains to be seen if we will redeploy afterwards, though the chances are still there we will be heading back into an immediate redeployment on where-ever the current front us. I hope that the Pact fleet at anchor has managed to beat back the worst of the reported incursions, though. We need some leave; most of us are starting to feel stretched thin. We've only had a fraction of rest time after Southsun, and not much else.  
  
Ema and Darksbane. Hah. I don't know what they said, but they've both turned around fully, and were shining with joy. Darksbane was positively beaming. I've seen that before. Good for them. He won't be marrying either, though that probably puts the lad in a pinch with his da. He knows that if needs anything of me, he has but to ask. Same for Ema anyway. Regardless, you can be sure that helped the mood at camp to stop from going somber. Spirits, if anything, I haven't seen morale spike like this for a good long while.  
I'll be keeping my eye out for them tomorrow, just in case fate decides to test them. And if it does, I'll beat fate with a pointy stick, and jam it up the dragon's arse for good measure. You hear me, spirits? No funny business.

# 81st of Scion

We remain right by the grounds known as the Splintered Coast, the spawning grounds of Hylek, and the main incursion point of the risen on this side of Tyria. Looks like the undead swarmed north away from Orr into the coastline, much the same around the Sea of Sorrows, really. We've bought some precious respite for the lands north of Trinity. The undead dragon is dead, or at least, cast back into the seas. It was a long fight, and we left with a lot of wounded, but truthfully, it was a great victory. We stood before the beast and took it apart, with sword, axe, arrow and laser. In the midst of the battle, confusion was high. The beast was difficult to fight, large, and covered in thick armoured scales. Gunners from Valour Chapter pelted it with Hylek shells, while soldiers darted between its claws, and sweeping tail. Hacking at its claw was all but pointless, as the sword seemed to rebound almost harmlessly off its hide, but we distracted it, and kept is busy. If anything, we kept it pinned, allowing the megalaser crew to lance it with searing blasts if light several times. And in the end, we were left standing, and the dragon had not.  
  
Wounded aplenty, however. I seemed to have been lucky, and came out with only minor scratches and bruises, nothing that would slow me down much. Others seem to have their variety of wounds. Kath's taken a cruel cut across he face that's split her cheek open. It'll be a nice enough facial scar, but it will be a painful one to recover from. At least she'll feel her wine burn a little when she drinks from it. Ironside was so tired he just plopped down where he stood once back in camp. We empties a bottle of good whiskey, the one Sana and Kath got me during our my first Chapter leave. It was needed, really. Spirits are elated, though, and everyone is happy about being alive for one more day. Lyralii released the drink stocks as celebration, and Kristen and I secured a bottle of mead each.  
  
The eve passed pleasant, Kristen was here, as promised, now claiming the title Dragonsbane. It suits her well. She went into battle alongside us, and certainly has proven worthy of the name. Hah, I'm a dragonslayer too now. Ema and Darksbane were in high spirits as well, and we spent the last moments singing and laughing. Cheery was drunk on nectar too, which was funny to see. Then Kristen and I went to rest. She's asleep now, lying right here, next to me. It'll be our legend, now, I think. I managed to find a trophy to keep as well. Shard of dragonbone. I want to carve it into something for her; a gift.  
Spirits, but she is beautiful.  
  
I'm drop-dead tired. I feel the weight of the pencil in my hand, and it has become a conscious effort to force out the words. Think I'll go enjoy some hard-earned rest, and revel in today's victories. A dragon slain, a woman loved, and a song to sing. As far as days go, this is one to remember.

# 82nd of Scion

Back at the Vigil Keep, another tour for the record. Seems like everything is coming together again; I've been reinstated as a Crusader, along with Ruthford, who's been promoted to Crusader rank as well. Seems like all the recruits are slowly starting to get their grades, and proving their worth. It's good, with us heading west soon, we need soldiers that have seen battle, at least. Now we have a strong center of Crusaders to work from again. I wonder if I'll be assigned a recruit as a trainee again, wouldn't mind one.  
  
This tour into the swamplands has been strangely therapeutic. The meditations have kept me centered and focused, even when people I cared for got hurt. They're helping me thing, and control my anger. The frog-folk and the marches are strangely familiar, and it was good to tread on the ancestral grounds. As if laying the last haunting ghosts of something that could have been to rest. If Hejja was watching, I will have to speak with her once I pass from this world. She must be more different than I can imagine, to live closer to the frog-folk than to the snow.  
And of course, there's Kristen, who's been with me all this time, and who now lingers ever closer and closer. We've embraced that what we wanted after we killed the dragon, a feat worthy of song and praise, and good auspices for us two. We are now eachother's, happily. I am deeply fond of her, as she challenges my wit and my strengths with hers, yet keeps me grounded when I think follies. It is good to hold her in my arms at night; something I have missed more than anything else.  
  
Tomorrow we'll hear how things are in Tyria, and whether or not we'll be getting leave at all. We deserve it, I think, most of us are tired and in need of a rest. Wouldn't appreciate some myself, truth be told, and neither would Kristen. Some time alone, now, away from prying eyes and regulations. It seemed relatively quiet, though, so my hopes are high.  
  
Until then, though, we're still confined to the keep. Strangely familiar, that, in a way. I think I only made it worse by making Wulfbane's hellfire curry now, which just throws us all the way back to Zephyr's season. Seems so long ago. I spoke at length with the new Charr, Dack. Seem like he's always been the runt of the litter, and was picked on badly in the fahrar. Took his revenge on the bully, of course, but that only turned around to backfire on him. He seemed anxious to show that he was worth something; at least the Vigil doesn't give a toss if he's a gladium or not, much less that he's a spellcaster. Told him as much, he'll have a fair chance to prove his worth, where he'll be judged on his merits alone. I just hopes the lad picks up on the Vigil way of doing things, like Grim has. Force will probably take him under his wing, though, as usual, so we'll see how that turns out.  
  
Was also some crazy asura with a flamethrower around, which made little sense. I heard some vague shouting when I was in here, writing, earlier, but that's stopped now. No idea what's causing it, and frankly, too tired to go check. Kristen's camping outside the keep walls for now, can't well smuggle her into the barracks. Ah well, one night. One night.

# 83rd of Scion

We're on leave, as I hoped. Turns out the Pact was able to roll back the Mordrem incursion with little issue, though we've been put on notice about further incursions. For now, though, fourteen days of free time to spend. Saw everyone leave from the keep in groups; Cheery, Felix and the flowers heading for the Grove, Drakemoor to Reach, along with plenty of the humans. Kristen and I are heading north, as we said, accompanied by Holm, who is like a wide-eyed child at the sight of the peaks and the Dolyak. Took the long way around, because we can, passing through Snowden. We're at Highpass Haven for the night, going to make the rest of the trek southwards through the foothills into the Lodges tomorrow.  
  
We encountered Xeyia on the way, whom apparently has an old steading out in the drifts. We went to take a look, only to find the place looted, and housing big dolyak. Looked like a tremendous amount of work to clean it all, and most of the valuables looked to have been taken a fair bit ago. Xeyia was distraught, but eventually just brushed off; turns out she wasn't there very often, and the steading really belonged to her uncle, the norn that raised her. The only thing of note she mentioned that was lost was one of Kath's old swords. Not much beyond that, though.  
  
Oh, I overhead Darksbane's brother talk about the ball to the officers before we left. Turns out it'll be set out for us, and I won't have to spend any time or coin on it, which suits me fine enough. I want to see Kristen in those leaves, as promised. Oh, Kristen did talk me out of accepting one of Xeyia's challenges. Apparently there was some sort of old ruin that we could climb. I really wanted to, because why not, but Kristen pointed out that having a broken leg now would be a bad idea. I guess that's true enough, so I refused. Pity, though, I never like turning down challenges.  
  
It is good to be back home, though, the snow beneath my feet, and the wind on my face. Kristen is here, a woman I adore more and more with each passing day, and I have more kin waiting for me on the morrow, with great prey and even greater legends on the horizon. It is hard not to feel great and powerful like this, when it seems you are living with the fortune of the world, and everything seems to suddenly lead to greatness. I hope it lasts, and that it is not just some brief spell of luck that will fade away again. Dragonslayers! It is as if we are living the stories old ourselves. It will be a tale to tell Freyja and Usha; perhaps they will join us in a moot before Kristen and I head towards the true north.  
  
I've decided what I want to carve from the bone shard. It'll have to wait, a little, when Kristen is out hunting. Can't have her sneaking peaks at it before it's all done, after all.

# 84th of Scion

Lazy day, we made the rest of the trek to Hoelbrak earlier today, good to be back home. Xeyia had left early, and we left Aaron to wander around the great lodges on his own a little, while Kirsten and I took a moment to head over to the boasting hall. Met some kinfolk from a mercenary company that were willing to share a drink and a table. They were impressed with our dragonslaying, though, and they invited us to visit their steading, south of the Lodges. We might do so if we have some time after the hunt, I think. We said our goodbyes soon enough, and went off to get some food and spend some time near the fire. Just us.  
It was good to be both cold and warm, to just sit and laugh, to eat and drink with someone, and just be happy of where we were, to enjoy something so simple that I have missed for so long.  
  
The rest is best remembered as it was, and not as it is written.

# 85th of Scion

Hoelbrak, slept long today, in a soft bed, until past noon. Been a while since I've felt so rested, which is good. Kristen was already up, she left me with a kiss and went off hunting. Can't stop the huntress from hunting, heh, even though she helped fell a dragon mere days ago. Good though, she'll be back later or before dusk anyway, and it gave me some time to talk to my family.  
  
Went to visit Usha, still managing her business in the brewery. Freyj's out east, probably doing some study work for the Priory, if I'm guessing. She'll be back on the morrow, so I hope to bring Kristen along then. Had some ale with Usha in the meantime and talked, about the past, about the future. She's curiously positive about the war and all that, and cracked open a bottle of whiskey. Good drink. Could swear Usha's gotten bigger though. Guess the soft life is taking its toll. Fuse was there too, though the old Charr can't hold his drink. Carried him him to the lodge while Usha was trying singing some Vigil song she picked up in a lodge. Not half bad, I'll have to ask her to write it down for me.  
  
Ah well. Slightly dizzy from the drink yet, think I might do some carving work and try not to nick my fingers too badly. Hope Freyj's back on the morrow, need to give her a hug. Little lass is- well, not so little anymore, truth be told. Still, have to see if she's found any new scars, or forged another legend for herself. She'll have to tell me, though I'll be proud regardless. Can't help that. Maybe she'll join Kristen and I for the hunt out north?

# 86th of Scion

Easy day again, more rest. Drank a lot of ale the other night, so the hangover was pretty bad. Not as bad as after Southsun, but certainly something that made the sound of the noon-horn ring around inside my head for a good minute longer than it actually sounded. Not bad, though, Kristen came back with some rabbits, which we roasted and ate. Few things to fight a hangover like a good meal! We spoke some more about our legend. She's... I'm pretty sure Kristen and I are in for the long run, now. It's good, I'm happy.  
  
Went to see Usha again, who was bemused, and gave me an earful afterwards. Claims Kristen is way too pretty to be sticking around. If I didn't know any better, I'd say the fuzzball is jealous, heh. It was all in good fun, though, Usha was in good humours still. Freyj was there too. Kristen went out to find her, and apparently cracked a keg with her first. Told me after that Freyja found the entire thing a little weird. Guess I can't blame her for that,when you think about it. At least I'm happy Kristen's hit it off well with Freyj.  
  
Likely going to start heading out north today or tomorrow, hunt us some fine prey! Leave's all turning out well, had a pleasant evening. Family, now, Freyj, Usha, Fuse and Kristen now too. Kristen and I told the story of how we fought the dragon, with the needed embellishments here and there. It's a good a tale, told like that, with a glass of strong drink.

# 87th of Scion

Making ready to head out for the hunt today, getting supplies, dried meats and other such things. I've packed some thick furs for the nights, so we can have some warmth while we rest. It's been a while since I've been so far north as we're going, but I remember it being both beautiful and harsh. Nothing's stopping Kristen though, she's got the fire of legends in her. Couldn't stop her if I wanted to. As it stands, though, I'm more than happy to go hunting. See how well we do fighting in the high north. It'll be a good tale to tell later, I'm sure.  
  
The day itself was quiet, again, went about talking to some old friends. Hejmar died, was ambushed and cut down by Svanir, somewhere south of here. Sifja recovered the body, and claimed vengeance on the raiders, but she won't walk again from the wound they gave her. Frost had set in, and the flesh around the cut had become dark and dead before someone found her. I got angry at that, but no rage. Spent some time thinking about, in meditation, like I learned. Anger's still there, but corked up, like I know when to let it bubble and burst, and when not to. I'm saving it for the next Svanir I encounter. I'll reap a toll on them for Hejmar and Sifja both, in the way of my ancestors. If not for the Wolfborn, I would be in their wretched lair here, butchering them like the animals they are. Usha's angry too, but hides it better. She's mostly happy Sifja lives.  
  
I think I'll bring a bow out for this hunt, instead of a rifle. Kristen can teach me some, and it is good to do some practice. Besides, they're better for hunting silently. Will still bring the armour though, weight or not. The extra protection might come in handy, even though Kristen'll scold me for being a noisy all the way there and back. Hah, might just pick her up and throw her in the snow for it.  
  
Oh, and I'm bringing ale and firewater. None of that Vigil regulation none-sense up north, we can get sloshed off good norn drink, there.

# 88th of Scion

Ahhh, the true north! Frostgorge, about as deep into the Shiverpeaks as my kin dares go these days; the most dangerous hunting grounds, raw and threatened by the dragon's evil. It is good to be here, at last, in the ice cold air that sharpens the senses and numbs the skin. My steel is so cold the water freezes on it before it can escape. We stick together in the night, under a bear skin, not just for the comfort and presence, but for warmth too. I have to write quietly, for fear of waking Kristen. She snores softly, with the crack of the fire nearby, and even the deeper, more distant sounds of cracking ice. Overhead, the sky dances with the light of the Mists, and the stars shine brighter than they do even out at sea.  
  
We're at Yak's Bend, a very, very old settlement. Used to be dwarfs here, now it's just hunters and a few of my kin. I could see some Kodan in the distance too; I hear that many of their Sanctuaries have drifted ashore here, and that they, too, are struggling in the fight against the Great Serpents. I hope to see one of the great ice-ships before we return; they are said to be almost as impressive as the Zephyr Sanctum of the Zephyrites. Worthy of laying your eyes on, I wager. Perhaps that is my father's blood in me. That reminds me, there are supposedly Grawl and Svanir nearby. We encountered some of the latter on our way here through the foothills. Threw up a roadblock, and an ambush point. I told Kristen about Hejmar and Sifja. She was all too happy to help; a couple of arrow shafts repaid the blood debt, and a finger devoured as a trophy for the Dark-Eater. It is only right.  
  
We will continue hunting tomorrow, perhaps head north, first, before we go west. See what prey we can find worthy of our aim.

# 89th of Scion

Going to keep it short, tiring day and a long hunt. Headed north, through a massive glacier. It was split into runnels, crawling with elementals, imps and ice trolls. Noises reverberated along the ice walls, along with the thunderous noises of cracking ice. We decided to climb over-top it, hopping between the ice cliffs. Lucky we didn't lose our footing, would've been a long and a hard fall. Took us a good hour of climbing before we made it through. There was snowfall, but only light.  
Saw something pass overhead near the top of it; not sure what, but it was big, maybe a griffon sire. Kristen is hopeful that it was a dragon again; they're not uncommon here. We saw some Vigil troops near an encampment as well, arming flak cannons aimed north, in case more of the things try to cross south from the far peaks. Still, whatever it is, might be worth tracking it down.  
  
We cleared north into some valley, leading to what looked like ice wurm breeding grounds. We shot one or two from a distance, though Kristen's a better marksman than I am. Hard to hit them when they get agitated. Had to throw stones to lure them out of the ground, before trying to spear them in the open maw. Kristen seemed to do it with the ease of a stripling tossing a keggie about. Had some more trouble, but I caught on. Not a lot of trophy on them, though, but it was good enough sport. Entertaining, at least.  
  
There was a big Sanctuary east. Could see it, clear as day, in the water. Lopsided, I think one side is slowly sinking. It was beautiful, with massive sails and pennants hanging from spires and fixtures. Small turrets were built into the side. It must have been a beautiful place to live in, a magnificent vessel to sail the seas on. It brings sorrow to my heart to see them sinking and broken like this. I hoped to find a way aboard one, but it was too far off to see. Perhaps better, it might have been overrun by Icebrood.  
  
Tried returning to camp some other way, through a pass southwards, but found it occupied by a grawl tribe. They had painted the walls with great markings and patterns, and their fires lit up the snow around them. We considered approaching them and ask for passage, but then one of their scouts spotted us, and fired on us with his bow. Arrow lodged itself into the padding below my pouldron, though it didn't do any damage. Kristen shot it through the eye. We moved away quickly after that, before the rest got agitated. Had to trek back down over the glacier, to Yak's Bend. Best try to move west tomorrow, I think.

# 90th of Scion

Last season's day, still in the Gorge. We headed west into the mountainside, trying to cross over towards the Ice Floe, but found the southern pass clogged with Svanir. Too many to even consider going through safely, which worries me. We skirmished with a few wandering ones that tried to stop us on the road, and left their dead bodies where they fell. Fools, attacking a pair of dragonslayers. We had to turn back eventually, or we'd have run afoul of them. Could see buildings in the distance; a tower and what looked like a steading, though there was frozen mist and heavy snow. Jagged silhouettes and shadows, though, which suggests corrupted ice.  
  
Tried going north instead, along the flanks of the Rime Moraine, until we found a passage. Seems like a tunnel burrowed by a big ice wurm, or at least it looked semi-natural. Crawling with ice imps, but those are small game at best. Kristen shot them right out of the air, before I squashed them below my boots. One bigger one gave us a fight, caught some ice splinters in my cheek. Nothing serious, just a smear of blood. Passage came out the other side, into some Dwarven ruins. Mostly buried deep below the snow. Pact camp on the slope nearby, where we managed to find some shelter, and take a brief rest. Also told told them about the Svanir, though they seemed aware.  
  
Tried taking the road west from there, but bumped into more Svanir. They had blocked the road with big ice crystals. We skipped past off-road, into the rough terrain, down into a the Leopard's Tail Valley. Seems like a good place for Kristen. Plenty of game, mostly ice drakes. We spotted an enormous Broodmother up near the mouth of the river that runs through, thrice the size of any other. Kristen and I decided to take it down. Was a good kill, got up close and personal with the beast, bashing it on the head with the shield, while Kristen lanced arrows into its flanks. Damn beast tried breathing ice on me, but I managed to keep it at bay. Eventually killed it. Kristen must've punctured a vital, because it became sluggish. All I needed, speared my sword through the eye into its brain. A worthy kill! The head of such a beast would have had a place of honour in the hall of a lesser hunter, certainly. Dragged the corpse off, and took some trophies; the head-plate from the skull, the tail and Kristen claimed a good part of its scaly hide. I also cut free some thick slices of drake meat for us to eat or trade away with the folk at Yak's Bend.  
  
We had just left the carcass for the carrion-eaters when we heard some norn voice up ahead. More bloody Svanir, cornered a Quaggan. We stalked them for a moment, until it became clear they were hoping to corrupt the puff-ball. Couldn't have that. Kristen dropped two of them before they even realized they were being ambushed. Last one was an idiot, apparently learned fighting from in the tales. Tried swirling his sword in a circle around him. I don't know what he was thinking he'd accomplish. Stepped in under his guard, and opened his gut for him. Idiot kid. Could have made a better life, but he chose death.  
Quaggan ran off quickly into the water after that. Think it was frightened. Can't blame it.  
  
Was only a few hours before dusk, then, son we decided to head back with our trophies. Passed through Highpeaks, where a Pact sentry told us the way. Passed by a ominous looking tower clad in frost, but apparently occupied by Pact troops. Griffon nest to the side, I wonder if that is where the griffon sire we spotted yesterday is nested? Kristen still thinks it was a dragon, but I think she's more hopeful than actually convinced.  
We found our way below back into Yak's Bend safe enough, at least. I want to retrace the steps, and head even further west on the morrow, perhaps get closer to one of the Sanctuaries.  
  
Either way, a good haul! Kristen and I spent the evening cleaning our trophies, and I fried some of the drake meat over the fire for the other hunters too. They, in turn, opened a cask of ale, which then became several casks. An hour after dusk, we were singing, boasting and laughing. Even did some arm-wrestling, and I think we did a keg-toss between the lads, judging from the splintered wooden casks down the hillside. Crawled under the the furs, tired, warm and drunk.

# 1st of Colussus

Antoher day of ranging in the Gorge; went out west again with Kristen, tried to see what was beyond the valley. Took the Highpeaks pass back through, and made it another Pact camp on the ridge. Plenty of forces on stand-by throughout the area it seems, though the troops stationed there seemed relaxed enough, aside from the cold. Keen spotters and marksmen in watch-towers, though, next to burning fires. Guess they're really keeping vigil out here, in case anything tries to make its way south.  
  
Right over the ridge, though, we saw it; the sanctuary, right there, in the water, close enough that when I had thrown a rock, it would have hit. We made our way around the edge of the water, looking up at the impressive ice-ship out on the water. Turned out that the Kodan had moored it out to the side, and there was a thin ice-bridge connecting the ship to the land. We spoke to one of the sentinels, who granted us passage because of my armour. He said that if we were foes to the dragon, then we were allies to them, which suits me fine.  
  
We went aboard, and gaped about like children. Truly, a beautiful thing. It is like a city built into an iceberg, and the bustle was surprising. Still plenty of Kodan onboard, and they try to carry on with their lives. A lot of fires, though their eternal ice didn't melt. Kristen was interested in their weapons as well, so we spoke to a weaponsmith. Seems they've hit on hard times, he was more than happy to trade some skins and meats for a pair of bows fashioned from their ice. I had intended only to get one for Kristen, but the Kodan would we trade them for food, than they remain unused by his dwindling kin.  
They're... peculiar. The ice is cold to the touch, but it will not melt, not even near fire. They're strong, though, made for Kodan. Harder to draw, as ice doesn't bend as easy as wood, but strong enough to skewer a minotaur. Worthy weapons! I'll slay a few dragon minions for them with it, I think.  
  
We spent some more time wandering around the sanctuary. Made it all the way to one of the bow spires. Looked back, saw the ice-ship and Kristen behind me. I realised that there wasn't anywhere I'd rather be, then. Perhaps, if Jormag falls, I might go even further north with a ship like this, see where the Kodan hail from.  
That, or I might carve one of my own, and build a lodge on top of it. It would be a worthy tale, wouldn't it? Carve out a piece of ice and sail out with it as if it was my home. Perhaps more something to write a tale about, than to aspire actually doing.  
  
We took our leave from the Kodan after a fair while, but ran into artillery fire outside. Turns out some dredge, holed up in a old Dwarevn site nearby, brought mortars to bear on the Kodan. Kristen and I decided to do something, so we skipped between cover, and closed enough to kill a few of the sentries. We barged inside, cutting down a few of the mole-folk. Spotted an ammunition passage nearby, with some dredge carting up pallets of mortar shells towards the guns. Thought fast and picked up a shell, hurling it down into the passage, before legging it. Suitably meaty thump seems to tell me they're not going to fire those cannons at least before the next day's end. Hopefully should buy the Kodan or even the nearby Vigil some time to intervene. I passed word to one of the soldiers in the Pact camp on our way regardless.  
  
We were pretty tired afterwards, long trek, so we went to rest early. Might start thinking about heading back south tomorrow, or the day after. See what the dawn brings.

# 2nd of Colossus

Back in Hoelbrak, came back from the north. Long day, spent most of it packing up and trekking down through the foothills again. We've got our fair share of trophies now, bows made out of eternal ice, griffon and minotaur skins, horns, beaks, and the rewards reaped from the Drake Broodmother. Uneventful trip, though the other hunters at Yak's Bend gave us a well enough seeing-off. The foothills themselves were quiet. We stopped some hour after noon at the hot springs to take a rest.  
  
We were in the Lodges before dusk even. Kristen went off to get some of the trophies treated on time, and to tell a tale. I'll see her around before the ball, sure enough. Besides, best not spoil the company by sticking around too long, eh? Looking forwards to seeing her dressed in those leaves of hers. Worth losing a bet over.  
  
Headed over into the Reach, see if I could find anyone else from the Chapter. I don't know where Darksbane or Ema or Drakemoor, or anyone really, live, though, so I just wandered around a bit until I found a pub. Turns out, Xeyia was in there, almost getting into a brawl over something or other I didn't quite pick up on. Turns out she's hunted down someone that's wronged her; apparently took him apart for it. She left after arguing with some other patrons, a rather abrasive man and some arrogant woman, which she even slapped. Said we'd probably bump into each other later. Didn't defuse the situation though, some Sylvari hot-head got into a brawl not soon after she left. I left before it got too bad, but I could hear people joining in on my way out. Saw a Seraph walking into the mess on the way out, so I hope the situation's cleared up.  
  
Made my way back to Hoelbrak, paying the gate fare. Still expensive for what it is, truth be told, though I like the ability to travel freely. Managed to pass by Usha for remainder of the eve; got to tell the tale of the hunt. Could see some envy in her eyes; old cat needs to go out more. She always used to hunt on all fours, and leap onto her prey like a leopard did.  
Anyhow, long day, and I'm knackered.

# 3rd of Colussus

A day of rest, and enjoying the familiar scents and tastes of home. Indulged myself, and took Freyja out into the great hall after dawn for an early feast. Thick black bread, smoked fish, and roasted drake make for a fine breakfast. Good to spend some time with the lass as well. Spirits, but she eats more than I do, the little glutton. I don't mind, good eating makes you grow big. I know this from experience.  
She was smiling the whole time though, which has been a while. I'm happy she'sfound her place here.  
  
She was curious as well, after a number of things. Apparently Kristen's made an impression on her, though Freyj didn't seem entirely decided about it. I guess the idea of her old man running on with someone like that is a little weird for her, even though it's not uncommon. At least she likes Kristen well enough, so the rest will come in due time. Usha's all in favour for that matter, claims it's good for me. Her and Fuse are off to Lion's Arch, dealing with a late ale shipment.  
  
Spoke to Freyj about the hunt too, though mostly about the Kodan. Turns out she knows a lot more about them than I do, which really shouldn't have surprised me. She did that curious thing she does when she just blurts out strings of scholarly speech which would make an Asura look uncouth. She seems very concerned and interested at the same time about their ideas of keeping everything in balance. I remember one of her deductions being that, if the dragons consume all magic before releasing it back into the world, aren't they then inherent to the world's natural balance? It would be bad for that sort of thinking to get hold, she thinks, because it could mean a lot more Kodan becomming corrupted willingly. While they resist, they are strong enough allies, after all. The idea of their beautiful sanctuary ships falling willingly to Jormag is concerning, at the least.  
  
Freyj also questioned me extensively about what I found out in the bogs. She seemed very disappointed I wasn't able to find anything about the Hejja or the Oddwalker, though she took extensive notes about what I described to her. Especially the ruins near Dryground village caught her attention, as did the obelisk or stone Ironside was tasked to destroy. Something tells me she's going to try and find an excuse to go there herself now, could see it in her eyes. Too excited to be dissuaded, so I didn't even try. Also told her about the Svanir I killed for Sifja and Hejmar; she agrees that I did well in avenging them, and that he ancestral spirit will likely be pleased. Good, can use the extra help.

# 4th of Colossus

Woke up early today for some wandering. Paid the gate fee to Lion's Arch first, and spend the morning and noon there, walking about the streets and sitting by the dockside for a good while. Almost wished I brought a fishing spear or a hook and line. The Sanctum Harbour waters run a lot deeper than you'd think. I remember that from going down with that diving suit that was prepared. Plenty of life down there, too, despite the ships passing through. Thinking about ocean fish made me hungry, so I got some sticky fish balls from a street cart in the Trader's Forum for a few coppers. Plenty of people about, seems almost everyone here's getting over the Scarlet attack these days, which is good. City was in ruins too long; can use a little more life to it. Way less criminals, though, it's certainly not the Lion's Arch of old. Guess Kiel's turned it around a fair bit, more towards the Reach. Consortium's got its stamp all over, however, which worries me a little. Fort Marriner's stacked to the nook with Vigil boots, though, and the Lionguard are out in force. Whatever happens, we'll punch back. That's for certain.  
  
Took the gate over to the Reach again, thought I'd go take a wander about. True enough, I bumped into Xeyia again, as well as some small human lass I met before. We got talking, alongside some of the Crimson Ashes, one Marlec. Nice enough fellow. Turns out all three humans were north-born, raised by norn. What are the chances, three of them talking to a norn, in the human capital. Still, tankard of whiskey and a good chat. Lasted until the early evening, before I made to leave back to Hoelbrak. Gate costs set me back several days' wage, but I guess I don't spend it on anything else.  
  
Went to eat with Usha and Freyja back home, along with their mates. Pleasant enough, had a roast boar over a fire at Usha's place, and we opened a cask of mead as well. Usha reminded me it's Meatoberfest over in Butcher's Block tomorrow. Might see where Kristen's hanging about, and carry her off towards Diessa for the occasion. Day before the ball as well, should give us some time together before I'm back on duty with the Chapter. Spirits, wish i could just carry her with me, like I had her on my shoulder after the dragon.

# 5th of Colossus

Leave's drawing to an end now, which isn't too bad. Usha's been getting preparations ready for the Chapter ball, and I hope the cook's arrived by now. Should be all set! Hope people'll be there tomorrow, I'm curious as to what everyone else did this leave. Only really bumped into Xeyia; spent most of it with Kristen, though I hardly regret that.  
  
We went all the way to Butcher's Block in Diessa today for Meatoberfest today! Plenty of Charr, as usual, though some Asura as well, which was strange. Little ones got drunk so fast, it was quite funny. Kristen and I did what you do at Meatoberfest, and just ate a lot. The Charr know what they're doing on that count, I'll give you that. Ate enough to make me feel a little ill afterwards! Kristen couldn't stay idle long, though, wanted to go off hunting in the Ascalonian plains. I loaded up a sack of meat for the trip, and we went ranging a little. Turns out, not too much prey around here. Kristen shot one big plains wurm, but that's about it. Plenty of smaller predators and such, but hardly anything worth tracking down in the long. Still, it was a pleasant enough trip, and I've got a bag full of blood sausage, so I can't complain!  
  
Wake early tomorrow, get down to Lion's Arch.

# 6th of Colossus

Chapter Ball was brilliant. A lot of people showed up, including Ironside and the Tactician, which was great. Wulfbane came down and cooked us a feast worthy of a noble hall, complete with an Ashen Chapter dessert cake, and copious amounts of drink. It all helped get everyone pretty drunk, of course, which only added to the general merriment. There was dancing and feasting; it was good to see everyone again. Kristen looked beautiful, dressed in Sylvari leaves for that bet we made. Can't say I feel let down by that. Not one bit.  
  
I got really drunk after a while; guess that's my own fault for spiking my ale tankards with whiskey. I remember Roeland showing up, which was nice. The lad's signed on again with a supply division, which means he's not on the frontlines. That's good, I think, means he's still doing his part, without being put in a situation that he can't handle. Maybe he'll slowly get there still, you never know. Either way, it was good to see him again.  
  
Same for Wulfbane and Siggy. Lass is now nice and swollen with their children; takes a strong woman to lug around an extra two little Wulfbanes, ha! It's been a while. Next time around, the twins will probably have been born. Then I'll really start feeling old.  
  
I vaguely recall something about Layfon and Drakemoor being married, but I think that might have been a lark. Plenty of couples around, though. Turns out that Darksbane and Ema have gotten betrothed during leave! They were almost impossible to separate during the entire party. Happy to see them turn out like that, really. Some weird story about Darksbane almost being framed for the murder on his father, though? Not sure what's up with that. Sounded confused; apparently old man Darksbane was stabbed by a mesmer servant, or some such. Ah well, I guess it sort of turns out well, in the end, right?  
Not alone them; I carried Kristen back to the barracks for the overnight, and spotted Cheery and Felix taking a moment as well. Curious, but I guess that's the way it goes. Can't help but think what's happened to Athelstan there, though I can guess. Still, I let them as they were; their evening just as well, and it is a ball. In human stories, that's where this sort of things usually happens, after all!  
  
I've put Kristen to sleep in the bed here, in the barrack. Lass knocked herself out on some casks of ale while I wasn't looking, hah. No worries, she'll feel that tomorrow; so will I, probably. Still feeling buzzed. I've made sure to hang a waterskin over the bedpost. Need that to keep a clear head on the morrow. Might take a morning dive as well, before making ready to say my goodbyes to Kristen. Don't know where we're going with the Chapter yet, but it might be a while before I see her again.  
  
Regardless; my head feels like lead. Think I'll crawl up in with Kristen for a last night, and sleep the rest off.

# 7th of Colossus

Back in the keep, preparing to return to duty. Wonder where we're going to end up this time around, though I'm hoping we're going to fly in first wave with the invasion west. Something thrilling about knowing you're flying into a war; a lot of glory to be found there, and a lot of death. I wouldn't wish the memories I have from Orr on anyone, yet I look forwards to doing it all over again, but in a different place and at a different time. Perhaps it's just that I am curious about the jungle and the depths of the unknown. Something enticing about discovering something new; there must be sights to be seen, hidden in there somewhere.  
  
Anyhow, the keep's relatively quiet, a few people heading back in. I encountered Cheery, Felix and Zara on the way there; we even beat back another pair of pirate raiders on Applenook while we passed through. They ran off before they could do any damage, though, luckily. Applenook really should think about raising a militia. Sure, the Keep's merely a stone's throw away, but we can't keep sending in patrols to check on them.  
  
Two new people at the keep, a rather eccentric lass called Sjofn, and an older norn that looked like a sailor. They were nice enough; the lass claims to be a warrior-poet, which I think just means she's a skaald. Apparently she does poems with a certain set of morae in three phrases? At least it's different enough.  
  
There was a lot of chatter about couples; we've also been poking fun of Zara for the entire Layfon thing, though I think it'll wear thin soon enough. Xeyia's run away with it, though, and she and Zara are squabbling a little bit over it. It's funny enough, truth be told. Athelstan also apparently keeps a list with possible couples, and the checkmarks them. He seems remarkably alright with Felix running away with Cheery, though I don't mind either way.  
  
Regardless, return to duty tomorrow. Time to get back to work.

[continuation of entry]  
  
*Rich ale flies through blood*  
*Drunk staggering and mayhem*  
*Tomorrow wasted*  
  
*An eye calls justice*  
*Strong arms serve valiantly*  
*War perishes youth*  
  
*Dolyak grazes quiet*  
*Minotaur rampages wild*  
*Tzahr writes paper words*  
  
Huh. I wonder if I'm doing it right.

# 8th of Colossus

Official return to duty today; stood in line-up while the orders got read out. Turns out we're heading west, as predicted, on the line of Resolve. Seven days 'till march. Seems like that's going to be it, another major invasion. I hope we've learned from Orr, and we'll see less hollow helmets this time around. Still, can't help but feel slightly excited. It's more than simple trepidation. We're going after Modremoth!  
  
Rest of the duties were mundane enough, we took a patrol out to a steading in Snowden, and cleared out some dredge. We attempted blowing one of the tunnels, but it was very chaotic. We rushed it, and nearly collapsed the entire thing on top of ourselves. Lucky no-one got hurt, truth be told. Should've been a job for the sappers. Would've blown out that tunnel cleanly, starting with the far support, instead of the reverse. Ah well, nothing to be done about it after the facts.  
  
It was good to be behind the cooking fire again, too. Made some spicy moa for everyone, a welcome-back meal. Had a good and long talk afterwards, going on about all sorts of nonsense. Turns out Zara and Cheery figured out some quirky game about asking people who they'd sleep with, marry and shoot. Tad weird, but it was sort of funny to see everyone's preferences highlighted a little. Turns out Storm is a wanted man, hah.  
The rest of the eve passed quietly enough.

# 9th of Colossus

Slow day, mostly routine work. Turns out some folk went down to Applenook on a 'patrol', where they mostly went over the pie and the kegs, from the sound of it. Should've joined them, sounded like a better than normal patrol, truth be told.  
  
Didn't do much, aside from checking over my gear, and thinking about what I need to get for the deployment west. I'm going to bring along the plate armour, that's for sure. Need the heavy armour for that sort of fight, if anything. Sent a letter to Kristen too, hope to see her before we depart. Should've sent one to Freyja as well, come to think of it.  
Might be gone for a good long while. I'll miss Kristen's company, that's for sure, and not just in the physical comfort of it all. It was good to have someone just... around. The boasting and the jokes were welcome, and it was refreshing to see someone outside the Vigil. Like a window. I don't think I can ask her to come west with us, though. Those are not hunting grounds; that's a warzone. Well, at least I'll be able to finish her gift by the time we return. Might be far into the next year, though.  
  
The rest of the day passed well enough, aside from Xeyia ripping into Darksbane at one point over the fact that he's a noble. Seemed rather pointless, truth be told, and it didn't end well. I wonder if Xeyia knows that both Kath and Alleshia are nobles too? Just hope neither of them starts carrying around grudges.  
Darksbane might need to ease off a little on the noble thing, though, truth be told. Second time he's run into trouble with that.

# 10th of Colossus

The dawn came red over the keep's eastern battlements this morning, mingled with drifting snow and cold welcome cold winds that brushed parts of the courtyard with smatterings of thawing white. I remember finding Vanholm lying in a pile of snow, shivering, here. Must be... What, two seasons past now? A lot of people have come and gone, died, disappeared, moved on. Strange, that, come to think of it. Makes me wonder just how large the tables in the Mists will be. Or the ale casks, for that matter.  
Wonder what Verril would have thought or said now. Probably that I have a drinking problem, and that ale and mead are of lesser importance in the greater Eternal Alchemy concoction.  
  
In any case, it's good to be back... Well "home" I guess. Not sure where that is these days anyway. I think I got used to living where I stand, and just keeping on the move. Usha's got the brewery in the Lodges, and the Vigil's always a little part of where I belong these days, where-ever they pitch camp. Still, something familiar and trustworthy about the Keep. Like that feeling we got when you marched back through the portal from Orr after a season. The collective sigh of relief. It won't be much different when we return from the invasion west, I think.  
  
Wonder what lies beyond that particular hill. I've heard many things about Camp Resolve, the big staging point out west. About as far as boots march in that direction these days. Some say it's worse than Orr. A never ending tug of war between the Pact troops and hordes of horrific and twisted beasts. The tales of massive vines and throns the size of mountains are troubling. There's some comfort in knowing the fleet will be flying out in force to provide us with air superiority. We'll need it. Almost regret not being part of the airlifted troops anymore.  
I wonder how the heart of the jungle looks from the sky.  
  
Duties today weren't that bad. Just a medical examination prior to deployment, nothing unusual. Took a fair amount of time, though. Kath took out a volunteer patrol to Applenook afterwards, though it was more so that Sana could go fetch the medication she was on for her arm from her house. I don't mind, it was fairly relaxing. Bought some apples from the kind along the road. Might surprise Mithy with one.

# 11th of Colossus

Training day; Ironside had us manning cannon as an exercise. Nothing modern, just old human-style cannon that fire round shot in the rough direction you point them at. A lot of work to load one ball; had to do it with a full of team. Marcus managed pretty well, we even hit our self-defined target on the third shot. There was a new lad there as well, one Lukas. He knew what he was doing, so that's good. Didn't get a chance to speak with him afterwards, though. Ah well.  
More new blood too, the sylvari lass we bumped into at the Hylek Holy Grounds in Sparkfly apprently signed on with us. That's good, I guess we made a good impression on her!  
  
Freezemaw was around as well, being weird. Sometimes I wonder if that Charr's just gone fully senile. Was running around, first claiming to be invisible, and second sounding an annoying bell over and over again. Not sure why or how, though. Mad as a hatter.  
  
Folk seem pretty certain we're not going to be in the first wave out west, which I find a little disappointing. Still, we're apparently making ready to march west tomorrow. Made sure all my equipment is in order; made a few small repairs, and such. Kristen didn't drop by, but I guess that's not problematic. We said our goodbyes and such when leave ended anyway. I hope that I can still send letters from Resolve, though I have a feeling the mail traffic will be slow.  
  
On another note, seems Freyja is going to be in the deep of the jungle with the fleet, as part of the Priory.  
Not sure how I feel about that, but I guess I can't really tell her not to go, when I'm going. Wouldn't listen to me anyway. Ah well, time to let our children grow up and make their own legend.  
Just hope she'll be alright.

# 12th of Colossus

A good day, long and tiring. Had gear inspection, but I knew that. Athelstan tipped me off on that almost by accident, so of course, everything was spit-and-shine. Even polished the armour a little with some machining oil to give it that extra parade shine. Lyralii checked it all over, including the greatbow. All cleared for duty, as far as I'm concerned.  
  
Had a nice talk with the warmaster after that, about a number of things. It was good catching up, however brief. Some interesting stories there. The new lass, Sjofn, was there too, asking about tales and such. Curious company, but pleasant enough as it goes. Athelstan's been trying his charms out too, which is always amusing to watch.  
  
Got called into a patrol too, with the warmaster. Took second command, which went well. Had to clean out some ettins out east of the kleep; they had been raiding the supply lines between the Lionguard havens. We scattered them, killed a fair bit of them too. Not entirely sure they all deserved it, truth be told, they're just dumb beasts, half the time. It's a bit like overly strong children. They don't know any better half the time. Still, I guess it needed to be done. Ettin are unpredictable enough half the time, nevermind dangerous to an unprepared traveler.  
  
Scouts set out to recover Wynn, who was apparently missing. They rode back in with a 'copter, lugging along a badly hurt Wynn. She's in medical now, recovering. Not good though, her eyes are bloodshot and red, and she looks badly mangled. Apparently they found her out all the way in Kessex. Some story about her caravan being jumped. Don't know who or what, though, so it could be anything. I hope we find who did it though, and extract some revenge.  
  
Long evening, had tea and food with the flowers, Athel and the warmaster. Pleasant enough as it goes, though I was tired by the end of it.

# 13th of Colossus

Nothing of note, very quiet day. Just some late night chatting with Zara, Athel and Cheery. Weird topics; it was fun. Poking fun of folks with Athel is a special sort of sport. Mind as sharp as a razor, him.  
  
Going to keep my gear packed and ready for deployment. Seems like it'll be sooner rather than later.  
No-one seems to know how we're going to be heading west; might be a long march ahead if we don't get an airlift. It occurs to me I don't know when, where, or on what vessel Freyja will be going in either.  
Should probably try and find that one out before we leave. You never know if something happens.  
  
Probably a bad thought to end on. Need to write Kristen before we leave. Just to make sure she knows I love her. Can't remember if I've told her that yet. Feels important.

# 14th of Colossus

Bust day, got our marching orders earlier. Seems like we're going to head to Resolve the hard way, on foot. It'll be a slog and a half, that's for sure, at least three days of forced march, if not more. At least we'll get to see the countryside again, so I can't complain.  
  
Duties out were light; I asked for a patrol, and Ironside took us out to Lornar's Pass and fought off some Skritt. Annoying critters, and a lot of them too. Had a tussle with 'm over on ther Lionguard Haven. Didn't prove too difficult until they suddenly used what looked like Dredge mining devices to bore up right under out feet. Tiny sliver of panic, but nothing we couldn't handle. Took a moment to rethink the scenario. Of course, at the end of the day they're Skritt, and we're Vigil soldiers. We returned to the keep soon enough for some rest. Had a chat with Kraxx. Been a while. I have a feeling I say that a lot, these days. Anyhow, she's well. Had some talk about a cooking golem to help me in the kitchen. Doesn't seem like it's impossible, but parts are apparently rare. Should keep a note for when we bump into Inquest. Apprently also been talking about getting some projects off the wall once we're in Resolve, so that's interesting.  
  
Force also apparently got put on trial for his goof in Arah. Not sure what was said, but he might be looking at additional punishments now. Not sure if it's entirely deserved, but that might be me speaking from a point of friendship. Ah well.  
  
Xeyia's got a nasty sneeze. Told Ema, so she could look her over. That sort of thing right before an invasion is dangerous. I don't get sick very often, but when I do, I'll be out for days on end. Rather not risk it because she's too stubborn to see a medic.

# 15th of Colossus

Hm. Took a patrol out, expected it to be routine. Just a stretch of the legs.  
Moved out all the way to Ascalon Settlement... right as the Centaurs stage another offensive. Spirits alive, but the timing. Had a patrol unit right in the middle of it. Not enough to commit to such a thing, of course, so I had to cut the losses and pull back before we were going to get overrun. Force wanted to stay. Karon too, I think. Shit, I wanted to stay, but that could have killed all of us, for nothing, right before the march west. Would cripple the Chapter.  
Pulled back, and put the nearby Seraph on alert. Not everything we could have done, but it is what it is.  
Try not to think about the people that died in those few minutes between.  
  
March west tomorrow; in for a long walk and sore feet, if I know anything about forced marches. At least we'll be walking west, along with the sun. Something poetic about marching off into the sunset, isn't there?  
I've been working on my shard of dragonbone, and it's taking shape nicely. It'll be a nice surprise for her when I return, I think. Heh, might bring another trophy back if I get really luck on the battlefield. We'll see where it ends up.  
  
Felix told me him and Cheery aren't going forwards.  
Guess that's why he looked so... downtrodden. I wonder if it's because of us and the jokes. I mean... they were good-natured and we were only happy because of the idea. I'd hate it if it was, really. Pity. They suited eachother.  
Ah well, each on a different path, looking for something to love and to hold on to. That, too, has its own charm, and if I know anything, it is that your heart sings many songs, and the next tune might always happily surprise you, long after you've forgotten the first one.

# 16th of Colossus

Long march and a patrol as well. Departed the keep in good order, and made it all the way to Black Haven in Kessex. Not bad as a forced march goes. Weather's humid, with the nearby swamps, but the heat is bearable. Nothing to worry too much about, truth be told. There was a further volunteer patrol to clear the road ahead, too, which Drakemoor and I took out. Not bad, we work well together, kept the unit tight and fighting. Good to see the Crusaders leading some more sorties, can only help to get some of the newer grades some more experience.  
  
Engaged some centaurs out west in some human quarry. Not problem, though, have fought ponies before. Apparently, I need to watch my spacial awareness a little, kept bumping into Xeyia. I didn't realize until she mentioned it, though. Something to watch in the future. Can't be a good shieldwall troop if I knock people over around me. Told her as much, too.  
  
Some apprehension about getting closer and closer to Camp Resolve, but that's not abnormal. Marching back into a warzone, I guess some reluctance is expected. I wonder how Freyja's doing? Probably over in the Priory, studying up on all sort of ancient knowledge and scriptures. Always was the brightest at home, in her own way. Just... soaked up things. I remember her coming home after having run into that Jotun that wanders are the Lodges. So excited about their tales and legends. A few days later she had raided the Priory study point, and was babbling on about runestones and giant-folk, and how they could be related to us. It was always funny to see her walk circles around the oven while reciting what she'd just read about to me in an excited voice.  
  
Ah well. Some must fight so that all can be free. So... strange to think the reason why I originally joined up is now fighting on the same front. Perhaps her children will at least know some peace.

# 17th of Colossus

Spirits... long day again. We're at... uh... some Seraph camp in Brisban. Don't really know where, apparently doesn't really have a name. We did the long forced march here from Black Haven today. Sore feat, as per usual, but nothing I'm not used to. Camp's set on a hillside, mostly Seraph here. We're not too far off from the main road  
  
Another volunteer patrol out, with Lyralii this time. Was fairly pleasant, didn't run into too much trouble. Headed south through a canyon to a sizable Sylvari village nestled under a tree. Would've been peaceful, if not for the encroaching Nightmare Courtiers and Inquest that apparently lurk about. Sounds like they're in need of a clean-up detail. Pity we're not staying, but marching on. Ah well. Perhaps something for an irregular brigade to handle while we're out at the front.  
  
There was some tussle at camp with Xeyia, who apparently got jumped by a bandit when she was looking for a place to relieve herself. Looked quite shaken. Bandit was all but cleaved in half, though, Xeyia ripped her greatblade through her. I wrapped up the corpse and left it outside camp for the raptors. Would've burned her, but that's never a good idea out in the wild. At least now, regardless of the choices the robber lass made, her body will return to the earth, and into the Mists.  
  
Always makes me wonder. These bandits, not all of them can be evil folk. Some probably just made a wrong choice along the way, and ended where they are now. I guess they reap what they sow, in that respect.  
Never really liked killing folks like that, seems so wasteful.  
  
Storm left before we marched.  
Bah.

# 18th Colossus

Long march again, we're in some canyon filled with Asura and active asura gates all over the place, called Ulta Metamagicals. Ironside wanted to blow up some of the portals, but Lyralii didn't seem to want us to touch *anything* at all. Probably thinks we'd break it.  
Eh, probably not wrong there.  
  
Still, weird. I keep wondering where they lead. Xeyia said that, for some reason they don't have gates at the other sides, meaning it's a one-way trip at best. Sounds like a massive security issue to me, truth be told, but I stopped arguing with Asura ever since that gate thing in Lion's Arch... when was that, '20? Spirits, seems ages ago.  
  
The rest of the place is interesting enough, though. All manner of what looks like old Asuran ruins out here; there's a series of strange looking buildings along the cliffside, carved with geometric patterns. Very Asura, but... way older than anything I've seen from them before. Maybe that's why all these gates are here? Some old travel hub that's just been busted, or something.  
  
Duties today were... sporadic, I think. After the march, the scouts ran out and spotted a big Toxic Alliance thing. We had to scramble to scuttle it, but it was being shielded. Consolidated while the scouts continued their mission. Xeyia and I headed south on an contact mission with some Priory that yielded little of interest. Apparently missed a Vigil troop staging an attack on the Toxic spore, though, so we linked up right in time to assist. Burned it to a crisp.  
  
Rest of the eve went pretty well. I spoke some with Zara and Cheery, but both were a little tired. Medical's taking in new people, which is good. Heard Mithra, Layfon and Darksbane are trying out. Would be good to have more medics.  
  
Anyway, tomorrow we're at the main warzone. Not sure if it's hit me, despite the fact thgat I'm writing about it all the bloody time. The Silverwastes, and the western front.  
Just hope we'll all come back.

*((The following is written beneath the most recent entry in square, standardized handwriting.))*  
  
You won't.

[One page has been left blank, as if to make a clean break with the ominous line.]

# 19th of Colossus

So... that happened. I skipped a page, because that's just a bad omen. Almost want to get rid of this book, and get a new one, but couldn't bring me to it just yet. Zara apparently found it outside my tent like this, with that line already in it. I don't know what to think. It's probably just some prankster who thinks they're funny. If anyone, my money would be on Xeyia. Still, though, it's eerie, and sort of disquieting. I wonder if it's some sort of spirit. Anyway, Ironside said some good words about it; if it's a bad omen, I'll show my strength by overcoming them.  
  
We finally finished the march west, though, and arrived at Camp Resolve. It's... grand. Set in between some canyons, Pact has a big staging area up and running here. Not quite as big as Trinity was in the day, but that only makes it busier. There are airships arriving and departing every few minutes, and many more on station. The Glory of Tyria lingers overhead. It's an inspiring sight, if anything, to see the ship that destroyed Zaithan again. I miss serving aboard those ships. A pity, it would've been good to have the *Ramming Speed!* still in the air for a fight like this. Not just Pact here either, but Wolfborn, Peacekeepers, Seraph, Legion troops. No doubt we're standing on the very edge of a another big step in the Great War. Soon enough, we'll sqee those ships leave anchor, and then the invasion will begin.  
  
And it's going to be a hard fight. Harder than Orr, that's for certain. Marcus took Blade out on a patrol to some camp out west, and we ran into some of the Mordrem. Not like risen. Not like risen at all. Big, hulking beasts with skin as hard as thick oak bark. Takes some force to cut through as well. Not only that, but the fort we were tasked with checking out was completely abandoned. We found some discarded retreat orders, but that's about. I don't know, but that just... creepy. It got worse, people started seeing things along the way back. I think some of those Mordrem secrete some sort of gas. Force was convinced he'd been turned into a a bird, for fuck's sake. I don't know. Just seems bad.  
There's also plenty of skritt here, which is curious, but not too bad. Just got to keep your stuff hidden away well enough.  
  
Some clear ruins out there, though, most of them old. Some are buried beneath piles and piles of sand, or have been reclaimed by the skritt entirely. Others apparently serve as forts for the Pact. I wonder if these are the reason why Freyj's being put forwards into the expedition? Some of them look impressive. Almost human, like temples. Columns and pillars, supporting walkways, and thick walls... A lot of it is almost crumbling, and many features have been worn away by the passage of sand over the years. I wonder who built them out here. Regardless, they're not here anymore.  
  
There was some insane, deaf Charr, making a ruckus. Damn fool scratched me in the throat, needed two stitches. Almost blew us up, too. Apparently he carried a live grenade on him too, and nearly pulled the pin when I started him. Ah well. At least the camp medic cleared up nicely with little issue. Cut's going to itch a bit, which is never fun in a hot climate. Nevermind it being another bad omen.  
Some weird Asura golemancer, too. Got off famously with Krax, they immediately talked about turning me into an actual assault vehicle.  
  
What else? Oh, right Mithy was freezing. Apparently the night time temperature drops right down here, below zero. I gave her the big bear pelt Kristen gave me, to keep warm. Don't need it with this climate, doesn't get cold enough for me to be overly bothered. Ruthford advised me to get out some loose clothing for day duties, though, the armour will likely boil me alive if I wear it too often during the day. Still, though, I'll need the plate if I want to come through this alive.  
  
Mithra's hearing that thing they described in Dry Top again. Or feeling it. Whatever. I've talked to Kath about it, just in case. She, uh... ordered me to knock out any Sylvari I see acting overly weird, and then find an officer. Not sure how to feel about that, truth be told.

# 20th of Colossus

Settling in, Resolve proving to be a good station, with all the bustle and hustle of a forwards operating base. No orders, though, just guard duty and prep. Spirits, but does it get scorching hot here. It's worse than Southsun. It is bearable at dawn and dusk, but for most of the day, sticking to the shade is the only way to spend any time at all. The sand because almost glowing with heat, meaning you skip around between patches of shadow that change and shift as the sun passes overhead. The Charr are even worse, they plated everything with metal. The result? All those metal structures slowly become red hot over the course of the day.  
  
Steady stream of soldiers coming and going, too. Most of them head west on patrols or garrison duties. Not just Pact troops either, but all sorts of troops. There's even a little corner of Seraph. The Wolfborn are genial enough, though many say the heat is bothering them. I've taken to carrying two waterskins on me, just to keep cool. I wasn't even aware I could sweat this much.  
Perhaps I have a bright future as a chemical weapon.

# 21st of Colossus

Camp Resolve, slow day, even though we're at the frontlines. Mostly still settling in, a lot of sitting around the campfire as it grows colder overnight. Miremel was around, apparently has been on station with her Chapter for some time now. Doesn't paint a pretty picture, if anything.  
  
Took a walk around camp at dusk, just to keep an eye out. Camp Resolve's big. They're loading materials into airships by the tonnes here, and there is a warmaster on station from the entry at Fort Vandal just to direct newcomers to their billets. The rows of tents and camps are impressive; I'm wondering if this is the largest invasion force ever assembled. Wouldn't surprise me too much.  
  
Spoke some with Drakemoor and Ruthford. Good friends to have, those, I feel. Strange, I never really liked humans much before that. Seems to be a new thing with this Chapter.  
  
Oh, Vee got herself knocked out during practice. Worried me for a bit, but Ema was watching over her, as usual. Good lasses, those two.

# 22nd of Colossus

Nothing really happened, aside that I might have found a quiet spot in the morning shade from where I can see the sunrise colour the cliff-sides and rock structures bright orange. At noon, there's a tiny nook of shade from where I can see the heat distort the air, like little tears in reality.  
  
Athelstan talked about eating rats, after he spotted some of them scurrying around the camp. I tend to forget he's been a mercenary for a long while as well, and isn't some noble who isn't used to rough living. You could say he's like a finely casked mead; takes a while to get all the nuances.  
  
There's a strange... bustle. I get a feeling the fleet's about to make their move. Just... something in the way the officers carry themselves, this feint tinge of urgency. Well, ready or not, we'll be there.

# 23rd of Colossus

Spirits, that set the tone. We went out on a patrol today, intent to investigate a disturbance somewhere down in the wastes. Warmaster took Blade to the field for that, had us scale a short rockface to get into some sort of small caldera. Didn't go without a hiccup either, had to rope us out one by one, over a ledge. Some giant tendrils flailed about as well. Some passed overhead, in giant tendrils that dwarf even the largest creatures I've seen. Sjofn said they contained Mordrem. Thought about blowing them up, but that apprently doesn't do anything. Smaller vines as well, all over place. Grasping, ripping, excreting blobs of acid that burns through plate armour. We beat back several of those. They don't seem to 'die' as much as just draw back into the ground, unless you chop straight through them, which is deceptively difficult.  
  
Anyway, we got to the bowl of that caldera, and saw some weird constructions on the edge. Turns out some crazy Charr mechanic set up shop nearby, and is crafting some sort of weird mechanical devourer-weapon in relative quiet. Looked impressive, though I have no idea how they work. Saw them in action, they're pretty effective at ripping into the Mordrem... things. The scrapper there seems ti have just been building them in relative quiet. Seems the Pact knows he's there alright, even though he said he had some problem with Skritt thieves. Hardly surprising, seems like a prevalent issue.  
  
Also found a cave that went pretty deep down. Looked like it would've gone deeper, but there was a big vine wall obstructing the passage. The Warmaster instructed me to try and blow it, so I did, triggering my satchel charge. Didn't have much of an effect on the vines, but it caught something's attention. Vines and Mordrem pushed out of the ground everywhere, and we had to give a good acocunt of ourselves there and then. Nearly died, too. Warmaster, Khil and Felix are in the infirmary with wounds, though none of it seemed overly serious. Stress got high, though, we were with our back against the wall at one point, roping down slowly to get clear. The Charr mechanic might be in for a rough time, though his creations might keep him safe enough.  
  
So tired. Fighting in the roasting sun was exhausting; my armour was hot enough to boil on egg on, if Sjofn is to be believed. First thing I did was rip it off and hunker down in the shade with a canteen of water, just to cool off. With nightfall, at least, it became bearable. Still; haven't taken a piss in hours. Means I need more water.  
  
I spent some time of the evening talking with Force and Sjofn. Some interesting things. Spoke about Charr legends. There's some good ones in there, in par with the tales we tell about our own great heroes. Should take some time to go to the Black Citadel, once. Maybe when this is all done, and I live, I can take Kristen out there, and we can pillage all the bars for their best drinks, eh?  
Missing her a tad.

# 24th of Colossus

Picket duty for today, sitting next to that weird box-thing Felix, Zara and I 'spotted' the other day. Turns out it *is* a guardhouse, but it becomes so damn hot in there no-one uses it. The only thing of note about it was some scrawling on the wall about how the Charr are idiots for building these things out of metal. Can't say I disagree, it's like a literal oven after it's been in the sun for most of the noon.  
  
Took my guard post sitting next to the gate cannon instead, watching the gunnery crews ready shells for breech-loading. Had a pleasant enough chat with some of them. They've been here a while, say that Resolve's been attacked once or twice by big Mordrem, but only has been threatened seriously once. Apparently they had to run danger close strafing runs down the canyon interiors with airships at one point, which bought some time for the troops at Vandal to reinforce in full. Must've been a mighty battle, though I'm surprised I didn't hear of it before.  
  
I'm a bit worried about the huge vines, truth be told. Apparently, that's how Modremoth got troops behind our lines, and ran rampant in Kessex and Brisban when we were out south. Apparently we're having hard times destroying the actual vines; at best, we destroy the surface protrusions, but we don't have anything to fight the below the surface. They go east for thousands of miles, too.  
  
Regardless, the camp's been bustling. I'm fairly certain Freyja's around here somewhere, or up in one of the airships massing above us. They're about to go, within the next score days, I'm almost sure.

# 25th of Colossus

Exhausted. Fought at some forsaken place called Indigo Caves, until the Modrem piled up in heaps outside the walls, and I struggled to keep hold of my sword in every swing. The heat will be the death of me, spirits damn it all to the abyss. At the end of a day, I have to all but rip off my armour and just sit around in the shade. At least it gets a little cooler, then.  
  
Wasn't all, even. Apparently something collapsed in the ground, and suddenly we were staring down a gaping plantlike maw. Ironside ordered us inside. At first I thought I didn't hear him, but then he barked the order again. Just dropped down, sword at the ready. Spirits, but that was nightmarish. Just a... corridor, turning in on itself in a circle, with two giant Terragriffs in it, running amok. We put the beasts down, but it was one of the worst close-quarter combat encounters I've experienced. Got beaten about and mushed up into the wall several times, all but trampled. Thanks the spirits I'm wearing the armour, or I'd have been dead twice over now.  
  
The fleet's prepping. There's more going up into the air now than going down; I've been watching the loading platform near the north gate.

# 26th of Colossus

Never noticed that the stars shone bright out here, but they do. At night, during guard post, you can stick your head out and look up where the campfire doesn't burn too bright, and a all the constellations light up. They're a fair tad different from where they are at home, but it's familiar enough. Could use some more aurora, though, and snow. The sand is a poor substitute.  
  
As it stands, the Silverwastes are still hot, and we're on rear echelon. The sheer amount of folks being moved through, though... Fort Trinity and the assault over the Straits was nothing compared to the muster Trahearne has been readying up for Modremoth. Spirits, I wish I could say that we're overestimating it, but from what I saw, we'll need every last sword and every last shell to make it through this.  
  
I keep checking my arms and armour, obsessively. For some reason, I keep thinking that as long as I keep them in order and maintained, I won't die. The damn ghost-in-the-book's getting to me. All the bad omens and all the evil signs, as if there is a daemon watching over my shoulder, waiting to see how I doom myself.  
Must've been the girl that jumped Xeyia on the march here... should've thought of that. Humans bury their dead. Now the spirit is angry, and it wants its revenge.  
  
I'm delusional. Just driving myself mad with these ideas of doom.  
Should talk to a shaman, if I can. Maybe with the Wolfborn?

# 27th of Colossus

Can't sleep, keep having terrible nightmares of all of us dying or perishing, in some terrible way. Each time, it is my fault, something I could have done, something I might have prevented. Now I lie awake, torn apart by worries. For my friends and allies, and also for Freyj and Kristen. Never been so afraid of death before. Unlike me, but it still terrifies me. So afraid to fail, and leave things behind unfinished.  
  
I need to stop. This is only making it worse.

# 28th of Colossus

The Wolfborn have a shaman, called Knarrsi, who was willing to speak to me. I've never been a strong follower of Wolf, but it was good to hear some words of wisdom from an elder of my own kin. The other Chapter's norn are too young, and Sana carries her own burdens. At moments like these I almost miss Jorund Wolfkin's words about the pack. He obsessed pver it, but understood at least some things which I am prone to forget. Doubt is a killer, as much as cowardice is, after all, and the hunter who hesitates before he strikes will miss his prey, causing the rest of the pack to have one meal less.  
  
Knarrsi and I spoke at some length over mess, and not just about the troubles of the idle mind. Apprently the Wolfborn helped shift some large and heavy pallets of munitions and stocks up to the loading pails. From what he decribed, sounded like a battle load and readiness for the Glory and good score of escorts and gunboats. Thunder and light,ing on the horizon, I figure.  
  
Freyja must have passed through or nearby, if she's fleet-side. I haven't seen her, but she might be overhead as I write, far as I know, it's a difficult thought. I hope to the spirits and anyone who would listen that she is safe. At least up on airship, it's relatively safe. I've thought about writing her, but it woulnd't reach her until we're already on the move, so it would be pointless.  
  
For now, I willl look up at each arriving airships, and assume she's in each one, while hoping she isn't on any of the departing ones.

# 29th of Colossus

We've been set to work again, manning the encampment and doing hard manual labour where required. The Charr build sturdy enough, but the steel still sinks in the sand and loose dirt. Don't think I can take much more sand, though, filled enough bags of it to fill up a small lake. But, at least the exterior walls and ramparts are about as sturdy as they can get. If this entire invasion thing doesn't pan out, Kristen can sleep on both ears, knowing I can errect a sturdy enough wall, if needs be. Build us a nice steading, perhaps, eh?  
  
I spoke some more with the Wolfborn and Knarrsi, even recognise one or two faces among them. They invited me to come to one of their tents to boast and drink mead until dawn's light, but I don't think that would be a good idea when it comes to duties the morn after. Besides, I think they forget that the desert nights are shorter than they are back home. By dawn's rise, most of them will likely still be drunk! I appreciated the notion, though.  
  
I'm almost done blunting my blade on the dragonbone, too. Got the rough shape done, which I hope she'll like. I'll have plenty of time to finish it anyway.

# 30th of Colossus

Too hot. Just too damn hot. Medics had to drag me off and put me in the shade why some elementalist trainee blasted cold air through the entire place. This place is getting on my nerves, with the desert, and all the spooky nonsense.  
  
I'll be glad when we're sent forwards into the advance, truth be told. Jungles like Metrica and such are still hot, but they're humid and have shade. Less arid dry.  
Anyway, my head hurts, and I think my skin burnt badly. Wearing armour and padding on top of it won't help either.

# 31st of Colossus

Spirits, it got even warmer. I didn't even think that was possible, truth be told, but it got worse than Southsun did. Just baking heat, with the air itself trembling above the earth in distress. As if the spirit of Wind itself coiled up and shivered under the sunlight. Luckily, duties are of for today, because it's just not workable. Means I didn't even had to put on the armour. I've set to keeping under an open tent sail at the west gate, where some wind passes though the canyon, and the sun never shines directly on the canvas. Dusty, but at least its cooler than most every place here.  
  
Felix gave me some foul-smelling goop for the burns. It must have worked, because they're not nearly as sore as they were the other day. Good, that, sleeping on the belly is bad for the digestion.  
  
Got our marching orders, which seems to affirm what we've suspected for some time now. The fleet's about to weigh anchor and we're support on the rear echelon. Not the most prestigious post, but I guess being a reserve troop isn't that bad either. The amount of warships on station is might impressive though. Pretty sure I know some of them, too. Others seem to be refitted Aetherblade raiders, flying Pact markings. Notably, we got a few ships with private flags, too. Though spirits knows how or why. Somewhere in Ascalon, a shipwright must be cranking these out by the dozen. Probably a hidden location, under the scrutiny of the Order, if I know anything. Ah well.  
  
Hm. Just know, I looked up to see the idle lights of the moored warships, and noticed that it was snowing. Seemed so strange. Then I realised it was ashes, not snow, from the pyres we built to burn the piles and piles of Mordrem dead, and the smaller ones for our own fallen. Hail to the fallen.  
  
Might be more omens,  
Still have some bad sleep, keep thinking I'm being haunted by something. I keep having this nasty idea that I'll open the fieldbook to find another eerie message scribbled down. Superstition, of course...

*The same square writing returns*  
  
The snow will be a blizzard when the smaller pyres grow.

# 32nd of Colossus

Someone has been sneaking into my tent and reading my journal. No other way. Can't be ghosts.  
Musn't be ghosts.  
  
Spirits, what is this madness?  
  
We're not going to die, you hear me? We're going to win, and we'll kill this spirit-forsaken dragon in its own nest, like we did in Orr. Mark my bloody words.

*The next message is written in charcoal in a familiar hand*  
  
Madness? Why Tzahr. We are just getting started...

# 33rd of Colossus

I had a talk with some of Pact spellcasters about the writing that keeps on appearing on the other pages. I don't knw if it is some sort of malicious peank, or not. If it is, someone's been sneaking to it in the evening, when I drop off the kit in the tent, and writing in it when I'm not around. Might keep it on me at all times now, see if it happens again. I also thought about asking Athelstan to hex it with a mesmer spell or something, but that seemed so... I don't know, silly, until I rule out it's not just someones idea of a bad joke.  
  
What would worry me more is the notion that the fieldbook picked up some unfortunate magical resonance. We found plenty of worrying artefacts in Orr, plenty of them being highly dangerous or housing such things as wraiths and other creatures we had to banish repeatedly back into the abyss. Usually had to destroy the artefact as well, if the Priory or Order wasn't around to contain it. If the writing continues, I'll have to ass it by one of the Scholars that wander around, might be able to divine something from it I can't.  
  
As it stands, though, I've decided to write around the text, and not to think about it too more than I need to. Best not get too distracted with the Great War about to fire off west again. I'm going to need my wits about me for that, fleet or not. It's already bad out here, and this is merely on the doorstep of Modremoth's domain. Thngs are bund to ge worse before they get better, especially with a blind landing like this. I, in some way, regret not being part of the first wave troops, but on the other hand, we'll be moving into established footholds after the initial landing, which will go some way in keeping us alive. Besides, we'll rotate through to the first line soon enough when the first wave troops are getting rested.  
  
I'll write some letters today, before everything breaks loose, and the mail carriers are forgotten in the dust-off.

# 34th of Colossus

Arms and equipment ready, got everything sorted out and ready for war. Couple of lessons from the Orrian invasion came back to mind, though, which helps. Packed up an extra roll of cloth tissues and messenger paper. Never know when you need to ind a wound, or wipe your ass in the middle of war. Though apprently you can se the sand and some water for the later, though that seems like a waste of potable water to me.  
Got a second canteen, and an water skin on top, just so I can cary around enough water. It'll be a heavy carry, but as long as I can keep cool, that doesn't bother me.  
I've also switched out my tent pegs for heavier ones with a lead anchor bolt. Better for sand, and the like, and it doesn't blow away as easy. What else... Oh, sand bags, took five empty ones, just in case.  
A contract from the stipped kit I've been carrying around, but it's got most of the essentials still in there, which is good. Guess I'll be as ready as I'll ever be to move up from rear echelon. Fleet hasn't departed yet, though, but it pays to be prepared.  
  
Nervous, I think. Keep fiddling with things. If anhing, it's worse than Orr. I keep thinking of things I need to do, only to realise I've already done them the day before. Pretty sure I'l pack and repack my kit sixty times more before the fleet even leaves anchor.  
I wonder how some of the others are managing. Must be the first big war many have seen, though the Silverwastes might have given them an idea or two about the scale, with the bombing runs and constant assaults. Not that many I can name of the top of my head who I know saw Orr or even Arah in 35'. Not sure if they're ready for it. Spirits, at least they'll be spared the baptism by fire of an aerial combat landing. Shitting your breeches mid-drop is hardly dignified.  
Was Ironside in the initial wave? I cant recall. Should ask him, might have an explosive story to tell.  
  
Pity Verril ins't here. I'm sure she'd have something to say about how far we've come.

# 35th of Colossus

Some movement in the Camp today; saw a lot of people moving through on foot. At least one scout's been setting off west with a long-duration kit on their back. Fleet's up and about to leave high anchor if I know anything, but I've been saying that for near on eight days now. There's something afoot, though, might be the final cast off. We'll known soon enough. Keep an ear out for the departure horns to finally sound on all ships.  
  
We've got some Asuran volunteer with researcher with us, heading west as part of some observation team. They seemed nice enough, though very set on their work. Not sure what they're trying to accomplish though, they didn't really explain what they were after. Still, they apparently have the blessings of command for it, so I'm not going to argue. Just hope they know they're walking into a warzone, not a science practical. The last thing we need is a civilian panicking in the middle of it all; it'll be hard enough to mange as it is. They apparently also have a Sylvari assistant, though I didn't see them anywhere, as of yet. Might be worth striking up a conversation, see what they're both working on.  
  
Hah, talking about asura and their work; Krax apparently managed to weaponise golemite, arming with a shield projector. It's a nervous, skittering thing, but it popped out a defense shield bubble about the size of one of the spells the guardians use. Turns out Kraxxi was inspired by me and the work I do in the frontline, so left me the choice of naming it. Seemed a little odd to just name it after myself, so I settled for "Shield Wall". Never been good with names if they're not nicknames; even Freyj's just called after her mother after all. Still, a nifty little gizmo, though I doubt it'll replace me wholesale anytime soon. Not big enough, for one.

# 36th of Colossus

Spirits alive, preserve us from an early death at the hands of unworthy foes. Nourish the legend of your heroes so they may overcome odds that are beyond mortal men, and emerge victorious in the face of the enemy.  
  
It all started so well this morning; the fleet left anchor in a display rarely seen, with hundreds of war-hulls lifting off and setting sail over the horizon, the Glory of Tyria at its center. Seemed like we'd win this war quick and clean, and be home in time for Wintersday... We had duties, Lorma took us back to the ghost fort we found, and in some canyons behind it. Went reasonably well, if somewhat chaotic, until all the Sylvari just keeled over. Mithra, Cheery and the one with the Asuran researcher. Horrible screaming, like they were going mad. It wasn't good. We had to call in an extraction chopper for them, while the rest of us legged it back to camp.  
  
All the Sylvari had it. Modremoth's been clawing at their mind, forcing them to go mad. It's what they said, the... weird feeling in their mind. It gets worse. Blue Bark... he... attacked and killed Karon, yelling about Modremoth destroying us, before attacking the Warmaster. We put him down, but the damage was done. Karon got skewered with an ice spike, just dead. The fleet's left for barely a day, and we're down two people. Maybe more. Athy, Mithra, Cheery... they're all in medical, tied down and confined. I'm worried that something will happen to them, and I'll only be able to respond with my sword. Terrified. Cheery's pulling them through, though. She seems to have the firmest grip on her mind. Some people are worried, though, and I can't blame them. If Modremoth can get into their minds, they're all risks.  
  
It's worse, though. Trahearne, Laranthir... they're out with the fleet when it happened. It might have affected them too. There is smoke in the west. I'm  
  
[break in page]  
  
The worst might have happened. There are people in there. Freyja. And apparently Kath too, and maybe Sana too, who has apparently deserted, spirits alone know why... I feel the need... and itch to go out there, to look for people, to know what happened, and make sure everyone is still safe and sound. I hope Freyj is alive. Wish I knew what ship she was on, so I knew what to look out for. But I don't.  
  
I had to meditate to just... calm down. Almost just took my gear and headed out west, try to find a passage myself. Can't yet. Have to stay, and focus, work with the Pact. We're still in this war, and we have a dragon to slay.  
  
66. Karon, slain by Modremoth.  
67. Anthaos, fell to corruption.

# 37th of Colossus

Saw the glow in the night. Heralds something bad, if anything.  
  
Camp's in a better state, though everyone's shaken badly. Should try and keep the mood up. Remind people we've not lost the war. Not yet anyway. We'll pull through, one way or another, though it'll be in the ground and in the dirt. We don't know for sure yet, but... seems pretty much like it that the fleet's just gone.  
  
I think this is the closest we've been to breaking full stop since the Pact's been formed. Spirits, it could be the greatest defeat the Vigil has ever suffered. We'll have to overcome and beat the odds.  
We need to start getting west. Command's with their hands in their hair, but if the fleet's down there, we need to get survivors out, and get fresh troops in.  
  
Trying not to worry about Freyj.

# 38th of Colossus

Thought it'd get better after it got bad, but it might have become worse. Lyralii had field command today, took us out west to take and hold that one fort, apparently called Blue Oasis. Didn't seem to bad, but the Mordrem staged an unending assault that ground us down inch by inch. If, as they're trying to claim for morale, the smoke west is from the dragon burning, then its minions do not care for it. They battered down the gates first, and then the walls, and swarmed inside like a tide. Giant husks hurled boulders overhead like catapults, and we had nothing to fire back. Had to charge out and hack at them until they toppled. One airship passed by low, and thundered out a volley, buying us precious time to get out. We were overrun, in every sense of the word, with wounded everywhere. I had to run ahead, carrying Felix, and to get Cheery up and ready. Garrick lost a hand. Of course, we didn't notice the thorn, and we were too slow on treating him. Dead, now. I, uh... gathered the banner, and kept it aside for now. At least his tale'll be told once more. Least I can do.  
  
Lyralii looked ragged after that, almost crushed. Hope she's not taking it too badly. Troops don't need folks cracking under pressure, not now. We're in a dip, and we need to be pulled out out of it. We need good news, or a victory. Lacking that, a purpose and a goal beyond sitting here and watching the situation get worse and more desperate. Many of us just feel the need to act; just so it feels like we're still in control of things.  
Spirits, at least the Sylvari are stable, though they remain confined at medical quarters for the time being.  
I hate having to treat them like this; they're friends. But I understand. Xeyia actually ha-  
  
Where is Xeyia, anyway? We lost her; Marcus and Bridgit tried finding her, but no trace. Hope she's alright; for all her flaws, I like her well enough to lament the loss, should she have died. Spirits, that would be the fourth in two days.  
  
I hope Freyja is alive out there; I think I understand what the humans do when they pray for something; I ask the spirits to keep her safe. It's on my mind almost constantly, and I'm doing my best to keep it there. There's so little I can do, but so much I want to do. My little girl.  
Spirits.  
  
I have to stay strong. Focus on my duty, and be an example. Anything else will bring ruin on myself and on the others. Best we can do is be ready for the inevitable moment we're sent west, and we can reap some revenge. We'll win this damned war, and put this dragon down for good, like we did Zaithan.  
We had a new transfer in too, one norn lass. Didn't speak much, but she seemed nice enough.

[continuation of entry]  
  
Oh, and Roeland is back with us. Apprently the Pact has been recalling back-line troops to the front to fill in the holes left. It was good to see him again, though he seemed a little unhappy about being here. But that might just be me, he does his own thing, after all. Asked me if he could name me his next of kin. Not entirely sure why, but I guess I can, if he has no-one else. Seems he's set alone on this world, in many respects. He did apprently get a mate! All he could tell me about him was that he was an academic. Not sure if I know what that entails in Charr, but fair enough I guess. Most of all I just hope the lad finds his place in the world, Vigil or elsewhere, and that he finds some contentment. I'm not sure he'll find it in the war, but he can make his own choices.  
  
Meditation is helping. I think I caused something to catch fire on a training dummy the other day, though I'm not sure why or how. I was just venting some anger when the damn thing just.... Ignited. Burnt a nice hole in it, too. I would talk to someone about it, if it didn't pale into nothing next to everything else we have to worry about.  
  
Bah, regardless, I need rest. Too damn tired. Running in sand and armour takes its toll.  
  
68. Garrick, died of his wounds.

# 39th of Colossus

I'm so tired, but I need to write this down, just because there's too much in my head for now. I'd rather put them on paper, go through them and order it a little before my head bursts, or nightmares settle into the chaos.  
  
Day started well enough, considering the situation we were in. We went through duties, west again. We held the fort strong, this time, prepared. Same tactics as the day before, so we were able to take down the rock lobbers easy with an outside team before the big hordes had time to swarm us. Mad sure they weren't able to breach the walls. Eventually, another vine collapsed below us, and we were ordered in again. Some big Modrem troll beast, we killed right quick. Dhianni was pleased enough, ordering the combat Golem we brought along from Kraxxi to take off the head for study. We managed to pull out in time, only running into two smaller ambushes on the way back. We cleared it out easy enough.  
  
I spoke with Ironside for a bit, until it turned out that two of the Sylvari tried to make a run for it. The Siona lass, and another one from the camp, called Elia. Apparently, Athy tried to stop them from escaping, but couldn't. Layfon followed them, and apparently intended to let them escape, if it wasn't for Roeland. Lad reported it, and Vethrir went to pursue. I didn't go with them, but apparently Siona escaped. The Elia lass... well, she died. From what I heard, Vethrir tried shooting her in the leg, only to be inaccurate at the worst of moments, and killing her. We burned her, and collected the ashes. It would've been too much to ask to be spared another loss. Roeland blames himself for it, thinks he allowed the chance for her to die by reporting it, and not just letting them escape. I wonder if they realise how many people could have died if they escaped, and turned, or got captured.  
  
It became a beehive after that. When Cheery found out, she was furious. Marcus and the Warmaster had me round up the Sylvari, and bring them to command. Turns out we're allowing the Sylvari some more leeway, but it nearly turned sour. Marcus and Sylvari were inches away from clobbering eachother to death over the death of the lass. I mean... I understand both parts; on one side, we are locking up potentially innocent people, and holding them in forceful confinement. On the other, we are doing so to prevent a lot more people from dying.  
It nearly broke down, but people saw sense and calmed down. We're not where we need to be, but we're not sunk yet either.  
  
I hate having to treat them like we do. The Warmaster has agreed to giving them some more freedom, though, which will help. It just feels wrong to have them as prisoners like this. Maybe we could've prevented those two from having to try and escape if we just... treated them differently.  
Bah. This is a war. If I stop to think, or start assigning blame, we'll get no-where but ruin.  
  
The fleet's destroyed, too, as if we didn't already know. Still, it made me so angry hearing it, finally. It means so much has been lost, so many lives, so much momentum. We're waiting for more troops to back us up before we push deeper west. Apparently, Ema's sister is also out west, along with Freyja, Kath and probably Sana too. I'm starting to see the other side of it; right now, I'm so angry I feel like I could kill the dragon on my own. I'm not alone. It's good, though, I can use this anger. It's a weapon, a tool, that I will aim at the dragon's heart, before ripping through it like the fury of the stars itself.  
  
I managed to burn another training dummy. I was just... venting some anger, when Marcus and Cheery were having a shouting match. I kept thinking about everything that was going wrong, and just got angrier and angrier, until it was like a red hot rage boiling over inside of me. And then it just spilled, like red hot bolts of fire. I need to talk to one of the guardians about it; they always speak about virtues, like justice, that causes fire based on emotion. I have a hunch this is related. And if it helps me burn a path through the jungle, this suits me just fine.  
Perhaps it's a gift from War after all, when we were in Orr, to protect those I love and care for. Kath, Sana, Freyja... at least Kristen is safe. I wish she was here, so I could talk to her. Always more sound of mind than I am on these sort of things. That's hunters for you, they're pragmatic, if anything.  
I should write her to let her know I'm alright.  
  
69. Elia, killed while trying escape captivity.

# 40th of Colossus

Small victory today, as we pushed back to the same fort we held yesterday, and onward, in a co-ordinates trike against a... growth, of some sort, that apparently directed a lot of the Dragon's minions in the region. Apparently, it was part of the large network of underground vines we encountered some days before, which were blocking our land-routes deeper into Magus Falls. It was a long fight, with some close shaves, but we held the line and pushed back -a mammoth effort, if anything- until we pierced through into an underground chamber in the west. We used a large mechanical devourer... thing, like the ones we encountered with that crazy Charr mechanic-hermit. Apparently, he survived the surge of Modrem we'd awoken then, and devised a weapon for us to blast through the vines. It did its job well enough, even if it had some difficulty here and there.  
  
Fought an ugly looking Modrem twice my size, below an enormous flower, alive and twisting, though it was certainly worth a sight. We managed to kill it, or at least make it die off from the rest of its network. Almost on cue, a lot of the big vines we've been seeing the Mordrem emerge from snapped back into the ground, or showed signs of being distressed. Whatever we did, we hurt it bad, and Modremoth with it. Felt good; the win we needed. We have something to look out for, a way deeper into the jungle. The Warmaster will let me know when we'll start sending search parties; that way we know something, at least.  
  
Tally on our side is light; Drakemoor suffered a fall that will cost her some time to recover from, and lost her rifle, but that's about it. I think I saw Lorma with some allergy issues, too, but nothing incapacitating. I'm getting lucky, and remaining largely on my feet, by and large, though I'm suffering from the heat. I'm probably going through twice or thrice my normal water consumption, and I need to walk around with a bare chest in the evening just to cool down a little. Could be worse, though. No number at the bottom of the page, though. We celebrated with strong drink, courtesy of the Warmaster and Lyralii.  
  
Which I could end on that note, but I can't. We found Xeyia, raving mad about fighting enemies in the fort, beating around sand with a club, and covered in gunk. We tried to calm her, but I think she was hallucinating, or she hit her head again, because she wouldn't listen. Athelstan ordered the Asuran lass to stun her, which she did in short order. Hate to handle it like that, but there wasn't a lot we could do, and Xeyia was flailing around with weapons drawn. Hope she's not just lost it entirely. Well, the goods news is that she's not dead.  
Some hope; if Xeyia's survived, other will as well. Got to keep hanging on to that.

# 41st of Colossus

Nightmares. Don't want to write.  
Too much things at the edge of my vision.

# 42nd of Colossus

Bah, dreams are still uneven, filled with urgent runs through a sweltering desert, never reaching the goal. Keep having to leave people behind until I'm all alone, when the sand turns into crumbling bones beneath my feet, and I slowly start sinking away. Right before I wake up, I'm up to my chin, desperately trying to claw my way out again, before something big and angry steps on my head.  
Almost ran straight out of my tent with my sword drawn the other day, int he middle of night, convinced that people were dying or needed my help. Too disturbed to return to sleep after.  
  
Quiet two days, now, trying to enjoy what rest we can, before it all inevitably comes crashing down. We're still only preparing to enter the real battlefield, after all, and we still have to deal with whatever brought down the fleet. Hope I'll sleep better before that happens, or I'll have to talk to medical. Don't want to repeat Orr.  
  
Xeyia woke up, but... it doesn't look good. I think she's finally fried her brain. Didn't respon very well, acts blank and jerky, and we didn't manage to get much of a response from her. Spirits, it took us long enough to just get her to take some rest. Apparently she's angry at Athelstan for ordering her knocked out when we found our. Something about needing help, and then being attacked. From her standpoint, that makes some sense, but she was too fragmented to even try and bring that across. I'm worried that she won't recover. If it's the mind, she might be out of it for a long, long while.  
  
Spoke with Athelstan and the Warmaster a bit, also about magic and the state of the war. They suggested I talk to Cheery about the fire-thing, and the Warmaster explained that it might be some inherent magic that's just been surfacing slowly through focused emotion. I guess Storm's meditation trick helps with that, in ways closer to the martial application than I had previously considered. I'm not sure if it's a good idea or not, Southsun's made me weary.

# 43rd of Colossus

Order came through, we're going in, two days. Good news, in a way, that fills me with determination and poses us with a clear intent. I am glad that when I've stated we were still in this war, I wasn't wrong. Modremoth's got a lot of very angry soldiers coming his way. I hope that if anyone survived the fleet's destruction, they are still alive, and have entrenched themselves until we arrive to relieve them. Hear that, Freyj? Help's coming, just don't give up until I can get to you.  
  
Spirits, but I am straining on the start. The next day cannot come soon enough. I curse the moments I sit idle, because I know good men are dying every second. I know we cannot save them all, but every minute we delay, the Pact diminishes. The mounds of helmets we will honour before this campaign's end will stagger us, and it will slow down the war for years to come. But first, we must finsh what was started.  
  
Dreams are still disturbed.

# 44th of Colossus

War. War never changes.  
I sometimes wonder how it would be to live in a world in case the Dragons won, one with nog magic left, where relics of the old world are rpized and guarded above all else, and where all semblance of order has evaporated. I think it would be a sorl ruled by avarice, with few people willing to give for the sake of giving, or doing good. Perhaps the Vigil would even survive, and become a beacon of hope while the world crumbles?  
  
It is unlikely I'll live to see such days, however. If will likely be claimed by the war, whether we win or lose regardless. It doesn't matter. I am ready for the advance on the morrow.

[](https://theashenchapter.enjin.com/profile/3099637)

[Tzahr Davidsson](/profile/3099637)

wrote:

# 44th of Colossus

War. War never changes.

.\_.

# 45th of Colossus

We're west, camped out near a crashed airship. We think it's the Lethal Vantage. There are five more I can see from here, all still aflame with burning fuel. As the evening falls, they glow all around us. Most ships are skewered and pierced by enormous barbed vines, some rising higher than some mountains I've seen in the north. It is a terrifying sight, that fills me with despair and anger. I'm biting down with everything I have to stop myself from going mad. It is hard to imagine anything surviving that, though I cling to hope. We have found spare survivors, here and there, so she might still be alive.  
  
There are signs of old ruins throughout, bridges spanning canyons in the uneven and disrupted landscape. Spare vegetation sprouts up between the vines, though there are hints of lusher and thicker pockets of life deep below. May the spirits preserve the legends of those who pass. Some survivors might have found shelter there, away from the Mordrem-infested ridges. Perhaps there are ruins such as there are in the SIlverwastes. We'll have to see tomorrow.  
  
It was a titanic effort to get here. We fought our way up this ledge, and are holding up in this small, yet defensible, position. It seems we are preparing to spend the night here, with guards posted on the approach. We're barely in, but we already ran into Modrem and other species of extremely hostile wildlife. There were vines popping up through the ground that shelled us with acid, and spat out hordes of Mordrem. Some of them look deformed and stunted, while some look for all intents and purposes like men, but with barks for skin. We hacked one down when it spoke, something about failing Modremoth. I didn't know they were sentient, which horrified me beyond words. It'll be a hard fight, much harder, if the enemies can think tactically, and account for our and-  
  
[writing breaks off]  
  
We were attacked when the sun dipped below the horizon. Sizeable swarm of Modrem stormed us, though we beat them back. And again. And again. I guess there will be little to no rest for us.  
I got angry during the fight. More than I've ever been before. I just wanted to rip them apart with my bare hand, and feed them [there is a slight scorch mark]  
  
I need to control this, save it for combat. Otherwise it boils over, and fills me with fire.  
More meditation will help. Spirits, at least Storm and Cheery passed that on, or I'd have exploded.

# 46th of Colossus

We ranged out looking for survivors. Got opposed at every step by Mordrem and hostile wildlife. We went down what I can only assume was some ancient path to a freshwater river. It was a lot lusher and we pressed on, through some ancient passages dug through the rock. There's staircases and rough columns throughout. Ruthford remarked that there used to be inhabitants here, hundreds of years ago. Not anyone likely to still be around, but they left their marks all throughout the Magus Falls.  
  
We pushed on, into a small valley filled with Plated Behemoths. Seemed peaceful enough, until the Mordrem started encroaching. An overhead supply chopper was pulled down and crashed on top of us; we salvaged what we could, but we're lucky to be alive at all. Before all that, we spotted some... construction of sorts, up in the trees, and I could swear there was a Hylek sitting between the greenery. We sent off some scouts to check, but they got ambushed. Turns out it's Hylek alright, but some local tribe here that's been waging war on the Mordrem on their own accord. We didn't have a chance to make contact though. Severals folks got roughed up, including, Bridgit, Marcus and Ruthford. Don't know how bad it is, truth be told, but it doesn't look spit'n'polish. We pulled out, through a cluster of Modrem, only to hole up back on our ledge.  
  
Hylek here, though... I wonder how they relate to their kin out in the coasts. Perhaps there's something to learn from them, like we did at the Zintl Holy grounds. Spirits, they might know things about the jungle which could prove extremely valuable as we push on. Provided they're not hostile, of course. At least we share a common enemy.  
  
We also apprehended some sort of scavenger that was darting around, going after supply caches. Not sure what she was thinking. I saw Ironside talk with her earlier; assume she was being interrogated.

# 47th of Colossus

I am exhausted, so I will try to keep it brief. I need some sleep, and hope it's not disturbed by nightmares. They're beginning to become real, though. We keep being too late, or too slow, and people keep dying just out of reach. Two times today, I was soldiers rent asunder right before my eyes, inches before I was close enough to save them, to put myself between them, to do... something.  
  
The day has been hard. We've been forced to pull back towards the canyon path and the overlook through which we entered what we're calling the Verdant Brink. No choice, we're taking losses, and the attacks are relentless. They don't compare to Orr anymore, they transcend it. We have to fight for every step we take, and pay in blood in order to hold it. I'm starting to doubt we can do it, even though those thoughts are poisonous.  
  
We were sent to pull some remnant from Blade Chapter out, up ahead. We pushed through some magnificent ruins, the remnants of a city that must have been grand in its time, but is overrun and trampled in these days.  
We hacked our way to the top, fighting through winding staircases and galleries that were just wide enough for me to squeeze through. At the top, we found some survivors. Grace, Freyja's mate was with them. Spirits, but at least she survived. She didn't know where Freyja is, but at least could tell me the name of the ship. It's the Thunderbreaker. It was destroyed by a Mordrem vine, from what she said. Freyja might have survived. I need to find a way to get over there, and see. Pulling back after that was like a punch in the kidney; how could we pull back, when I finally knew where to look?  
I know it's selfish, but still.  
  
Right, Blade Chapter. We escorted them back to our bivouac, but it was overrun. I took a thorn from one of those snipers into my arm, that's swelling and hurts when I strap my shield to it. Medic looked at it, but it's a minor wound. One of the Blade members got killed on the spot, shot dead, meters away from me.  
It got worse; we got orders to pull back the survivors; but one wandered ahead while we were forming up and was thrown off the bridge, plummeting to their death. That's another two. The list is growing longer and longer.  
  
It was too much, at one point, and I erupted, however briefly. Dented my helmet, hurled it into the cliff.  
First outburst I've had since Southsun. I don't know. I'm tired, and angry and spent. But we must keep faith and we must keep going on. There's no choice.  
  
70. Ataam, shot by Mordrem.  
71. Cota, fell.

# 48th of Colossus

Didn't sleep. Nightmare.  
More running, but more urgent. Kept being hounded at the heels by snaking vines that wanted to drag me down and drown me. I woke up, but the feeling of urgency didn't fade. I jumped at every crackle of the fire, and I kept seeing snaking monsters at the edge of my vision. I think I'll go join the night's watch until I get tried enough to calm down a little, and try to sleep again.

# 49th of Colossus

We're recovering a little at rest; seems this is the only place in the entire region we're still holding firmly onto. Still, we can see the ledge we occupied before from here, and it is depressingly close. It becomes clear how little ground we made, and it is painful that we had to give it up already.  
  
Still, we snet out a ptrol to check for those Hylek today, and spirits, did we find Hylek. Three species of Hylek, actually. There's the regular sun-worshiping ones, the bug-eyed Itzel native to these parts, and some very large ones that we don't know what they do or are yet. The Itzel folk have a whole village out here, suspended in the trees, and filled with beautiful woodwork and wicker, like a spider web in the trees. It's good to see something which doesn't immediately relate to destruction or death. Something alive, that's not Mordrem or trying to destroy us. They might actually prove to be valuable allies if we managed to communicate with them that we're fighting a common enemy. It's good to see that we're not alone out here, though.  
  
About that, apprently Grace, Freyja's mate, made a run for it before she could reach Resolve, and went back into the Brink, looking for Freyja. I can understand why she did it, even though I think it was foolish of her to do. It's taking me a lot of willpower and energy to just stay here, and follow my orders. I know I could be out there, looking for Freyja, helping this Grace woman who has the coura  
  
Who was foolish enough to just run off on her own. While everyone else just sits he  
  
Stop. This is the best way. I'll find her. I'll find them. They're fine. They're alive.  
  
  
Still didn't sleep well, though I think I was too tired to stay awake.

# 50th of Colossus

Dream's changed some; I'm not running anymore. That's because there are vines snaking around my ankles, holding me down. I just struggle, clawing at the sand to escape, before they drag me down below the sands. It doesn't help to wake up to a sky filled with vines. It's as if the nightmare doesn't stop.  
  
Drakemoor rejoined us from Resolve, and had to go through the entire shock of walking into the Brink for the first time. This place here, aptly named Shipwreck Peak these days; highlights the worst we've seen, sticking out the shipwrecks like trophies. I'd think Modremoth did it on purpose, but the idea of that the dragon has that much control over those vines terrifies me.  
  
We're still resting a little, mostly doing recon work and trying to locate other pockets of survivors. There's a rumour of a larger encampment out west, though we haven't heard anything about that yet. It would be good, means there's another bridgehead of sorts for the invasion advance to link up with, and push through. Right now, it feels like the attack is already stalling. Hopefully, we can find some way to communicate with these Hylek we found, and at least open another avenue of attack.  
  
My arms hurts, from the wound. It's not serious, but it nags, and I can feel it as the vambrace chafes the padding.  
  
I'm whining. Bah. That's how you lose a war, when you let defeat wiggle in between your ears.  
We have a course forwards, we're regrouping, and there's hope. Deeper into the jungle, it is teeming with life, and even the wrecks and ruins around us have a sense of beauty in them. Like the Orrian invasion; it will get worse before it gets better. For now, batter down the hatches and weather the storm.

# 51st of Colossus

Recon team headed by Lorma found a line of advance towards another Pact encampment west of here; we're marching on it on the morrow. Finally. They brought back one; none other than Freezemaw. Of all the people that survive, it has to be the clinically insane charr. Started rambling off about needing to kill the Sylvari. Apparently, they've been taking them outside the camp boundaries and executing them, in spite of standing orders from a Commander not to do so. Bah, sickening.  
  
But, at least there's a group of survivors out west, with an established foothold we can relieve and man. Good news, and an objective. Plus, if a Commander was on site, it means the Pact is still alive and kicking, and we're not just salvaging wrecks. The offensive is still on.  
  
While this all happened, warmaster took us out to an S&R mission near the Itzel village. We found two shipwrecks, but they were tangled up above ground, held up by the vines. Didn't seem like we could get to them safely. I hope that who-ever was in there made it out to the ground alive. Spirits, they might actually have found their way to that encampment west.  
  
We were still on site when we ran into some Modrem. Diverted us inside some sort of underground cavern system, with a couple of weird walking mushroom things that tried to shoot spikes at us. I'm not sure if they're sentient, or just some local form of hyper-aggressive fungus. I wonder if you could eat them?  
Deeper down the cave, however, turned out to be some sort of Itzel shrine, or a shelter. Packed with the kin. They didn't respond much to us disturbing them, I'm starting to think we're not the first, and they see us a benign, or at least tolerate us as such.  
We headed back, before salvaging some supplies from a wrecked 'copter on the way. Linked up with some more survivors, including a Whisper Agent that popped out of nowhere to help us in a fight. They have a habit of doing that.  
  
Still, ready and able to make that push, and finally take some ground. Somewhere, I hope Freyja, Grace, San and Kath are all at this westward camp, waiting for us. Not going to let them down if they are. If not, well, it's one step closer to finding them.

# 52nd of Colossus

The advance went well, we're now a good stretch deeper west. A lot of them survived, thank the spirits, there's a sizeable force here. Most of them are exhausted, and in desperate need of medical aid. At least we're here, and we'll be able to relieve some troops. We encountered an evac 'copter during a perimeter patrol, so they're slowly starting to pull these troops out. Seems what-ever is left of Pact command is pulling together what the have. It's good.  
  
The camp itself is... uh... problematic. I made a voluntary assessment of the defenses, and spirits, it's a difficult one. Not hard to see why they call this place Stonetwist Paths. It's a mess of connecting pathways and bridges. Seems we're best off keeping in the center, were we're best sheltered. There's a spring right in the middle of camp, meaning most of it is lush and green. Cool, too, which is a blessing, even though the insects will get to me eventually. The other reason why the foliage helps is that we can barely see the enormous shipwrecks hanging overhead. They could come down at any moment, if those giant vines every retract. A chilling thought. All we can hope for is that the sheltered nature of the camp shields us a little from whatever falls down.  
Still, it's better than the ledge we tried to occupy in our first few days, and it's damn good to see so many of them still on their feet.  
  
Supply lines... I have no idea. We've collected plenty, and there seems to be viable forage a plenty here, so we're not going to starve anytime soon. I'm not even sure running supply caravans through here is possible, and we're certainly not getting anything in by airship. I'm not sure how many 'copters are still operating from Resolve, though, they seem to be able to perform some operations out here.  
  
No sign of any of our missing people, though. Freyj's not here, and neither is anyone else I was hoping to find. Still, I can't let that defeat me. This might a breakthrough, a tipping point for us. We need it.  
I'll find Freyja. If not today, then tomorrow. You survive out there, lass, I'm coming for you.  
  
We ran into Athy's old Warden captain. The Charr that's been attached to us, the one that doesn't speak; is keeping an eye on her. We're still under orders to keep all the Sylvari penned up and under guard. It must be humiliating for them, but we have so little choice. It pains me, though. The only thing I can do is treat them with kindness until we find a way to make sure they're free of that blasted dragon.

# 53rd of Colossus

Patrol duties today out south, as was suggested, stumbled into another, albeit smaller, hold out for Pact survivors. Troops holed up in a small cave, and barricaded the entry. They seemed to suffer periodic attacks, but that seems to be the rule here. They're close enough, though, so we could start thinking of linking up a supply chain between the camp, and turning it into another advance point. Turns out that there's a cave through there as well, that burrows all the way through the rock and ends up below the southern bridge of the camp here. An airship apprently crashed right on top of it, and caved in a part of the cave's structure, meaning there's a warship hanging from the roof. That seems to be a common theme here. We were tasked with blowing it, in order to collapse the passage, but one of the Asuran levs was still active and sputtering. I'm not aware enough of Asuran engineering to make a call about setting off a detonation charge next to one with any degree of certainty. Could've just rendered it inert, or it could have cratered the entire area. Lorma and the Warmaster considered it, and decided against it in the end.  
  
Troubling observation, there seem to be Hylek in with the Modrem attacks. They're larger and have different skin colours from the ones we saw in the village, so they might just be different tribes. I think it was Sjöfn that noted that they might just be... uh... dead ones, brought back to life by the dragon's corruption. A bit like the branded. It's unsettling either way, and they're difficult to fight. They don't approach combat like their ground-bound kindred, using bows and camouflage, and probably poisons too. I'm happy I'm wearing armour here, despite the heat. One of the soldiers in camp noted that they think the Itzel and their kindred look so different because they're tree-frogs. It makes a certain sort of sense.  
  
Almost died, too. We were fighting some of those mushroom things when it charged me and nearly hurled me off a bridge. I managed to hook my sword arm around the edge before I slid off completely, and the others hauled me up real quickly. Lucky, or I'd have just...  
I can't even imagine it. I don't think the shock of what it meant settled in completely. Might just be adrenaline still going around in my head. I need to sleep. It'll seep in.  
  
We ran into Enrista as well, apprently suffering fomr a lot of mental stress. They tried to arrest him, which ended with Lorma shooting him in the leg, befor ehe leapt off a cliff to escape. For a moment, I thought I saw him afterwards down the cliffside, but it just turned out to be a vivid red flower.  
  
Gave Garrick's banner to Kraxxi. Lass needed it, most of Blade Chapter's been... wiped out. That hits everyone hard. I tried to give the lass a pep-talk, but Asura are always a little special on that. Death is easier to parse if you believe that the Mists will be there to meet again all those lost to you. Still. The banner should help her, give her something to cling on.  
  
Sinclair found hos brother's field book today, horribly burned, at a camp site north of here. It doesn't say much, but it does mention Freyja in it after the crash of their ship. It means they survived the crash, and they're out their, surviving. We can find them. Spirits watch her deeds, I knew they wouldn't manage to conquer my flesh and blood so easily.

# 54th of Colossus

We continue our sear and rescue operations from the encampment, ranging out south and north more. Blade headed out to the campsite where Raphael found hos brother's field book. Turns out to be a deathtrap canyon, somewhat west of the Itzel village. A climbing party explored the top while the rest of us went down into a cave. Found a lot of discarded material in there, but no bodies. Though I guess that isn't surprising, considering the fact that we know Modrem drag away their victims. No signs of a large battle, though, just left a heap of equipment behind. There was a fair number of the mushroom things around though, might have been why. Also encountered some seriously big Modrem specimens at both exits. We put them down easily enough, but someone if these survivors were wounded or fewer in number, that might have done them in.  
  
I looked around as best as I could, but no trace of Freyj. I'm not sure if I should be worried by that or not. I suppose it is better than-  
Yeah.  
  
We tried to find out where they might have gone, and ended up pushing through the cave out on the other side. Found ourselves in the Itzel village. It was under attack when we got there, and I had to hold off a couple of the bastards while Sjöfn got the warmaster. Nearly swamped me, the bastards, but the warmaster showed up in time to relieve the pressure? We were attacked soon after in some force, and had to fight in between the winding pathways of the village. Hectic. Felix slipped off, and managed to hang onto a lower branch until Force could rope 'm back up. I saw Lorma with a bleeding wound, too.  
Still, we did fight them off; if anything, that shows the Itzel we're on the same side, no?  
I don't know, they seemed apathetic about the entire ordeal. We found some weir dartwork of them in the cave too, like a large disk cut straight out of a tree and painted with vivid colours. Looked a fair bit like a sun. Strange, because I thought the Itzel didn't worship the sun-god like the Zintl do. I don't know, they just become more and more enigmatic when we encounter them.  
  
Kraxxi and Rowasent nearly fell off defending the camp from more Modrem incursions, too. It's a miracle no-one's fallen off entirely yet.  
  
I heard Lance's detail got back from another signaled survivor's holdout, only to report all of them perished.  
May they find peace in the mists.  
  
I miss Kirsten. I finished the carving I was making from that shard of dragon bone we got from the Orrian dragon. Spirits, but that seems so long ago now. Can't be a season yet.  
I've managed to carve it so that the flower goes with it nicely. It'll be good to see her again, after all this is over, and just forget things, and go hunting with her. Spirits, after the beasts we encounter here, it'll be almost easy to go and hunt a minotaur bull, or a wyrm broodmother. I wonder if she the letter I sent her before we departed.  
  
Staring to miss the Sylvari too. I woulnd't wish them here for anything, but I could use a chat with Cheery, or seeing Mithy pout after being told she can't have all the apples. I hope they're alright, and that the weight on their mind doesn't weigh too heavily. Every survivor we find is another soldier in this war, and we will destroy Mordemoth for what he's done.

# 55th of Colossus

We're at rest for the day, taking a breather. Supply lines are being set up throughout the area east of us. It's slow and dangerous work, and we see wounded and exhausted soldiers coming in and out regularly. Turns out there's no such thing as 'stamping out' a Modrem infestation. At best, we're setting up series of checkpoints though which we can steadily advance troops to the frontlines. At this pace, though, many will be exhausted before they even reach the forward post. No point relieving exhausted troops with other exhausted troops.  
At least we seem to be operating 'copters again. Hazardous, we still see crashes happen. I wonder how quick the Charr can replace those; we'll need a steady supply to keep going.  
  
It just dawned on me we're just advancing "west". I hope someone, somewhere, knows where the dragon actually is, and we're not just aimlessly pushing up a frontline deeper and deeper into the unknown. Well, considering, the Priory or the Whispers might have a pretty good idea. Sometimes I wish command wasn't so... obtuse with intelligence. If I didn't have some faith in them, I'd think they didn't know where they were going either.  
  
Regardless, I don't mind the rest. I slept quietly for the first time in a while. The water helps, I like listening to it when I'm trying to sleep. It reminds me of the hot springs not far from home, and all the good memories I have of that place. If only it was colder, I could almost pretend it was home.

# 56th of Colossus

Another rest day, aside from periodic Mordrem assaults on the camp perimeter. Nothing we can't handle, though, but the minor wounds keep stacking up. If anything, I'd say we're under siege. Thankfully, it seems plenty of the troops around are lifers that saw Orr as well, and are used to around the clock perimeter watches against a vastly numerically superior enemy that relies on attrition. Morale's all sorts of low, though. We didn't start Orr with a total loss of air superiority and the primary landing forces. I must admit, though, the persistence and tenacity of the Pact as a whole is inspiring. Few armies this world has known could bounce back from a defeat like that and still have the energy behind them to salvage and continue an offensive. But we're here, and we're still calling it an 'invasion'.  
Modremoth probably didn't account for the notion that shooting down the fleet wouldn't put us down; it just pissed a lot of us off.  
  
Talking about venting anger, I've been getting used to venting a lot of latent anger through combat. It's... surprisingly natural to just let it flow when we're in battle, through I sometimes struggle with keeping focused. It makes me feel strong, terrifying so, as if I can crush foes with my bare hands. It erupts and boils, before fire leaps from my hands and engulfs the enemy. It's liberating.  
  
On another note, Roeland and Force got into a kerfuffle about the former wanting to get back into Shield warband. From what I can tell, Roeland's using his rank to try and become Force's mentor. As someone that's been in the "technically recruit" bracket, I could've told Roeland that wouldn't go down well. Regardless of rank, if someone has that sort of veterancy, you treat them with the respect accorded to them based on their service, not on their rank. Anyway, the lad then asked me what I would've done to someone that turned his back on me and insulted me after I spent time teaching them. My response, as honest as it was, was to say that I'd probably punch them in the jaw.  
I don't think Roeland quite got the notion that I'm also twice as big as most things I'd be punching, and didn't take into account particular circumstantial details such as "Vigil", "code of conduct" and "warzone".  
Seems he took it a little too close to heart and went up to smack Force in the maw. Lorma gave them both a good dressing down for it, and then politely asked me not to give any more advise to Roeland. At least she seemed to understand that I wasn't trying to cause anything on purpose.  
  
It's also the most charr-like thing I've seen Roeland do since joining a warband.

# 57th of Colossus

Another rest day, though far from quiet. We suffered another sustained night offensive. Unfortunately, we were out on the perimeter when it happened, and nearly got overrun. Force, who typically doesn't hesitate to wade into the thick of things, got pinned by Modrem chargers while we were in an open and flanked position, trying to fall back and regroup at the center. Marthe charged in and tipped the scales in our favour, but we couldn't find her afterwards. Almost everything points to her being carried off or having fallen off the side. Lorma's put her up as missing in action. Same as Satsuki was in Orr, two seasons back. We looked around and tried to find her, but between the bustle of a war camp and the dead modrem, we didn't find much. I really hope it was just a clone we saw, and the lass is just on guard somewhere we forgot to check.  
I don't know.  
  
I know that going 'missing' in a warzone like this means you're not likely to be found. It is a good tale to tell, and I will make sure her deeds are known to our people. May the spirits witness your deeds and transform them into legend.  
  
72. Marthe Dargosdottir, missing.

# 58th of Colossus

Kath's back. I'll just open with that one, and write the rest as it pops up.  
Apparently, the scouts picked her up after she was separated from her own group of jungle-survivors out in the wild. Turns out she got thrown clear of her wreck when the ship crashed, but managed to use some fiddly Guardian magic trick she's not wholly sure about herself to survive and land, before linking up with Ebony Chapter, current whereabouts unknown. Worse news, Kath and Ebon were hunting down a rogue Chapter and their warmaster in the midst of all this. None other than Blade Chapter, too, which I'm sure will turn Kraxxi into a wreck as soon as she finds out. I only hope command clues in does as I suggested, and place her under medical observation with an added guard to boot.  
Anyway, back on track, turns out Blade Chapter and their Warmaster, one Baneblade, have been butchering Sylvari because of the fleet incident, despite direct orders to desist. Now they're on the enemy combatant list, and we're tasked with putting them into the ground. Seems some folk were conflicted about that. I'm not. If you let anger and hate blind you towards the oath you've made, you're not doing justice. They'll not cross my path and live. They're no longer allies; they're enemies that just so happen to wear our uniform. They made their choice  
  
Kath told us as much, while we pinned and disarmed that one surviving Charr, Fairtongue, until he openly stated his allegiance. Must be hard to pick a side against people you know. I'm happy I'm not in his position, or had to make his choices.  
Regardless, it was good to see the snowcone again, a surprise as well. She was full-on with her head set into her duties, so it wasn't much of a social recap. I guess, given the circumstances, I don't think anyone can blame her. Sana also wasn't with her; she didn't even know San had left the Chapter. I don't know, I just actually presumed San'd been wily enough to wriggle her way unto Kath's ship before the departure. Turns out not. Spirits, means she could have gone anywhere. Raven's wings grant her the sense and determination to survive if she was on a different ship.  
  
Rajani also rejoined the unit on a reinforcement wave. Surprise to see her again, though a welcome one. Marcus took us out on a patrol towards the Itzel village to look for traces of so-called "Wyverns". No idea what they are, but they're apparently airborne and able to set fire to large pieces of ground. We didn't find any traces of them, but did run into a determined attack on the village, which we had to beat back. Nearly got swamped several times, and had to fall back under determined assault. That village is a death-trap, disorientating to fight in, if you don't fall off. I got pushed off the side of one in one of the melees. Luckily, it was one sitting directly on a branch, and I just had to climber unto the railing again. Still, they took Roeland down bad with a head injury. We were lucky the way back was comparatively free of mordrem and wildlife, or we'd have been in some trouble.  
  
All in all, we're not bad, but we're not doing good either. We know where we're going; trying to find the remains of Ebon Chapter. Thankfully, Kath should know where about they camp, which means we'll have another link in our path of advance. Bad news, there's apparently flying Mordrem with an abundance of ground-troops loose in our back line, and we're dealing with a group of Oathbreakers who will inevitably torpedo the morale of some of our troops, or at least make them severely question their purpose. I wouldn't want to be in any of the officer's boots right now, but they'll have to weather it. I'll just do my best to keep morale up by making jokes and trying not to think too much about the people we'll never see again.  
  
And people wonder why war makes you jaded.

# 59th of Colossus

We've moved camp, further west, based on recon done by scouts. Another crashsite, though this one is spectacular. It sits on top of what I think is best described as a "crag-on-a-mesa". The ship itself seemed to have been speared out of the air by vines, and shattered on top of the crag, where it is held aloft by the nightmarish tendrils. Some are thick enough to walk over, and seem to have become part of the scenery, as much as anything else. The crag itself juts out from a flat mesa, the top of which itself is only reachable through a winding path up the side, flanked by a sheer drop almost all the way down. The survivors of the crash, a part of nobles no-less, seems to have take refuge at the bottom of the crag in the... dubious shadow of the crashed vessel. I'm surprised it hasn't fallen down and crushed them. They material they lug about is ridiculous. They seem entirely unsuited for war. The servants are still catering to them, though, playing music and serving tea. It's obscene. Seems that some humans are simply hardwired for servility, even when faced with sheer stupidity of their social order. I'm not sure if they should be admired for refusing to let disaster upset their way of things, or thrown off the side of the cliffs because they're too stupid to live. One of the nobles was clinging on to a bloody longcase clock.  
  
Turns out this is the wreck of the Thunderbreaker, too. Means Freyja was aboard here, if that Grace girl of hers is to be believed. I looked around, but I knew she survived and moved off regardless, so I didn't expect to find much. I tried asking one of the noble party's folk, but they are apparently too slag-headed to distinguish one norn from another, or even Priory from Vigil. All I could get out of them was "some Pact people headed away from the crash, some time ago". Couldn't even tell me why troops would move away from their crashsite, despite that being against all logic if they hoped to be found fast. I don't know. I suppose it's possible that a Priory party was aboard this noble ship, and that they moved away on some objective after they crashed. Spirits damn it all, somewhere here, there should be something. Anything!  
  
I'm letting it agitate me.  
We're at camp, and working on defenses. We've set up near the foot of the crag, fortifying the obvious path up, and defending the corridor back down the mesa. Not ideal, but it could be worse. Not long after we arrived, Mordrem vines burrowed up and spat out sizeable Mordrem troops on top of us. Roeland's wound got opened again, and I saw Sinclair go down. We had to push back pretty hard for breathing room, but that just seems to be the rule. It was a good fight, hard, deadly. The Mordrem are superior than most of the foes I've fought before. They're strong, fast, well armoured and hard to kill. They employ military tactics like the Pact does, employing entrapping fire and shock charges with superior numerical forces to overwhelm us.  
And we took them down and apart.  
  
Supply lines... relayed back through four camps, across a warzone crawling with hostiles that require every caravan to be hardened and guarded. We're not as much pushing up a frontline, as we are pushing our advance deeper and deeper into enemy territory. I don't think we'll win this war by occupying ground. It'll be about getting enough troops to mass somewhere we can make a difference. I don't know where Modremoth's hiding, but we might be in for a war where we'll need to reach summit without being able to climb the proverbial mountain. No wonder Modremoth destroyed our airships. They were the only way we'd be able to get enough troops on target. We're going to have to bleed for every step. At least we can make damn sure it'll be mutual.  
  
I don't know where we're going next. This jungle seems to stretch forever. We've started smoking some of the local wildlife, mountain rams, so we're set for food, but all the sheer drops are getting to me.

# 60th of Colossus

We're still at the Thunderbreaker wreck; turns out this is going to be out camp until we find a way to push forwards again. Eventful day, though most of it was fighting. Duty started 'fore the evening, but it strung out into a chain of events, so it all seems hectic. Blade got tasked under Kath to go back to the camp we found some days ago, the one under attack from the red-skinned Hylek, with the crashed airship jammed through a nearby cave. We found traces of another Hylek village nearby, so I guess the red-skinned Itzel aren't the friendly kind, just like their counter-parts in central Tyria. I think I figured out why they were attacking that camp; I saw some remains of a few huts, and I think the Vigil troops took over some empty dwellings of theirs. The Hylek are ferociously territorial; they're likely trying to recapture some of their grounds. Still, we beat off some attacks there; the defenses are pretty sturdy, and we didn't have too much trouble holding them. We were sent back into that cave, though, to kill some especially nasty Mordrem critters living in them. Big troll, and one of the bipedal ones riding a large saurian of sorts. We put them down easily, and secured the flank, before Kath had us return back to camp. We found Xeyia on our way, just in time to spot a signal flare over at camp.  
  
Rushed ahead, and fought off a major Mordrem attack on the site. We didn't stick to the defensive posture Ironside and I tinkered out though, and got caught out in the open trying to sweep out the Mordrem. Plenty of us went down; Sjöfn and Force got wounded, while several, including the Warmaster and I took light wounds. One of the vines grabbed me by the throat and flung me aside, knocking me out for a while at the edge of the cliff. The armoured collar and the rim of my helmet protected my neck, but some flesh on my throat and below my jaw was shredded, nevermind I feel like someone smacked me in throat with a chair. I disinfected it, and pressed some bandage to it, and now it's a nagging reminder why I need to be thankful for armour. We eventually managed to fight our way clear back to the incline. Seems like a close call, truth be told. The flat open terrain is dangerous; the Mordrem can use their numbers against us, and their marksmen are worrying. I've never been more thankful for my shield; the amount of bolts I've deflected is staggering. Well, aside from the one that jabbed me in the arm when we were fighting to hold that one ledge. That wound's closed nicely, as it stands. Just a small scab, and a hole in the padding.  
  
Xeyia's back as well, as I mentioned. I think I nearly bumbled into a private talk between her and Kath when I saw them standing away from the rest. I was going to ask why, when Kath ordered me back. Anyway, I managed to talk to Xeyia afterwards. She's doing alright; her head's all right again. Well, relatively, anyway. She doesn't remember much, so I filled her in about what happened at Resolve when she got shocked. Apparently she was looking for Ruthford at the time. She seemed pretty angry about the entire thing; I'm sure Athelstan is going to have his hands full dealing with her when she finds him. Ah well.  
  
My throat feels numb. I'm going to try and sleep a little, now everything has quieted down.

# 61st of Colossus

Tired. Getting grabbed by a vine didn't do much good for the sleeping. I kept waking up, thinking that the nagging itch and pain in my throat was something trying to strangle me.  
  
Ironside took us on a demolitions mission today, where we were supposed to blow up the village of that other Hylek tribe, the red-skinned ones that have been attack our positions. Turns out they're living right outside the camp approach. No wonder they needed to be removed, they were threatening at least two Pact positions from there. Point was, we weren't able to get to it, since the entire thing was nestled up in a bloody tree. Ironside had us lob the explosives like kegs in the tree on a short fuse from a higher vantage point, and watch the 'whump'. Luckily, I've done my fair share of keg brawling, so I know how to make a good throw with something heavy. We blew good parts of the side, and much of the structures collapsed. For what it's worth, their village is gone. They'll have to settle elsewhere. I just hope they don't decide to go haywire and take over the blue-skinned Itzel village.  
  
We went further west, looking for enemies, and ran into some Mordrem holding an overgrown outcropping. We cleaned them out well enough, but then found out that they seem to be taking prisoners. We found a vine mod of sorts, with a Pact soldier inside. Ironside looked disturbed at this, and I can imagine why. I wonder why though. Ironside's convinced they're taking them deeper into the jungle. If this is true, there might be any number of ours held behind enemy lines, for whatever purpose. Spirits, I hope that's not where they dragged Marthe off to.

# 62nd of Colossus

A quiet day. One that wasn't spend thinking about the war, the destruction, the lost...  
There are brighter, more beautiful things to remember, and to hope that one day, there'll be a time when we think back of these days as nothing more than a brief storm interrupting the joys of life. Where we dig into the earth to sow seeds of life, only to remember those times when we wielded the swords we turned into plows.  
It seems like a folly to dream of peace in times of war. Doubly so when you think that none in my lifetime really know what that words means anymore. Hunts are hunts, but the darkness in the north has been there for far too long. The world has become so much smaller. When I was a stripling, the world stretched until the edges of the Foothills. Now, it seems the whole world needs to be saved. Never have unconquerable mountains seemed smaller.  
  
I long to be back home, but it's a figment that doesn't exist anymore. There is no small bakery under the stairs of the great Lodge; the little girl that ran around with snow cherry blossoms in her hair has stopped being small, and the kindred folk that I knew as friends have long since moved away to hunt larger prey, or wage war on distant foes. Maybe there is triumph in that. In the idea that life continues, such as it always has, and that no matter how hard the dragons will try, there is little that will stop a norn from living their life to fullest. I guess that now, looking over the dusty approach to our fortress of wreckage, the despair and urgency of it all seems to quaint. It stops us from looking at this beautiful world we are fighting for, or remembering why we risk our lives and sanity to oppose an angry, primordial, god, and do so gladly.  
  
Thinking about the old ruins hewn in the rock, and the ancient crumbling city we encountered made me think of Orr. That too was a blasted landscape littered with gems that I will never forget. The old cathedrals and giant arches that spanned thousands of meters, under which we lived and fought. I miss the chatter I had with Sana and Kath, over a bowl of some manner of exotic delicacy Chief had whipped up from somewhere or other, while Sima moped around, sneaking in tiny gulps of hard drink under the nose of the quartermasters. Mitha and Athy sitting in the shade of Caer Shdowfain's giant shell, or Azzis leaping from the cliffs to take a dive on that beach in Malchor's Leap. It hasn't been a year, and yet it seemed ages ago.  
Maybe I'm just getting old.

# 63rd of Colossus

There's something to say for wanderlust in people. I know I had it, after Orr in '25, the desire to see more of the world. I had little else; Freyj didn't want to see me, and the Vigil seemed to have run its course for the time being, defeating Zaithan, and restoring some measure of order along the shores of Tyria. It seemed, at the time, as if we had bought us untold years of time. As if the next dragon was centuries away, rather than at our doorstep. No, I wanted to see Cantha; the Jade Sea and the Echovald forest. I wanted to walk between the streets of Kaineng, to see if the scale of that far-off city could overwhelm me like the broken foundations of Arah had done. And maybe more! The great deserts of Elona; the gems of Vabbi and the copper-skinned merchant-princes that traded in goods so exotic none in Tyria could name them. That was what I hoped for when that small sailing vessel weighed anchor from its pier at Lion's Arch.  
  
It was still a city of pirates, then, where ships were as cheap as the lives of the men that crewed them. Spirits, I remember paying a good purse of gold coin, newly minted and stamped with the Queen's crowned head on one side, and the ship was mine. The most expensive thing I had ever owned. Money I'd earned fighting in the Queen's Jubilee. The Crown Pavillion. A roost for a giant metal bird, where battles were cheaply sold in celebration of young girl ruling over a faltering realm. Still, "Warmaster Gargantua" bested many opponents and painted human "champions" that had never fought a real battle, and I lined my pockets with gold I had no idea of how to spend. I just remember wanting to get away from the Reach. It stank too much of idle opulence.  
  
No, freedom and new sights beckoned to the south. A ship was cheap with Reacher gold, and I felt purpose again. It was something special, to travel in the footsteps of a father I could barely remember, Far and wide. But the voyage was doomed, of course. Zaithan may have been destroyed, but the perils he raised remained. We barely made it past Orr, navigating the Straits of Devastation towards the mouth of the great river Elon when the beasts lurking in the deep caught up with us. The ship was broken, ripped apart across the bow by something with teeth larger than my arm, and we were left adrift in the wreckage. It's a miracle I survived at all. The crew, no-more than a handful of people whose greed for coin blinded them to the idiocy of my venture, had all perished. I saw them grow pale and slip away into sleep in the cold water, sinking under the waves quietly while I could do nothing but watch, too exhausted to do anything, my strength sapped by the cold. I can only believe that some spirit granted me strength and endurance to survive.  
I washed up far south of the Shiverpeak mountains that bisect Tyria after what must have been days, and eventually found my way to a lone Sylvari settlement, not far from a great mountain filled with fire. Eventually, I found my way back home, from half a continent away.  
  
I don't regret it. It taught me the valuable lesson about what it means to know that people died because of your folly. The value of a life cannot be weighed against a mere wanting or inclination. I killed Li Jo, Anna, Akxxi, Muller and Arbaea, because I wanted to see how far the horizon could stretch. It is too expensive a price to pay.  
  
And now Xeyia does it, without stopping to consider what she might have done. She fled Resolve's medical ward, intent on fighting the Mordrem in her typical short-sighted way. Once the realise she's missing, and with her injury, they would have sent people out to look for her. Good, loyal soldiers, combing through the wasteland that cost us Garrick, Karon, Anthaos... If any soldier has died because of her stupidity, the blood will be on her hands.  
Spirits alive, she even insulted the dead by saying that anyone who'd come after her would deserve the fate they get. I'm sure we'll remember that next time she goes missing. Arrogant [break in page].  
  
There is no point in getting angry. What is most important is that I do what I can now. Xeyia's brains got fried like a drake dumpling during Wintersday. I've seen her twitch. She needs medical help, and fast, before anything worse happens. Spirits alive, who knows how extensive the damage is, she could hardly speak when we left! If only she'd just stayed put, instead of trying to wander off into the jungle on her own. Lucky we found her when we did, she might have been dead by now, regardless of how skillful she thinks she is at avoiding the Mordrem. Few people venture out here on their own and live, that much has been proven twice over.  
  
How I'd wish for a glass of strong drink, and a cold breeze.  
Bah. At least the Vigil has done its part when it comes to wanderlust. I've seen places, fought creatures and met people that I could never dream of when I set foot aboard that ship and its fateful journey. It has led me through strange paths, fighting for a better future at the edge of the world. Hah, the Vigil even brought me into the arms of the woman I love; Dragonsbane indeed. And perhaps, one day, I'll see the streets of Kaineng yet, and the people will wonder; "Who is this stranger of great height, dressed in steel and crested white?"

# 64th of Colossus

The absurdity of this place just struck me; sitting on the ledge just up the incline, where you can look down across the mesa on both sides of the entry. A good point for the watch, too, this. The servants of the nobility here are playing music, serving poor ration-grade cups of water as if they're decanters of the most expensive wines. We're sheltering in the shadow of a vast shipwreck, perched atop the remains of an older, long gone civilization that would likely have remained buried with only Itzel hylek as company for as many years as Raven has feathers. I thought it would be hard to imagine living here at first, but if you think away the Mordrem, I can imagine it is an exciting place to live. The jungle is teeming with life, grand and worthwhile prey that would even give experienced hunters pause. There is fresh water from the mountain springs. Perhaps people will return here once we drive off the Mordrem.  
  
We continue to remain at rest; mainly because of the wounded, I think. They're looking better, which is good. Force was on his feet and about, as was Roeland, through I saw him lug around a drip earlier. Sjöfn's still stuck with sore ribs, though. I hope she'll get cleared for duty before we decide to move on, even though that can't be more than a few days from now. That one Whisper agent, the tiny human woman, stopped by and we managed to worm some information from her. It seems the Order of Whispers is inching deeper into the jungle ahead of us, trying to figure our where the heavy boots can follow through. There's a Priory team out west too, which gave me some hope. I asked her to see if there was anyone there fitting Freyj's description. She's said to at least keep an eye out for anything. It would be good news to know that at least she's found her way back into the organised Pact efforts.  
  
I saw Xeyia talk to Kath earlier, and I spoke to the Warmaster and Athelstan afterwards. Seems that they're looking into it, and going to make sure Xeyia's alright before anything else. I don't know what came over her. At this point, I just hope she's alright, and hasn't finally just cracked somewhere or other. Truth be told, I'm not sure if you could tell.  
  
For the remainder, the dust billows around the cliffs and the mood seems to be better. Turns out that going a few days without a fight goes a long way when it comes to that. We were joking around with the Agent and some of the troops. Making fun of the Order of Whispers always eases the mood, especially if they play along a little.

# 65th of Colossus

Spirits, long day. Right. We took out a patrol east, check up our support lines. Not much worth mentioning, aside that we repulsed a minor attack at what's now being called 'Bogo's Bungalow', apparently because the camp's commander is called Bogo, and they fashioned their shelter from a lone-standing Itzel hut. The big encampment in the center is also under our control. Seems like it's become our main staging point for the area, while we're on the advance camp. I bumped into the Whisper agent again at the camp's evening watch, turns out she brought a friend as well. Both small human women. Williams and Richards, I think, though that might just be some sort of covert name. Regardless, they mentioned that the next camp off is in a place called 'Auric Basin', some distance further west. Apparently they've been getting some interference from the Mordrem. I'd put gold on it that it's our next link in the advance, and we'll start moving soon. The scouts were sent out forwards today. That usually heralds something.  
  
We lost Bridgit today. Camp was under attack again, and we made the same mistake again, spreading out too far away from the center to engage effectively, when we heard a cry. Layfon managed to see Bridgit go over the edge, dragged down by a vine. We only had enough time to watch her struggle before being pulled down deeper out of sight. Problem is the cliffs. We didn't have enough rope to make the distance safely. Rowasent, the Asura mesmer, went down tied to one end of a rope, despite his fear of heights. He tried, but he didn't see much, aside from scuff marks. The Warmaster and I took the long way around to find a way to another vantage point, or even a way to just get down, but it's sheer cliffs on almost all sides. There's large tree on the other side, but we have no idea how to get there, or even how to get from there, back to where we saw Bridgit last. In the end, the Warmaster declared her MIA, presumed dead. Another one gone.  
  
I don't know what to think, or feel. I made a pot of tea for the Warmaster after, because it was the only thing I could think of doing. Just had to keep going, as if nothing was wrong, before it all sank in that we're likely not going to find this one again either. It feels cold, but somehow, treating them all as numbers on a list helps. I wished Sana was here, though. I've seen her take dives off the ramparts in the Vigil keep before in her spirit form. She might have managed that. I guess I should feel angry at the spirits, because I couldn't do something like that myself. I wonder if bear had given me his blessing, if I could have made the leap down there. Don't know how I would've gotten back up, but it would've been better than just watching her struggle and get dragged under. It's pointless to worry about it now, though. It has passed, and Forgewood is likely dead.  
  
It's moments like these that I really miss Cheery and the flowers. Spirits, anyone, really. Kristen would have said something comforting, no doubt. I miss having her loaf into our camp without a care in the world, before pitching her stand-to. I keep thinking back of how I picked her up and carried her around on my shoulder after we killed that Orrian dragon, and how happy I was in that moment to be exist in this world. Few people have made me feel so alive. Freyj, and her mother, when I was younger, and the world was a smaller place. Mithy, sometimes, when I realize how much I've experienced and I feel older than I am. Orr, too, when Malchor's song was saddest on its blasted shores. Now I just feel empty, aside from anger, worry and all those emotions a soldier has when at war.  
I suppose it is hard to feel heroic in the now, when there is sand in your boots, sweat in your eyes, and you can only think of how you weren't able to save a fallen comrade.  
  
73. Bridgit Forgewood, missing.

# 66th of Colossus

We moved camp, but not west. We head back, due north-east. Not a long trek, truth be told, minimal opposition. We're near another wreck, good deal more north if my sense of direction isn't being fooled, so away from that Priory camp the Agents mentioned. At first, I wasn't sure why we were even heading here, until we arrived. Turns out there an enormous, blackened tree sitting just down slope from our position, barfing out Mordrem. Figures it's some sort of spawning ground for the smaller Mordrem we see around. Command wants us to blow it up, rob the dragon of one of his assets. Not unlike that time we scuttled the undead barge in Orr, I think. I hope Wolf grants us the skill to pull this off as easily as we did that. Ironside drafted a survivor to help me work the explosives; an Asura engineer called Tinker. We've managed to re-purpose some cannon shells from the wreck into improvised explosives. Even so, we're not sure if that'll do the trick. We're not able to do a demolitions assessment up close, so we eyeballed it. From afar, it looks like the tree isn't dissimilar from the Grove in terms of structure. It's got a big hollow at the base, surrounded on all sides by thick roots that anchor it to the ground, while numerous smaller roots and vines snake down in the middle. I think if we managed to blow out two of the big supporting roots on one side, and then systemically collapse the larger internal roots, the tree should topple over. The issue, those supporting roots are thicker than some curtain walls. Blasting through them might be incredibly difficult. If Ironside can scrounge up some incendiaries, we can also just set it aflame. We'll need a lot of the stuff either way.  
  
Camp itself seems fairly secure, except there's a persistent problem with encroaching Itzel, and not the friendly ones. We've had to set pickets on camp borders to keep them getting too close. Some of those big frogs, Nuoch, are around too. Spirits, but they are large. It's hard to imagine they're related to the smaller Hylek we know back home at all. Something inside me wants to go out of its way to fight one, and see if they're worthy foes, but I know that's foolish at best. Regardless, aside from the frog-men, the camp only has two main approaches, one leading west and an angled path that leads down to the blighted tree. We seem fairly isolated from the rest of the encampments, though we can't be that far removed from them. This place does confuse with all the walkways and paths. I've started to keep a rough map in my fieldbook, just so I know roughly where everything is in case I get separated.  
  
We didn't send out a search party for Bridgit. I think the Warmaster has resigned her to her fate already.  
  
The airship here crashed badly. It looks almost like something sheared in half along the keel, leaving one side on this rock. It's a new model, too, like the Glory of Tyria, with the heavy rotors and steering vanes jutting up into the sky where they catch the sunlight. Not much is left, though I haven't been inside. I took a moment to find a name, turns out this is the Mellagan's Valour. I think that's named after the Quaggans. It's a testimony to engineering so much of the external structure can still be recognised, even after the crash. Most of the balloon superstructure seems to have held, even though the deck-plating and engines have been reduced to rubbish for the most part. One lift-vent is, despite all odds, still active, though it's fitting was mangled, and it's aimed at the sky. Well, I guess it'll make sure the vessel remains crashed.  
  
The nightmare tree does make people antsy. It's like sleeping in the shadow of your enemy. It looks horribly maimed, blackened and sick, as if the corruption took over a much prouder being and twisted it. Large pods the size of a man hang from its roots and branches, like diseased and rotten fruits. I've heard some people whisper that they think this might have been a tree like the Grove is, once. If that's true, I am thankful that none of our Sylvari are here. They don't need to see... this. The sooner we destroy that perversion, the better.

# 67th of Colossus

Bah! Stationed just south of that damn tree still, and we didn't even manage to blow it up. Attack went smoothly, far as that goes, and we managed to penetrate the thing without too much issue. Death trap inside, though, but that would only have been a problem if we would have met with overwhelming resistance. Enclosed space, dense growth and a very narrow entry. Still, I guess Kath punched us through into the interior before that became a problem. Once we were inside, demolitions was tasked with assessing the demolition plan. Luckily it was easy enough to determine, even just with a quick look. Interior roots and vines are pointless, they're not supporting weight. Some of them look like they have vital functions inside the tree, but I'm not sure blowing those out would stop them from regrowing. Plenty of the thick pods, though. Up close, it almost looked like there were things writhing inside. I'd be afraid that they'd keep prisoners in there, but I doubt anyone could have survived in one of those... things. More likely they're Mordrem whelps. Regardless, the tree seems to support itself on its external roots; I saw four big clusters from the inside. The problem is, the way they curve, their weakest point is a good twenty meters up from the ground. So we'd have to blast through much thicker and structurally solid stems at ground level. The entire tree is slanted eastwards, though, suggesting most of the weight is carried by the root bundles on that side. That's what we decided to target with the demolitions, anyway. Except, because of the danger, we didn't take the main charges with us on the first go. Ironside and our smaller demolitions team had to head back, only to be ambushed by Mordrem at our campsite. I barely managed to hear Ironside bark a retreat order when one of the big Mordrem beasts charged me and threw me head-first into a hall. I must have landed badly, because next thing I remember is Mist pulling me onto my ass, while Kath and the Chapter troops routed the remaining Mordrem. I don't know how long I was knocked out, but it can't be more than a few minutes. I thank my helmet for that. Just left me with a bruise and sore skull. Medic says my eyes still function normally, though, so I won't be charging any giants soon.  
  
So aye, mission aborted, on account that we lost our demolitions team to an ambush. Spirits alone preserve us, but it's a miracle everyone survived. I think the other three bailed and simply jumped off a cliff to a lower ledge until help arrived. Not brave, but smart. Better than smacking your skull into a pole and just relying on dumb luck that anyone or anything saves your ass before some Mordrem eats it or drags you off to only Raven knows where. Graceful Mist's back, though, which I find surprising. Turns out she was with Kath before, in command of Ebony Chapter after the crash as Warmaster. Not sure how I stand on it yet, but she sure enough save my life, for which I'll owe her a life debt. Funny, we seem to bump into the last people we intend to fight out here, while the ones we're looking for remain hidden to us.  
  
I'm tried though, and my head hurts. We're likely going to attempt the demolitions operation again soon, even though the Mordrem know we're coming now. I hope the pickets have their eyes out and ahead; it wouldn't surprise me to see increased attacks against our position now, with Mordremoth trying to dislodge us before we can recoup fully. Luckily, we seem to have the edge when it comes to fighting in the defensive. They might throw Modrem at us, but it is hard to dislodge an entrenched Vigil Chapter from a position.

# 68th of Colossus

Nothing better to sleep on than a sore head. No dreams, no horrors, just a hazy blackness that makes it feel as if I've slept for a century. Been a while since I've been this rested. At this rate, I need to make sure I get battered about more often, just to get a good night's rest.  
  
We're still in the camp, looking out over the jungle's tangle. There is a wealth of stories out there, epic tales and journeys to be found bured underneath the red rock columns of ruined cities and the thatch weave of the Itzel villages. For the jungle, the Mordrem, and the Pact, are just another chapter in an already venerable book. The dragon has changed this place, though. The vines are all-but indistinguishable from the trees now, and some have ripped whole chunks of the earth away, and raised them up towards the sky. It is as if the world exploded, and pieces of it were caught while falling down. I think the only place where I've seen things like this are in Metrica and Caledon, where there are rocks set afloat in defiance of nature's laws. I wonder if the rest of the jungle it the same as here. All these cliffs and sheer drops are difficult moving, and the dusty tops leave us exposed to the sun. I expected it to be more lush and overgrown than this.  
  
Camp got attacked by some sort of terrifying Mordrem construct. It wielded two large scimitars, and fought unlike any of the other Mordrem I've seen, safe from the corrupted Sylvari ones. I guess the dragon doesn't like us trying to blow up his trees, and sent out the heavy weaponry. We did manage to beat it down, but it came dangerously close inside the camp's perimeter before we were able to destroy it. I don't like the fact that the dragon has got these special mordrem things, though. If there's one, there'll be bound to be more we haven't seen yet. We did a lot of work securing the camp approaches, so we're not just waiting until they show up on our doorstep.

# 69th of Colossus

Still camped in the shadow of the spawning tree, though it became quieter throughout the day. We had some skirmishes at the pickets with raiders, and vines occasionally burrow up before they're cut off or incinerated by our folks. Still, it keeps us slightly jumpy and afraid to stray too far from the center of camp. Command's put up a message, saying the big Mordrem we saw was likely some sort of command critter. Seems like they got the same idea as I noted down the other day, and are expecting retaliatory actions from the Mordrem. It'll be something to deal with until we can finally go down there and blow up the damn tree.  
  
The rest of day was quiet enough. Rowasent tried to hex himself to stop him from being afraid of heights, and nearly wandered straight off the edge. Spell wore off before anything bad happened, though, just had to carry him away from the edge before he froze up entirely. He seemed a little shaken by the experience, and I have a feeling he isn't going to try that again soon. That one agent Richards showed up, and we spoke a little overlooking the jungle, joined by Row and Sjöfn, who's making good time on her recovery. Seems most of just miss a good meal. Some chatter about those glider things Mist and Ironside mentioned. Never thought that Pact actually started using those, I know we didn't in Orr, but Graceful said she'd employed one to traverse some of the terrain here. Last I've used one those was Lion's Arch, and I was poor candidate for the things. They had to strap half a sail-boat to my back to stop me from falling out of the sky into the water too fast. Only part of drop training that I envied the Asura their size and weight.  
  
It went pretty well, Kath even joined us for a talk, which is always good. We speculated a little about everything, talking about the creatures we've seen, like the Wyverns and some sort of vampire critter Kath saw up in a tree. Kath did a good job of reminding all of us what we were here for, too. East to forget we're not really on the offensive here, but are actually performing a search and rescue operation. We need to consolidate our forces first and foremost, before we can really start the attack in earnest.  
  
The agent did say that the Priory set up a forward camp down south, and she strongly believes Freyj to be there. We spoke for a while after that, about Freyj when she was young, and... that sort of thing. It's good. I miss her, though.

# 70th of Colossus

Still at camp near the Quaggan ordnance ship, in the shadow of the dragon-tree. It'll be Wintersday soon; if it's still standing by then, we'll have to do something about it. It's already got those ominous green pods in it, so we don't have to worry about getting baubles. Maybe we'll leave some high-explosive gifts at the roots while we're at it. Saw during patrol that the entire thing only has one main stem, all the way down. If we could reach that, blowing it sideways would be easy. I'll have to talk with Ironside when I get the chance, if he doesn't have a plan yet.  
  
Talking about demolitions, we went out to that Itzel village on a patrol, because I was worried that destroying their home wasn't going to clear out those frog-folk. Well, I wasn't wrong, there's plenty of the red-skins around, even though half of their huts were blown sideways with explosives. We found a survivor too, a mercenary with a funny human name that makes me think it's not his real name. Saw other mercs earlier as well, with their usual nonesense. I know we're on the same side, but these people... Anyway, we got this one out of a pinch, and into medical. Not sure if he'd been able to survive on his own for much longer either. He claims to have been separated from his unit, sounded like he left them on his own volition. Considering how much of a pain in the ass they are to us, I don't find that surprising. Still, good to save a life for once.  
  
Aside from that, all is quiet out here.

# 71st of Colossus

Patent slow day when all you've got to note is that there was a lot of funny talk at the edge of camp. We've got this place at the side, overlooking the forest, away from the sick tree. Despite people having fallen off before, doesn't seem to stop most of us from having a breather. Richards is still here, so I figure she's going to stick around with us for a while, like Mippl.  
  
We should be up and ready for duty soon, I think.

# 72nd of Colossus

Bear grant us strength, it's much, much worse than I thought. Turns out the majority of the Pact is still in tatters, and we're not succeeding in establishing a back-line through enemy territory. We're not getting supplies, and most camps are under constant threat of being overrun, which they often are, before we manage to reclaim it. Looks like we're still trying to regroup and find somewhere to turn into a staging area forwards, like we did at Resolve.  
  
Turns out we also lost all of our demolition equipment when we were overrun during the first attack, so we can't even blow up that corrupted plant if we wanted to! We've been staring at a target we can't touch! Gah! [feint soot mark] If only we had prepared better, and made sure we took it out, then we wouldn't have to sit here feeling like incompetent idiots! We can't even bloody resupply. Luckily, Xeyia spotted some Itzel leaping about up a vine; she's fairly certain that's where they have been stuffing all the loot they lifted off from the shipwreck here. Considering this was the munitions barge, we might recover enough good stuff up there to blow this thing sky high several times. If we're allowed to recover them, that is, a mission which is not without substantial risk itself. I saw a notice that we're about to leave camp, though, so we might just hand it off to the next poor sods that end up here.  
  
Also, that jungle we've been looking it? Lyralii said that the dragon ripped apart the earth with its vines to destroy our ships. The more I look at it, the more sense it starts to make. This landscape isn't natural. The dragon ripped apart the mountains and cliffs into chunks, destroying the very earth under our feet.  
  
It just makes me an [a small, irregular hole is burned through the page]  
  
I need to meditate, and then sleep. Make sense of this.

# 73rd of Colossus

We left camp by air extraction earlier today, without scuttling that ugly tree thing. I was disgruntled about that, thinking I would feel like I ran away from a fight when we did. Of course, then so much else happened so shortly; now I have so much things to do, to think, and little time. Some writing should help me organise my thoughts a little.  
  
Right, so we lifted away with a 'copter this afternoon. Some issues securing the area; Alessa was overzealous, and despite being wounded, kept wandering off to get in the thick of fighting. I had to call them back when it became too blatant to ignore. Can't risk having people leave whatever rough imitation of a formation we have, so I did what I did those seasons ago with Darksbane, and just barked them back into the fighting perimeter. It worked well enough this time around. But I digress.  
We squeezed ourselves into a chopper, and landed out on a ledge near a precarious ruin. It's a miracle and testament to Pact pilots that we even managed to land on anything so narrow, so close to a cliff wall without wrecking the chopper. That mad Melli would probably have smacked us straight into the damn thing. We disembark, only to be greeted by some norn civie who wandered up to the drop zone and 'forgot' to identify. Damn mercenaries can't even bother to remember that wandering up to a group of soldiers without making sure they're aware you're not there to kill them is generally a bad idea. To make matters worse, seemingly none of our officers had any clue who they were, or why they were there. Turns out they're some sort of volunteer-group called the Guild Initative, trying to bring mercenaries and such into the fight. I didn't even know guilds were around anymore. I vaguely recall them being important for humans hundreds of years ago, but that's about it. Though I suppose "Destiny's Border" or whatever they're called is sort of a guild.  
As it stands though, these people didn't account for the fleet disaster either.  
  
This place, though... I never expected to wander through the crumbling hallway, only to discover a hidden city behind it. It's... massive. A caldera filled with monumental jutting cliffs that someone carved into a city, complete with winding staircases and dusty streets. It looks like people haven't been here in a long time, though. Sand has billowed into every open door, and banners hang in faded tatters from flagpoles. It is vast, though, larger than Hoelbrak entire. We're not allowed deeper into the ruins, but I can see galleries and columns hang over us. Deep below, there is crystal clear water, shimmering blue where the setting sun catches the surface. There even is a dock below the ledge where we are now, as if they used to sail ships here. Miraculously, it seems the Mordrem do not come here either, be it through ancient warding magic or just because the rock here is too thick for even the dragon to rend asunder.  
  
We are not the only ones here, either. An airship, badly damaged, but still floating, has moored on a ledge nearby. The crew is haggard and distraught, struggling to keep the vessel afloat. I've seen worse wrecks, but none of them still afloat. It's even worse than the damage the *Ramming Speed!* suffered above Orr when we honoured her name against a dragon. That was just a mangled fore-deck and a torn stabilizer. This... we're not sure about the balloon's integrity. It's either leaking, or the engine can't keep the aero-mix in there stable enough to provide much lift beyond stopping it from falling. The port gunnery deck is pierced in two places, where something tore out half the cannon. The prow is intact, thankfully, but the aft assembly is a nightmare. The stablizers and aerilons are mangled or just outright gone in some cases. The engine itself is running, but it looks like something in there caught fire. Worst case, it fused half of its power crystal arrays, and we need to open it up without turning it off, and pray no-one loses a hand, or it doesn't die mid-way through and crash us all. What else... right, the front observation window at the helm is smashed, and none of the heavy deck guns are in place. All in all, it's a barely floating-brick at the moment. The good thing is, almost all of it can be fixed with enough time and replacement parts, but doing so without a full dock like in Lion's Arch will be hard.  
  
Related, the warmaster wants us to start making replica's of the drop gliders. We took out the four remaining ones from airship's cargo deck, with the intent of seeing if we can replicate them. It doesn't look too difficult, most are just tarred canvas on folding rig you wear around your torso. Problem is testing is problematic. Warmaster has ordered us to try anyway, and use the water down here to our advantage. I'm not so sure. I've done drop training, but I'm not sure if we can pass it along just as easily for use in enemy territory. Anyway, enough work to do.  
  
Spirits, I forgot to make food.

# 74th of Colossus

Fuck bats.  
Scratches and blood loss. Little light headed.  
Just some bats in a cave. Place is big. Human statue, too.  
Xeyia thinks it's White Mantle.  
  
That's about it. Sleep.

# 75th of Colossus

It's quiet here, now, with the wind billowing through dusty columns and the world setting steadily into the dusk of a day we will never see again. Soldiers clad in steel plod around, tired, distracted. Even in their silence, the defeat is palpable. When they speak, their voices are soft and strained, bucking under emotions they fight to keep in check. In the corner, there, two people sit crying softly, whispering. A glance cast their way leaves a hollow pit in the stomach, and you can do nothing but curse idle hands and wandering minds for their aimless pondering. Below a sheet rests a broken body of someone we all knew.  
  
Vox fell. We were sparring, using this old arena structure, and when we marched back, she fell off the side of a bridge. We rushed to get down below her, and I tried to save her, beating on her chest to keep her heart from moving, and keep air in her lungs, but she was dead already. By the time the Miremel got down to us her spirit had already left for the Mists. So pointless. We should have known, in this heat, and Vox never had the endurance to...  
  
Spent all the rest of the evening working on the airship. Something to do, and not think.  
Cut my finger on some broken glass.  
  
74. Vox, fell.

# 76th of Colossus

There is a the usual silence after death, the forced conversation and strained jokes that belie how much you're trying not to think too much about it. We all know that we could be the next one, but it never really hits until you're there, and you star counting. Who will be the seventy-fifth? I guess it is ironic that the death of others makes you acutely aware you're alive. Through the fallen we see glimpses of fate.  
One day, a dawn will rise where my body is lifeless, and I will only be measured by what I have left behind in my wake.  
  
I wandered around the ruins some more, out of curiosity, when I grew tired or frustrated with the airship repairs. The place is big; larger than any single settlement my people has ever built. I wonder if this was the capital of forgotten nation, and all the other ruins we have seen were mere villages and outposts. Who-ever they were, they did not think small. There is an enormous arena, worthy of the greatest champions. We set foot there yesterday to spar, before the fatal event. It felt like stepping into the Crown Pavilion again, only lacking the clamouring crowds. This city... I would have liked to see it when it was lush and filled with people.  
  
I wonder how they buried their dead?

# 77th of Colossus

The quiet at camp continues, though people are slowly coming to terms with it. Ema's heavily stricken. A pity, she is always so kind and quiet. I find it cruel that she has to experience this sort of sadness. With the uncertainty of her sister's whereabouts, and now the loss of a dear friend, the days ahead will be hard. I do hope Darksbane takes care of her a little. A kind word and a shoulder to cry on go a long way.  
  
For the rest of us, it remains quiet. I have been working during the day on getting the airship back up and running. Needless to say, it will take some time and effort. Worse, I need to stop working around noon when it becomes too hot, and the ship becomes like an oven. Xeyia's been working her on the gliders, and I'm glad to leave those things to her, she seems to know what she's doing, which is more than my insight on the project. As far as I was concerned, i'd tar some fabric and hope it held. Xeyia's on about making some sort of special thing to support all the weight. I'm curious to see what it turns out with.  
  
For the rest, we took to talking about this place in the building where I've set up the fire pit, as wall as about what we'll do after all this is over. Makes me realise how much I miss home. Snow, Usha, Kristen... It'll be a good day when we this war ends, and I finally need to make through on that dragon-lodge for Kristen. Taking her home to the true north of our forefathers would be a good ending to this chapter of my tale.

# 78th of Colossus

I saw and spoke with Sigra today, though I fear she might have lost her memory. She does not seem to remember any of us, and claims never to have been in Orr. Unfortunately, there is little to be done, as this is not something you can just 'fix'. It is weird through, and I started to doubt my own sanity for a moment, before I just dismissed it. It doesn't change anything, and she seems not to be suffering from it. So, I will be glad she lives and fights on among us once more.  
  
Spoke to Kath about the fire thing, and she thinks it's some sort of very raw and untrained guardian form, maybe something like retribution fire. She seemed pretty put off by it, though, saying that such things were generally dangerous without proper control like a guardian or an elementalist. She'd suggest I'd show up for the guardian training, just to see if I pick something up. Also called me a "magical abomination", which I find quaint, as I imagine it as some sort of terrible Orrian thing. Still, I've never been able to conjure anything for the life of me, but it slowly becoming more and more natural to just ~~give in~~ unleash some of the hate and fury I work to keep in check when hacking away at a Mordrem that I've been doing it more and more. It fuels me, and I've never felt so strong or powerful as when the fire rages and leaps from the tip of my sword.  
  
We held a vigil today for some of the fallen, including Forgewood and Vox. We didn't commemorate any of the others by name, but I did keep them in my mind when we watch the fires of the pyre light. The list becoming too long to commit too memory only. I keep looking at the names in the back of the book, and I catch myself forgetting the names. Some have been dead for years and years, and it is them most of all that I can no longer see before me. Their deaths and their deeds, yes, but the rest fades into black. It will soon be my year's day, and Freyja's not soon after. I am young in the eyes of the world, but I feel older than the mountains. Has it really been almost twenty years since we lit that pyre in the darkest heart of the night? If you asked me this day to carve her likeness into a totem, I would not know where to start.  
  
Sitting here, in the quiet corner of the door that is in the shade throughout the day, and pleasantly breezy in the cold of the night, I could not feel further away from anything. I know these people around me are my allies, but I start to wonder how many of them are my friends, truly beyond what short brutality we are made to suffer through. If not for where we are, and why, none of them would ever become more than another voice on two paths crossed briefly by fate. Now it feels merely as if we are cordial out of sheer necessity. Being alone out here would be a punishment I would not wish on anyone.  
I am being melancholic, of course, which is always the danger of loss. Hail to the fallen! You leave us all bereft with your passage.  
At least they will not lack for fine company.

# 79th of Scion

You have these days where it all slows down, and everything just seems to go at a snails pace; and then, as if time realises in some cosmic form of irony that it was running late, it all contracts and happens at once. Over the morn and afternoon I started making detailed recordings of the damage suffered by the *Aegis*. I cannot pronounce its name either; people keep thinking I say 'haggis'. The only sort of person I can imagine being inane enough to name a war hull after a dish would be a Charr at Meatoberfest, but still. Regardless of naming flukes, the assessment goes slow. I've started with the main decks, and will move onto the more mechanical parts once we have the materials and equipment to handle that. Sel's promised to help me crack open the engine compartment, and have a peek at the more arcane innards of the beast, hopefully without terminally shorting anything out and crashing it while we're onboard. The biggest concern are the external components which will both be very difficult to assess just how damaged they are, and ever harder to replace. At least I'll have the next few days scheduled ahead.  
  
In other, better news, the Sylvari returned. They were dropped of by chopper to the Dustbowl, where we went to collect them. Kath was very weary of the situation, but I think most of us are just happy to see them again. Mithy's got most of her eyes back, even though she's a deeper shade of red after all of what happened. Cheery's still her peppy self, which is as expected, and so is Athy, mostly. It really lifted my spirits to see them standing there, all in their right mind. If the dragon has scarred them, they bear the wounds on their mind well. Cheery and Mithy also helped me with some insights on the fire; Cheery's idea is to try and control when and how I get angry, I think, which makes some measure of sense. Still, I don't know if deliberately getting angry is a good idea. It sounds dangerous, especially considering magical fire can be highly dangerous. I don't want anyone to get hurt in this. I don't know.  
  
Not the only newcomers today, a group from Blade Chapter apparently got seconded to us by command. Two Charr and a norn woman; they split off from Baneblade's group, apparently, though they still go around calling themselves 'Blade Chapter'. I would have left behind that cursed word long before. Regardless, the two Charr are just that, Charr, and the norn is that Astrid I talked to briefly when we entered the Brink first time around. She's pretty enough looking to offset the two slabs of angry fur, so that's something. She hasn't got anything on Kristen mind; short one or two dragon kills for that. All in all, I don't mind them; if we're supposed to work together, we might as well try and establish friendly terms.

# 80th of Colossus

The days are becoming shorter, and winter solstice will be upon us soon. In the home peaks, the brewers would start making eggnog, and the snows would heap up thick and high, so that a grown man might sink into a snow bank whole and disappear as if nothing happened. In the human cities, great pines are brought in and decorated with ornaments and baubles, while the lodges of the north stoke their fires, and winter-fat drips down from roasts at the great moots of yuletide. The frost dances over the water, and the keg brawl court will see many champions now.  
Not here. Our bastion of quiet, the great Dustbowl, has not seen a speck of snow since before it was carved from the flesh of the mountain. It will be a dry and hot Wintersday for all of us.  
  
Progress on the *Aegis* continues, albeit slowly. I went into the lower decks to assess the damage, and took the time to look over every single gun on its battery deck. It always takes so much longer than you plan for, and you forget there are forty separate gun fixtures on each of these type of Pre-Glory style frigates. It took me the best part of the morning, and early afternoon. I managed to pass on the to the crew decks, which are six different ways of wrecked. I don't know. It's getting difficult to think about a way we can finally fix this thing up before the war is over. I'll move on to the really complex parts tomorrow, and hope I remember enough about the basic principles of airship engineering to know what I'm doing, or at least look like it.  
  
We left the Dustbowl for foraging today, along with several resupply tasks. I took a foraging unti through the ground near the Pact Encampment, and we managed to haul in a good bounty. Several whole hogs which we'll roast, and enough Raptor to make a crispy raptor special one of these days. Also stumbled upon an enormous striped stalker, unlike any other I've seen. A majestic animal, likely some sort feline adapted to hun alongside the saurians and giant beetles. We spotted more of their type, but none of them were as large as this one. We killed it, and I skinned and tanned the hide for a gift to Kristen. It was also heavier than I was, and will make good eating. Especially the ribs look thick and meaty, with little fat, but plenty of muscle tissue. We only gathered some river clams and mussles, which Rajani cooked up in a surprise seasfood dish for the Chapter. It's rare when you can find fresh river critters like that here. I wonder if the water below us contains any fish? I might thread up a net and see if I can't catch any. It would be a good supplement to the Chapter's stores.  
  
Rowasent went completely mad today. He was on the foraging mission, and ended up wandering too close to a fungi cluster, after which he started babbling. It went on, and on and on, and he eventually ended up in medical, having to be tended to by both Cheery and Mire. It could've been worse, I guess, but still. The endless punning almost made me punch his head in.  
  
I miss Freyj and Kristen. Times like these, you should spend some time with your kin. Usha will miss us in the north too.

# 81st of Colossus

Good news and bad news for the repairs; the good news is we good a load of high-quality salvage metal and parts in from recon forage, which means we can actually start effecting repairs without having to cannibalize from the ship internally. The bad news is the secondary engine lacks any sort of containment for the volatile fuel reactions, so we can't use them to take over lift while we try and see how bad the damage is on the main engine. Annoyingly, that leaves me with the only option of opening up the thing while it's spinning and pumping. Even worse, I can't check for any internal damage or deformation until we find a way to bring the secondary engines online, or are certain the ship won't just drop like a brick when it's no longer powered. I have exactly zero idea of how much lift is being provided by the balloon on its own, or how much is powered lift, and I have no intention of finding out the hard way.  
This is going to be a lot of work.  
  
In other news, we're going to blow the nightmare tree sky high; we had a battle briefing earlier detailing how we're going to approach this. Ironside is bringing out tubs of airship fuel to just flood the area in liquid fire and turns the entire thing into a blazing torch. I can't say I disagree with the notion. it's risky, of course, because even a stray spark will incinerate all of us, alongside with any of the leafy bastards. If anything, it will send a clear signal to Mordremoth that we're angry, and we're coming for him. I might have to keep the work on the ship down tomorrow, and make sure I'm properly rested and able for a demolitions mission that includes a lot of running.  
  
Rowasent getting on my nerves from his fungal infection or whatever it is. Always an issue keeping mesmers and blinkers confined to medical.

# 82nd of Colossus

It is almost year's end, and we blew up the only tree of any note with an improvised fuel explosive that turned it inot a giant smoking torch, the smoke of which we'll see for days to come at least. We're still residing in the dust bowl, and seem unlikely to move anywhere soon. It seems we'll be building this place out into a stronghold, and use it to regroup for whatever comes next. No time to work on the ship today either, had to help loading the fuel barrels we used as improvised bombs into the craft assigned to land us. You wouldn't say from looking at them on the outside, but those Charr choppers can hold a surprising amount of cargo if you squeeze in tight enough. Spirits, one of them can lift Force, myself and another four people into a warzone with no issue. You have to admire them for their engineering feats.  
  
Regardless, yes, we lit the nightmare tree up. Smooth operation, more or less, with Blade leading the vanguard. We managed to punch through cleanly, securing the crossing chokepoint easily. Lance was in and out with the charges before the enemy could regroup proper, and not a minute later the area was bathed in fire. Ironside cooked off a number of fuel drums from the airship, which just turned it into a tinder box. Luckily, a lot of the wood was dead and dry, so caught fire easily. Then it just sucked oxygen into the hollow and burnt like a beacon. You can see the glow from here, deceptively close by, keeping the sky lit in a dirty shade of orange, like a dying coal buried at the edge of a fire pit, smoking softly.  
We celebrated with a roast hog and some positive talking. I lit up my last cigar for the occasion, as it needs to be done. It's good to finally have been able to destroy then thing.  
  
The rest of the evening passed pleasantly enough, though I got tired early again. The heat is exhausting and weighs on me, especially if I do some harder work, like hefting barrels of fuel. Still, the water is apparently fresh and clean, so I can get a bucket and wash more, as well as meaning I don't need to worry about spilling drops to cool me down. I might see if I can find a basin I can fill with water. I could use just lying down in some cold water for an hour or so. I should ask Mithra about that, she's always been happy to help with keeping the armour nice and cold with a lining of frost. Oh, might combine going down to the waterside with a fishing trip, if Zottik can conjure up that fishing net he mentioned. Fishing seems nice.  
  
Apparently Ironside has six cubs.

# Six.

We spoke a bit about norn bairns and cubs, and other young, for seemingly no reason. Turns out, two-tear old norn are not that different from Grawl, when we pondered that notion. They both seem to be in the primitive talking stage, and like using their dirty nappies as weaponry. I'll not mention Freyja's passage through that stage here, just in case she ever happens to read it. She was always a busy child, though, when she was that young, only became more quiet when she was older. It's funny to think about the chubby girl in the wolfskin dress, dragging around an ugly sack-cloth doll around by the ear grew up so fast. I missed those last years, after I left for Orr, and now I feel she's changed so much. Ironside was right about the notion that we stick to our children too much. But I don't know how I couldn't. Every memory I have, even the bad one, remind me of why I was there for this... part of me.  
I do hope she's alive, and somewhere safe. If she's not, then  
Well, I can't even consider it. Not really. It would break me.  
  
I wonder if Kristen and I will have more children. I may feel old, but we're young in the time of this world, and there is time. Perhaps, one day? I wonder what Kristen is doing now, so far away. Something inside me hopes she's sitting around a fire, under a clear sky filled with the shimmering lights of the north, thinking about me, and somewhere in between, our minds meet briefly.

[](https://theashenchapter.enjin.com/profile/3099637)

[Tzahr Davidsson](/profile/3099637)

wrote:

I may feel old, but we're young in the time of this world, and there is time.

( [And even though I look so young, the wars have made me old...](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvHuAeLO8c8) )

# 83rd of Colossus

Another clear day. Don't think it even rains here anymore, but today was especially quiet. Little wind, aside from between some of the cliffs where it whipped up clouds of drifting sand that occasionally surprised you when you wandered past, getting inside your nose and throat. Spluttering for half an hour because of some grain of finely ground rock stuck in the back of your throat isn't really enjoyable. Luckily, that's about it. No mordrem. No vines. Nothing, just peace. I wanted to wander through the ruins, to see if I could find anything the previous inhabitants left behind. I can only hope to stumble across a wine cellar or an old drinking hall with casks of miraculously preserved mead. That, or a swim. But I'm not sure yet if we're allowed down to the water's edge by this point. I've been refilling the caskets for the kitchen, and using those daily to keep clean and somewhat fresh. When it was colder, yesterday evening, I managed to feel somewhat clean for the first time since we left central Tyria. My armour lining has started to show rings of white, salt left over from evaporated sweat. It smells worse than it did after Orr, but maybe that's because my nose isn't getting used to the smell of dead fish at the same time. At times, it feels like those early moments in Southsun where we squeezed passion fruits into drinks, and mixed it with ration rum. I would do the same here, but I don't know any of the fruits and plants that grow outside in the jungle, and the only folk I might ask are immune to most poisons anyway, so that's pointless.  
  
Major work on the airship today; Seleea and went into the main engine compartment, and found our first critical repair task. We need to replace the crystal array. Turns out half of the array is unusable, and whatever is left in the remaining crystals is keeping is afloat, while the boiler engine is working overtime. We patched a small fuel leak and ignition risk as well, which probably would have blown up the ship if it wasn't for the fact the containment system is still drawing the majority of the power, and kept the fuel from going over Ironside-way.  
Anyway, it's good to make progress, even though we're only finding out more things that need to be repaired urgently. At least we're not uncertain anymore about what's keeping us afloat, and what isn't.  
Sel herself did well, was good to work with.  
  
Spent some brief time talking to Athel and Arca, but it mostly boiled down to the notion that we're going into a stretch of quiet time while the Pact regroups. I retired early to look over my notes, and write this. I can see the ship hanging in the air ahead of me from my perch out the barracks, and the arena sitting lazily below. I haven't really gone back to it, since Vox fell, but I should. I do sort of miss the days of the Queen's Jubilee, when earning coin in the Queen's Gauntlet was easy. If you fought enough, and won enough, they would honour you with some entirely impractical trophy weapon plated with some sort of metal that resembled gold, made to honour Queen Jennah. I remember striding through the Gauntlet arena in my armour. It was burnished and scoffed, then, not being kept as clean as it is these days by the quartermaster's angry glares. Spirits, but I felt strong among those humans, standing taller than most. Because of the armour, they quickly came to call me 'warmaster Gargantua', despite me not even being in the Vigil anymore, then. The clamouring of the crowd was spectacular, and they were fights worthy remembering. Mages and warriors from different parts of the world. Still, few had fought in the Orrian invasion; those that had usually remained in the Vigil, or took a good long break from fighting. I beat the greenest of them easily, and struggled victoriously against others. In the end, of course, I too was defeated, but not before they had given me one of those dainty golden swords. It was a pointless trophy, really, and I sold it for gold to a noble who was beaten in a lower round, but still wished to claim the honours. He paid me well, as they are want to, though I know he gave me less than he thought it worth. I could see it in his greedy eyes. I used that coin to buy that ship, in Lion's Arch.  
  
Hmhm. Sometimes I think I do miss those days, but then I forget what brought me there. Filling voids by fighting is just something the Vigil taught me. So, I think that was what I was doing, taking part in that pompous human affair, for a Queen I didn't even respected or cared for enough to learn her name at the time.  
Hah. That, and the fact that you could gorge yourself on cheap wine and ale that tasted of piss in the Reach.  
I should've just gone home, and made amends to my daughter, instead of waiting... years.

# 84th of Colossus

Quiet day, with little happening. We had a notice that we'll be at extended rest for a while, which isn't bad. It's one of those times when it is good to be feel boredom occasionally creeping in. When your principal worry is trying to keep busy, all is well. Of course, it will be some more time before that happens to be true in any sense. We will experience Wintersday and year's end in some quiet, enjoy the company of our own, if not our families, and watch the clouds roll by while the Pact pulls itself together again, slowly. Those mercenaries or whatever they are from the Guild Initiative have started to set up a more elaborate camp, and even put a Wintersday wreath up in the barracks. I don't know how or where, bless them for finding pine spurs out here, and putting them up. A little reminder of home never hurts, I figure.  
  
Most of the day was barracks chatter. Apparently the Asura warrior, Zottik, does similar things with 'anger' magic as I've been doing. Most of what he said boiled down to the same principle, though, practice getting angry at things in a controlled way. He told me trying it on a dummy is good start, if I can get myself to conjure up enough rage at something like that. A bit of self-delusion might be in order. Spirits, I might even ask one of the mesmers if they can't help me by hexing me or conjuring up illusions. It's a bit more than just practice, though, so I need to find a spot I can exercise that's remote and secluded enough for that sort of thing. See what happens.  
  
Little else of note, really.

[The list in the back of the book is expanded.]  
  
1. Freyja Sorundsdottir, childbirth. May the snow cherries shade your sleep.  
2. Eirik Roar-Caster, mauled.  
3. Old Hakon Urrersson, old age.  
4. Alla Grayfiend, old age.  
5. Blast Speedcycle, explosion.  
6. Speed Blastcycle, explosion.  
7. Eamyllen, fell.  
8. Haemillen Ullasson, drowned.  
9. George Farfield, mauled.  
10. Loika Bylssdottir, slain in battle.  
11. Lilly the Young, sickness. Passed before her time.  
12. Murmer Snowbanished, mauled.  
13. Elby Lodge-Born, slain in battle.  
14. Constantine Aenimalf, old age.  
15. Xi Yee, sickness. Human.  
16. Timur Snowbanished, fell.  
17. Fjolda Kurnsdottir, slain in battle atop a mound of foes.  
18. Grox Pawcrank, misfire.  
19. Anger Furystrike, slain in battle.  
20. Bjorn Piersson, fell.  
21. Echo Ashcrawler, missing, presumed dead.  
22. Vaiwhyll, burned.  
23. Siegfridr Huijsson, slain in battle.  
24. Mathild Cleartide, shot.  
25. Tuuma the Destroyer, infection.  
26. Ulx, presumed slain in battle. Only crater was left.  
27. Tusk Facegore, slain in battle.  
28. Carnanon, missing, presumed dead.  
29. Ulrika Siegfridrsdottir, sought death. Felled many before she fell.  
30. Runt Redmauler, left behind, presumed dead.  
31. Ogglun Grawl-Slayer, infection.  
32. Black Spinesnapper, slain in battle.  
33. Toghalla-Strides-Swamps, fell.  
34. Helmi Sivassdottir, loose gas mask.  
35. Brick Greatmauler, slain in battle with his warband. They could not find Runt.  
36. Six Foemauler, slain in battle.  
37. Almar Fyrsson, burned.  
38. Crush Jawmauler, slain in battle.  
39. Pound Mousemauler, slain in battle.  
40. Blast Shipcrank, sickness.  
41. Ripper Guttmauler, infection.  
42. Fae Cliff-Brave, slain in battle. Body not recovered.  
43. Ikitik War-Skritt, slain in battle. He was the greatest among giants.  
44. Verril the Steelrider, slain in battle, leading the charge.  
45. Burunk, slain in battle. Saved my life.  
46. Unger, slain in battle.  
47. Bjorn Hakonsson, slain in battle.  
48. Elfyr Kurnsdottir, missing, presumed dead.  
49. Fury Hardmauler, slain in battle.  
50. Turic, sickness.  
51. Lander Dragonslayer, infection,  
52. Crush Rangecrank, missing, presumed dead.  
53. Sigurd Sigrasson, slain in battle.  
54. Tiloomoo, slain in battle.  
55. Li Jo Han, drowned.  
56. Anna-Victoria Vineyard, sickness.  
57. Akxxi, drowned.  
58. Muller Reavers, drowned.  
59. Arbaea, drowned.  
60. Satsuki, missing, presumed dead.  
61. Xherili, missing, presumed dead.  
62. Vanholm Snowshield, deported.  
63. Isabeth Nixon, slain in battle.  
64. Gutt Cindertail, slain in battle.  
65. Rotarn 'Tricky', fell.  
66. Karon, slain by Modremoth.  
67. Anthaos, fell to corruption.  
68. Garrick, died of his wounds.  
69. Elia, killed while trying escape captivity.  
70. Ataam, shot by Mordrem.  
71. Cota, fell.  
72. Marthe Dargosdottir, missing.  
73. Bridgit Forgewood, missing, presumed dead.  
74. Vox, fell.

# 85th of Colossus

I'm sitting on a ledge on the outside of the barracks, trying to evade that annoying Freezemaw about pestering me for lemons for lemonade. The view on the ship from here on is extraordinary, but the drop is quite high. It's wide enough for it to be safe, though. Still, it's a long fall down into the water; it'll kill me if I slip. Heh, I wonder if there's any way to dive in and live through it. I wanted to go for a swim anyway, after the day's proceeding, but I'm getting ahead of myself.  
  
We're still at rest, as usual, and it seemed to shape up to be a slow day, on all accounts. The new Charr, Ak, seems to be capable. Veteran Blood Legion, though he's a Gladium now. Didn't feel like explaining why and how, and I know better than to press on about that. Still, he's got the scars and it's obvious from the way he goes about that he knows what's he's in for. Half-afraid he was just a green recruit, but he'll do well.  
  
Hold on, Freezemaw has moved. [break in page]  
  
I managed to sneak out down past the arena onto a beach here without Freezemaw spotting me. It's dark, but the stars and the moon shine bright enough out here for me to write a little. They're almost as clear as when you are out at sea, dazzling and beautiful. All the old constellations are there, but in different places, carried atop a crown of shadowed rock. The water is cool, and dark like ink, catching the light of the stars like a field of eternity, stretching out in front of you. It's good being away from people a little.  
  
Cheery wandered up past, and is busy undressing to slip into the water. Can't blame her, with what's happened today. Felix ended whatever they had, because of the entire thing with the dragon, as I understood it. They both were... out of it. I don't know, it wasn't good for them, I think, but they decide, in the end. Enough words for today, though, I think I'll just enjoy the water, Cheery's splashing and the sounds of this place under the stars. Not a bad place to be on a winter's day.

# 86th of Colossus

Command came through and gave me permission to run the refresher exercises for the recruits. Seemed to be a little slim at first, but we eventually gained enough members to run a semi-decent exercise scenario. Basic stuff, and a little tedious, but essential. Besides, pushing soldiers into command situations where they have to resort to their theory is always good. Good way to spot who has potential and who doesn't, in a sense. Most of them pick up and find their way through it with little hassle, some find it harder or lack the initial confidence, while others seem to have an almost natural inclination towards handing small formations of troops. Besides, the theory and its application is valuable for field work. Soldiers that know how to deploy and move through dangerous terrain are less likely to get killed, after all. Maybe we can prevent some falling deaths.  
I've got tomorrow's exercise though out roughly, more positioning work. Not tiring or taxing, just working through the lay of the land. It should prove easy enough.  
  
We're given more leeway to wander around the city and just like many of these places, it is even larger than it looks. There are many galleries and buildings hewn into the rock, and a few chambers, here and there. Many are barren, with little trace left behind of what their purpose was, though a few show signs. A large hall overseen by galleries is adorned with tile mosaic and large statues, while fresh water pours out from a source at their feet into a basin. I sat there for a while today, after I stopped to drink. It's not hard to imagine people here, which makes the desolation all the more shocking. Sparse pockets of soldiers and mercenaries are slowly filtering in, but they mostly keep to the open 'island' over the water, supported on giant stone pillars. They must have been large fangs of rock jutting up from the water, flattened and smoothed by great effort or magic. The rest stands almost like a sunken cathedral out of Orr around a central dais at the very center. It seems precarious, and the remains of an old smoke oven remain there, looking out over the rest of the city. I wish Freyja could see it; she'd be chattering on and on about everything. I suppose these sort of ruins is exactly why the Priory sent her out here.  
Sometimes I wish I could take pictures with my mind, and keep them with me forever. It seems cruel that sights such as these would be allowed to fade when the mind goes soft with age.

# 87th of Colossus

Another positioning exercise through the ruins today. Attendance is low, but that's not surprising considering they're voluntary. Many people are just resting, or busying them with other types of exercise. Can't blame them. Many of us would like to have though we'd have been back in time for Wintersday when the fleet launched. Now, there's no telling how long the war'll take. We could be here for several years, if it goes wrong, or we might be victorious before the next spring. Either way, doing drills today, even in the dusty sand here, reminded me a lot of drills at the Vigil Keep, or even Marriner. Familiar. Sometimes I think I was born in a training yard, the way it feels so natural to go through it all. Even in the bakery, I always liked baking the bread and pastries in neat orders. One was always the "serjent"; the one I'd keep aside for me and Freyj to eat, out of each batch. Just a word I learned as a kid, reading about the humans and their wars with the tengu and centaurs. I half expected the Vigil to have them too. The Vigil Keep always had that sort of familiar thing. We got to know a lot of faces there we see around us near every day, now. Makes me wonder where Sana is, and if she's alive at all. I never really considered that she might be dead, just like Freyj. It's... weird. Maybe if Kath was more distraught about it all, I'd be more worried, but she seems fine. Who knows, maybe Athel put a spell on that mirror of hers, and Sana's just through the other side of it. Wouldn't even put it past them.  
Something tells me I'll be seeing her again, one way or another, even if it is in the Mists after I die.  
  
Gloomy idea. I've come to go swimming more often, but before dawn, instead of at night. Walking up the columns past the arena in the first rays of day's light is a small joy to savour, and a good way to greet the new day. The airship hangs above, humming quietly, and you hear exotic birds chirp and chatter. Sometimes it's hard to remember you're not alone, and you start to think that this is another world entirely. Whatever magic is here, or was left behind, it sings it's most beautiful song in the silent solace of its rocky steps.  
  
Almost year's end, and my own year's passage soon after. A year has never felt so long. The then compared to the now might as well be a century ago.

# 88th of Colossus

Quiet day, now, in the dark corners of the Dusthold. Not bad, though, just quiet. The height of wintersday, now, when the wind blows colder in the north than normal, and the clouds are filled with ice that dances down from the heavens in the handwriting of the wind, telling us all to stay home and enjoy the hearth. The time when furs and pelts are pulled out, and even the hardiest take care not to stay in the biting wind for too long. At times like these, Usha would break open a keg if wine and heat it over a fire with cinnamon, until we were all too drunk to speak properly, and we'd lapse into laughing fits instead. Freyj would come sit with us, mistletoe in her hair, and we'd sing or tell tales of Wintersday, like Freezie the snowman, and the lost treasure of the Dwarven king Hundar, hidden deep beneath the mountains in great halls of ice and frost. It always good to have that, at least.  
We could use a good strong drink and some holiday cheer here, but mostly people seem to keep to themselves and just sort of pass it over.  
  
Don't worry Freyj, you're not alone, and I'll find you, one way or another.

# 89th of Colossus

It remains quiet here in our dusty caldera. Peaceful, in a way, though I am sure that idleness will soon be replaced with more action and death. I've prepared some other exercises for the soldiers to undertake soon, make them ready for when our surprising winter's rest will pass and we'll be thrown into the deep end of the offensive again. Nothing too heavy, but better than having them sit on their arses all day, doing nothing.  
  
Shared some older memories from Wintersday and other celebration revelries. The best tales, of course, of getting Usha drunk with Murmur, Timur and some of the others, before tying her paws behind her back and tying several of the small copper bells from Hoarn Eiriksson's smithy to her horns, before loudly chanting "jingle charr" over and over again. Or that time we put Ush into a keg and rolled her down the hill onto the frozen lake, right after the keg brawls, and the revenge she took by dropping me in front of a bear cave with a spoon of honey over my head. Woefully dangerous things, but great tales to tell, and the memory is always more spectacular than the it actually was. Hope Usha's doing well. Usually out peddling her goods out to the other cities for Wintersday, while the home brewery sells the stock it accumulated over spring. Could have sent someone else to do it, but always preferred to go herself; so she could keep an eye out for any funny people, I think it was the way she put it. Fuse's probably with her, grumping about as he's want to.  
  
Ah well. In the old calendar, this evening would be this year's end, and it would have been 1329, as the humans count it. But now, the Asura say we wait five days more, 'till the night falls on the 95th of Colossus, and the season of the Zephyr may once more begin. Never thought the days were so fluid.

# 90th of Colossus

Brought about some repairs on the airship; nothing major, unfortunately. Straightened out some decks plates with a mallet and I've measured off some internal hull patches from the better scrap we have. It's not good, really, but it's better than nothing. I don't know, the scale of the task is daunting, even with several hands working in tandem.  
  
Wish I was home.

# 91st of Colossus

Did some more repairs on the ship, but the stock welding equipment makes it slower than I'd like. I'm running out of gass and material for the actual mends, meaning I need to use it sparingly. I'm attaching deck plating by welding the corners only, leaving the rest to be finished when we get more supplies. Luckily, that seems to getting a brighter prospect, with more people trafficking through the area every day.  
  
It remains quiet for today, as I'm too tired to run the exercise I've got planned. Will do so tomorrow, and take work a little easier during the day. It'll be relaxing to oversee it, I think. Might combine it with a good long swim and some armour cleaning afterwards, focus the mind a bit.  
  
I'll see on the morrow.

# 92nd of Colossus

Well, news came through, finally, looks like we'll be moving out before year's end, even, back into the fight, with an actual extermination mission, this time. No regrouping, we're out hunting this time around. I'm ready for it, I think, though I've got a feeling we'll miss the sanctuary of the Dustbowl eventually.  
Today's exercise went well, but those few people who attended aren't really who it was intended for. Seems most recruits are otherwise occupied. I don't mind terribly, the rehearsal was good for myself too, in a way, and the walk was scenic enough. Makes me wonder why they built a big throne or dais in the center of it all. Maybe they worshiped something? I hear tales of Morganites or something, but I don't think they were from around these places. Too long ago too, I think.  
  
Also went through some exercises with Drakemoor, who's decided to pick up a shield. Nothing complex, but basics that are essential for a good fighter. If anything, I'm surprised it took her that long to pick up a weapon skill like that. Most weaponry isn't that hard to handle, really. Anyway, she'll have to train and practice to get adept at it, but it'll do in a pinch. Still better for her to keep her rifle handy and drop them before they get too close.  
  
As for the rest, well... who know where we'll be at year's end.  
Also, it was Cheery's year day one of these past. Pity, we didn't get a chance to do something for her.

# 93rd of Colossus

Last day in the Dustbowl before we get ready to move off again 'deeper into the jungle', as Ironside was silling to let slip. Sounds like we're going into new territory, then, maybe that Priory camp I've been hoping we'd reach since I heard of its existence. Whatever or where-ever it is, I'll see soon enough, and I'll know, finally, if my daughter is alive or not. If she isn't there, I don't know where to look anymore. I hope Grace found her, in life or death. Freyj shouldn't have to be alone, not out in the jungle, and not out in the Mists.  
  
Regardless. Today's exercise went smooth enough, though I sometimes feel I'm speaking to a wall. Kraxxi and Sinclair seemed interested enough, at least, which is something. Doubt their readiness will improve much, but maybe it'll help a little when it's needed most. We were allowed to employ the command room and everything, though, which was nice, even though we had to use boxes for the Asura to stand on. The scouts did something else; from what I gather, one of them used shadow magic to hide himself, while the others had to find him; including, apparently, by way of throwing rocks at him. Less brainy, more practical. Perhaps I should focus on that more, in future? I don't know, doesn't matter anymore. Doubt we'll see another period of rest in the foreseeable future.  
  
I've packed and cured whatever was left from the 'fresh' rations, though most of it was on the edge of going stale. I cured the boar with salt, before smoking it thoroughly in the kitchen, meaning it'll last us for a while. I did similar with some of the raptor, though some some of it had already gone off; I threw it out near a tree, before covering it with sand for the smell. At least it'll feed the soil. I don't know if we'll see better foprage deeper in the jungle, but I'm not overly concerned. Despite the landscape being literally torn apart, the jungle seemed teeming with natural life. Darius, slightly special human, decided to help me out in the kitchen. He was ready enough to help, though there is a strong hint of Devin in him which... is worrying. I wonder if that's just me, or if his vivid presence is just part of that. He does ramble on a bit, at times.  
  
Packed most of my equipment already. I always kept a lean pack, but I've started to accumulate trophies and equipment at an alarming rate. I've long since thrown out the blanket for the bear fur, but now the beautiful tiger skin I've managed to cure into a hide is added to that. Even rolled up tightly and bound, the large pelts fill up most of my pack. The grooming kit and tin of grease go on top; managed to refill the latter with boar fat too. Not as good as the genuine bear stuff, but it'll hold me over. I might need to ask the quartermaster for a razor, though, the shaving flint I've been using for my scalp has gotten dull over time, and is now little more than a worn rock. Maybe I'll just use a dagger. Anyway, I'm getting sidetracked; with some spare footwraps and garments, my kit's become full. I'm lucky I keep the gas mask and flaregun in belt pouches already, or I'd have to dangle them from the outside with the entrenching tool. I'll have to adjust the shield strap so it can fit over.  
  
Felix's doing alright, I think. Monty's been sick, which apparently everyone knew but me, to the point that the bird is in medical. Lot of pent up anger in there, with the entire thing with Cheery, too. We made use of the arena to throw some punches before the night, which I hope helped. Fighting always sort of helps with that.  
Swimming afterwards to make sure that walking back up the stairs wasn't something to look forwards to; tired enough to lay down and sleep easily in a moment, and not keep myself awake with a wandering mind.  
Kraxxi's asked me to ask Raven for a favour on behalf on Monty. I doubt the old croak has much favour to spare for me; always was more Sana's patron. Spirits just never... I don't know. At best, Dolyak, Bear or Minotaur might hear me in really dire straits. Dark Eater'd probably just want me to eat the damn thing. But I guess it never hurts to ask, so I'll do that before I go to sleep.

# 94th of Colossus

We've redployed back into the jungle, another deployment stretch that might take a long time. Airdropped in with a chopper group, before marching the short hop over to the encampment. You wouldn't think it at first, but you march straight into an enormous tree, nearer to the top than you are to the ground. Cheery remarked on that it doesn't look unlike the Grove, and she's right. Large, towering trees with tangling branches and roots, between which are suspended large stretches of moss-covered stone and dirt, held aloft by the tree. It is as if it took with it parts of the ground with it, and over the many, perhaps hundreds, of years of their growth, it has all been taken with them in their impossible journey towards the heavens. There are rough paths between them, leading down to the ground, deep below the foliage of the trees. From the edges, you can see the sheer drops, swirling with mists and the coloured caps of enormous mushrooms growing on the walls and bark below.  
I don't know what lies ahead, but behind us lies the broken landscape of what's been known as the Verdant Brink. This place isn't as sundered; it is denser, older, and the air is heavier.  
  
It almost seems fitting that the camp here is settled by the Priory. They've done their best, setting up supplies and sending our research groups before we got here. There is also a huge bullfrog here, who is friendly, and speaks in some tongues about more of his kin, even deeper into the jungle. How he got here, I don't know. There is an Itzel village directly across from us, with their large wicker looking structures hanging onto a platform weaved between the branches. There are more Hylek riding beetles not far from the camp's borders, and they do not seem the friendly kind, which means we're sending pickets and guards. They don't seem to have the courage to try and dislodge us, though, which I guess is a mixed blessing. I'm watching them now, probably just outside of reach of their bows, as I write. They're still a curious folk, and I can't help but feel a measure of apprehension at us invading their lands again. For them, we're just another group of foreign beasts, trampling on how they've been living for untold generations.  
We'll probably end up blowing them up.  
  
We went out for a perimeter patrol directly after arrival, and ended up near the surface. There was some very odd structure right near the ground, like a beacon or a pylon, with a strange glowing lights on top. It was surprisingly spindly, even though you could see the lichen clinging to it. There was also a series of odd mirrors or sort along the side, like the ones we have in Hoelbrak at the Might and Main, displaying the images of the spirits in the sky. We didn't get too close, because the Warmaster has some apprehension about sending us down outright without asking the Priory first. We turned back. Found a dead one, too. Norn woman, middle aged, though she was badly mangled, likely attacked and dragged down by these filthy raptor things. Kath came back reporting it as a "norn priory woman", which made my heart freeze in my chest and my head feel numb. Freyj isn't among those here at camp, and I was terribly afraid that it might have been her. I swear by everything I hold dear, I never wish to be so afraid again. It was almost a relief to find out it wasn't her. Recovered the body, and we brought her back. Better than to let her just... rot. They'll give her a proper burial, now, so she can be with her ancestors, and tell her last tale.  
The Priory explorers here mentioned that there are more buildings like the one we saw, as well as 'mystical golden beings'. Not sure what to make of that, but I have a feeling we'll find that out soon enough. The explorer devolved into a lot of difficult magical terms about enchanted armours which didn't mean anything to me, but sounds like something from legends. Maybe the people that used to live in all the ruins we saw never left?  
  
I was worried when I couldn't see Freyj, at first, but I spoke to some of the Priory here, and they do remember some word of a norn woman fitting Freyja's description coming through, along with some others. They're even further in, a forward camp somewhere. Close, now, and some hope that she's alive and well, somewhere, out there in the tangle.  
  
Ema and Sinclair got into a fight, too. Kath had to intervene, and scolded them both for it. If I had a guess, I'd figure it was Sinclair that was too insensitive to deal with someone mourning a fallen friend, and Ema too sensitive to let it go without allowing anger to get to her. I'm worried for her health, mental, if not physical, but I feel there is little I can do. At best, I can offer the token comfort of kindness, which is meager consolation in times of hardship. Still, not the best of luck.  
  
Kristen would've loved to see this place, I think. I wish she was here, though I wish she never has to be, at the same time.

# 95th of Colossus, 1328

Last day of the year counted as the 1328th after the exodus of the humans gods; it will be the nineteenth year since I have buried Freyja Haiva and Sorundsdottir, and it will be the start of my 35th year on this world in a scant few days.  
Like each passing year, the world will not have changed much more than between any other two days, but it does its best to remind us of the past, focus us on the present, and hope for a better future.  
We have been at war with the dragons for more than two-hundred years, now, and it will be only a few score years less since my people were driven south by the ice beast's wrath before mighty Asgeir sundered from it a tooth.  
  
We celebrate the end of the old year here, on the march towards putting down the second of these great monsters we face in our struggle for everything we hold dear. A year has changed much. The company of the peope I keep, the names of the people I trust, and even the woman I hope I was holding when I wake after a night of troubled sleep would have been unknown to me, only something as brief as a year earlier. Seas and oceans were crossed, victories celebrated and defeats suffered. My body has been torn, shot at by cannon, mauled by Orrian beasts, burnt and exhausted to its upper limit, while my mind and spirit has been assailed by the endless horror and deprivations of war. Sleep comes with hidden beasts lurking amongst the sheets, waiting for a moment to strike, in the hope even a small crack in the stonework of your willpower will bring you to your knees. Some must fight, so that all can be free, after all.  
  
Still, I think I find my courage every dawn, looking out to the rising sun, knowing that it shines brighter for our children and our children's children. I'll gladly trade my blood and sanity for that.  
  
*Give us peace, Crusader,*  
*In our time,*  
*For there is no other,*  
*Who would fight for us,*  
*If not you*.

# 1st of Zephyr, 1329

We remain at the Priory camp, in the higher reaches of the large trees that grow here, taking some measure of rest in the familiarity; it does resembles the Grove at times, especially during the twilight of dusk, which comes fast and sudden, before the jungle itself is lit by entirely different colours.  
  
We raided deep into Itzel territory today, trying to track down a crashed airship. A night raid, almost, due to the thick and broad foliage making it dark this far below the canopy. We ripped through them, though we had little reason to do so; there was no airship. Instead, we trampled through a settlement of Itzel, butchering them as we went. I don't think we even tried just asking them. What a waste of time and lives.  
To makes matters worse, some Charr recruit we picked up stopped in the middle of a shovel-face nesting ground to butcher some meat off one of them *while we were being chased by a broodmother the size of a small airship*. Caused a collapse in cohesion when the rearguard didn't advance, meaning we had to fight a berserk saurian in its own nest. It's a miracle none of us got badly injured. I don't think any unit has had collective disciplining inflicted on them because one of their members screwed up in a fair while.  
The good news is that we do have a sizeable 20kg saurus steak which I cut up and will start frying up fresh for tomorrow's meal. Enough meat to fill the Chapter's rations for three or four meals. Incidentially, the offending Charr's been put on cleaning duty permanently, and 'grounded' to vegtable rations. Guess he won't get a taste of his cut.  
  
That one strange ~~man~~ lad with the eye-patch is back, too, wearing Vigil colours this time around. I don't know what that means, but I guess your Order of Whisper types just are liable to appear and disappear. Never did see those two from Verdant Brink again either.  
  
Sinclair also came to told me that he's also heard that his brother and Freyja might have passed through here, recently, which adds to my hope that she's alive and well, and not far. I just need to know where she went, and hope that the Chapter marches in the same direction. I doubt they'd let me leave on my own to find her.

# 2nd of Zephyr, 1329

And so the year marches on. We remain in the canopy-camp of the Priory order, on the edge of what with every day seems to be a valley filled with the most remarkable rumors, some of which seem hard to believe, if not that I saw the beacon near what has been called Northwatch with my own eyes. Others report seeing large gilded being floating through the air, as in told in the old tales of the White Mantle, who lived in times as such when the Dwarves went into the earth, and the likes of Jora and Svanir walked the frozen norths. These White Mantles worshiped some manner of creature made of gilt they called the Mursaat; but they were malevolent and cruel beings, if I recall the stories correctly. I'd doubt that these were the same, or that they even were real, if not for the great ruined cities we have found, and the tale that there is an even greater city not far south, built entirely from gilded stone. It is these stories that has the Priory order here so invested and alive. I guess it is why they flew Freyja out with the fleet, too.  
  
The camp itself is alive with people coming and going. We seem to be the main of several Vigil forces in place, but there are spooks here and there among the Priory people. The latter have set up camps deeper into the tangle, around various sites of interest to them. The ground below is bristling with life, and a large herd of 'shovel-faces', big and heavy saurians bristling with razor sharp bone ridges and a spear-like portrusion from their chin, have made nest not far from camp. They lag eggs like Griffons do, in large nests, through the eggs are easily large enough to house a large dog. I don't know if they eggs like poultry; if they do, seeking out unfertilized eggs could be worthwhile for forage, if not very safe, considering the aggressive behaviour and large size of the beasts.  
We will not go hungry, regardless of what happens; the meat of a single one of them could feed everyone in this camp for a season. Neither will we grow hungry. At dawn, the condensation leaves behind pools of crystal clear water on the broad leaf surface, and from the overgrowth, even deep below the canopy, the rains must fall furiously and hard, if intermittently. I always thought that when people spoke of the "Maguuma jungle", they mentioned such places as Metrica and even Caledon. But those are mere sparse forests compared to the raw lush savagery of the Magus Falls.  
  
The day itself passed in relatively quiet, however, though I am itching to head out, and see if these tales of a golden city hold any truth to them.

# 3rd of Zephyr, 1329

Quite day, not much has happened. Apparently the singer-woman that lost her chest of instruments in the Hylek village went out and tried to get them herself. She got badly injured, and Force had to go in with Jorund to extract her. She's alright now, though she'll be in medical for the time being. Never understand why these civilian folk come out here, instead of heading home.  
  
More talk of this golden city and their inhabitants, which the Priory have started calling Exalted. I haven't seen any, but others have, so I'm staring to think it's not just some spun-out tale. We'll see soon enough.  
  
[continuation of entry]  
  
I think it's about this time, almost sixteen years ago that Murmur died. He was part of a number of charr mewlings that were left to be in the norn foothills next to Diessa, and was always close to Usha and Timur. So much that when an old Legion Charr passing through remarked he remembered some Gladium and lesser criminals being 'banished to perish in the snow', we all started calling them the Snowbanished. It stuck, and they carried that name ever since.  
  
Murmur wasn't the same as Usha or Timur; we used to think he was just small, but now, in hindsight, I think the cub had been born with a disease, and that's why whoever sired him left him out to die until our folk found him. He was never strong, barely the size of a child, even when he was older, and frail and brittle like something made out of glass. He was weak, and thus needed strong friends. Usha was always his ally, and through her, so was I. What he lacked in brawn, he made up in cunning and good humour; the most outrageous pranks and plots were always his devices, and we were always more than happy to carry them out. Hrist, Timur, Usha, me... I don't think we really ever stopped to think anything could go wrong. He fell and got hurt a often as all of us, which was often. Skinned knees and elbows were the rule, and the palms of your hand were as dirty as the soles of your feet.  
  
After I buried one Freyja, and started raising another, Murmer went off on his own merry way, much like Usha did with the brewery, and Timur started out hunting. Then one day they brought back his body for burning; coming back from a fishing trip, he'd fallen off a bridge and shattered a leg. Arkdotus smelled the blood, and mauled him to death, unable to crawl away. He wasn't much bigger than I had been when I was twelve when it happened. It struck us, hard. Especially Usha, who drank herself into a stupor for eight days after. The days were sad then. I think even Freyj, small as she was, must have noticed it. We kept a crude carving he'd once made of himself at the bakery before I left for Orr, and I sometimes used it to tell Freyj stories about what we did when we were her age, like racing empty kegs down the road to the keg-court Wayfarer, or making crude scare-crows to rile up the Grawl.  
I guess he never dit forge a great legend, or died in a way worth retelling, but he was my friend. that alone is worth a retelling,

# 4th of Zephyr, 1329

Another day comes to rest with the troops out here in the canopy; seems we've at last made contact with the real enemy, though it was on our terms. Took a patrol out through the canopy levels to see if the Itzel had stirred up trouble after that civilian wandered off into their camp. Sure enough, the area around it was crawling with the buggers, so I felt we had little choice but to make it clear we're not tolerating them encroaching on our camp. Had to fell a few to make the point clear, which only makes it more sad. They've been picking off Priory members that wander too far, and we keep finding bodies strewn around. A pity we aren't able to live in peace with them, like we do with several other Hylek tribes. We'd be so much stronger as allies, instead of being forced to kill eachother. I'm sure history will remember us better, but we're equal part aggressor as they are. I suppose we do what we must, because if we fail, the dragon will devour all of us.  
  
We found Mordrem near the Northwatch camp, though only a handful. First sign I've seen of our actual enemy; good to be reassured about actually being on the front again. I guess we'll be on the move sooner or later, now, and advance deeper into the basin. Might even find this fabled golden city, though I find it odd that we don't see any signs from it here. The foliage is thick, aye, but the way the stories are making it sound, you'd think we'd have seen some of it by now. Something that large can't be hidden in the jungle for this long, right?  
  
On another note, that one Slayer, Lavena, from the Order of Whispers misled me about the identity of one of the Sylvari that accompanied us, claiming their were Priory, when they were at best ex-members of that Order. It didn't factor into the operation, but I cannot stand Whisper folk that see the need to deceive me. We're better off without their ilk; they're as much help as the dragons are. How do they expect us to trust their intelligence or anything at all when they can't even tell the truth about someone's Order within the Pact? I know I'm not talking them on any operations in future where I have a say in those matters, and I'm indicting her in the operation report. If they can't function with their allies, they should've stayed at home, or kept out of sight.  
You'd think we were their enemy.

# 5th of Zephyr, 1329

Spirits, where do I start? Freyja is alive, and well, and in Tarir, the great golden city that apparently lies not an hour distance from us. She's studying the Exalted, and the scouts ran into her. Athy said she looked well, and wondered where I was. She'll be waiting, once we make our way there. Seems almost a certainly now, that, now we've seen the Exalted in action good and proper. But I'm getting ahead of myself.  
  
We started the day with another operation, searching for the crashed airship. We stopped to clear out Northwatch camp first, which was overrun. The Priory left behind few dead, though, and Freyja wasn't amongst them. Still, I was afraid for a moment something had happened to her. We later learned they'd all pulled back into Tarir, which is only a stone's throw distant from the camp. Anyway, we cleared through Northwatch, and headed west, underneath the large trees in which we make camp, until we found our way into the little Skirrt scrap heap. As I noted when we passed through with the Tactician, the little skritt town we so blatantly went around *is* the crashed airship. I'm still surprised we didn't stop to check it first time around, would have saved us a lot of hassle, and two walks through the spade-head nests. Regardless, we went in this time around, and it only took a little looking around to figure out it was the ship. The Skirtt were friendly enough out of themselves, and a little armed intimidation and trade allowed us to carry off a veritable bounty of spare parts and scrap. Xeyia found a hoard of smaller miscellaneous items, and Ironside and I recovered a detached engine bank, with power crystals and all. A lucky break, it'll allow us to fix up the auxiliary engine on the Aegis back in the Dustbowl, and replace at least part of the containment power! I had to lug the entire housing up; we'll take what we need, and I might turn the housing into a a hot plate for the kitchen. Apparently, the Warmaster got into talks with some of the Exalted at a pylon down from the Skirrt fort while we were scavenging too, something about a mirror. Probably one of those things we've seen, that they use to light their beacons.  
  
When we arrived back at camp, Sigra had apparently forgotten to take along an anvil for Xeyia, which sent her into a tirade. I didn't pay much attention, but the Warmaster had to calm her down. I was too busy hearing the good news from Athy about Freyja. Not a lot of time, though, the Warmaster pulled some volunteers to recover that anvil anyway; so we marched all the way back down again. While Xeyia packed up her anvil, the rest of went down to the pylon I mentioned earlier, only to find the place occupied by enormous gilded armours that towered over us. It was magnificent; how I had always imagined Orr was before it sunk. The air itself felt warm and heavy, graced by a presence that would help us. Looking on those creatures, apparently ancient humans, just like Felix predicted about the people here, it didn't feel like we would be losing this war. With magic so potent, so... old, almost divine, Mordremoth will be in for a surprise. And they do seem to be our allies, for all intents and purposes. It got even better when we marched back, in an infinitely better mood, we passed Northwatch again, only to find it purified by the same great gilded constructs. They had exterminated the Mordrem that had infested it, and restored it to its true purpose, shining brightly.  
What Athy claims about the city, though... I will have to see it with my own eyes to believe it.  
  
I think our fortunes are turning, for the better this time. The Dustbowl and the ancient ruins are all just stepping stones towards this great bastion, that has survived in the jungle for what must have been hundreds of years. And now, they'll be a stepping stone for the Pact to destroy the dragon, and we can go home.  
  
Spirits, I wish I had better mastery of words in this instant to describe the feeling I felt gazing upon these gilded sentinels. It's not just awe, it's a sense of salvation, of impending retribution. Hearing news of Freyja will have helped that. I cannot imagine what it will be like to set foot in the city itself, and to see her with my own eyes again, though. Perhaps I might simply die happily, then.

# 6th of Zephyr, 1329

We're in Tarir now, and it is more than any of us imagined. Great staircases of gilt, lit by ever-burning fires and inlaid with beautiful glass and crystal in all the colours of the sky lead us down into the heart of the gilded city. It is huge, divided into four quarters, almost symmetrically. In the east, where we camp, there are giant waterworks that stand over the city below in three great bridges from which the clearest and coolest water I've ever known flown down below into the heart. The reason why we didn't see it before is because the city isn't built the surface, like you'd expect, but it sits in a deep valley or crater, obscured by the surrounding foliage and cliffs. The outer walls are indistinguishable from the rest of the tangle, except for the golden gates, of which I think there is one in each cardinal direction. So large is the city that we could easily get lost wandering, and it takes time and effort to across from one side to another.  
  
It is also mostly empty; giant halls devoid of life, with only the occasional Exalted flying by in silence, or tending to some damage. The rest are Pact. Mostly Priory, who seem to be studying the city extensively, but also Vigil, many of them camped at the waterworks with us. Not all of them are in good shape, and I heard there are dead and dying waiting for care on the fountain-bridge above us. We also saw one single Charr dressed in a spook uniform, though they keep to the shadows, as usual. Freyja is here, and spirits, was it good to see her again. She hasn't changed much, but I heard she did great deeds in saving others of her group, and tending to those who are wounded. Unfortunately, it seems she didn't know Northwatch had fallen, and fears for some of her group that were there. On the flipside, I did bring her news about the human woman she loves, Grace, which Freyj believed had died. Sinclair's brother is also here; a far more amicable man, truth be told, but unfortunately scarred by the ordeals of the jungle. He will likely never see again, though his spirit remains unbroken. He speaks well of Freyj, forgetting his own strength.  
It was good. I missed Freyja, and it gladdens my heart her legend is already growing; she will be a greater hero than I will, some day.  
I wish Kristen was here to see it as well. It would have made the day even more perfect than it already was.  
  
Truly, I think this is the answer we've been looking for. I remarked in my journal yesterday that the pylon we saw was what I imagined Orr to be like before it sank. Tarir, the gilded city, is what I though Arah would have been like before it fell. It is, surely, a city worthy creatures so powerful as the gods. As it the Hall of Heroes passed straight from the Mists into our world, and left a shining sigil behind. It is difficult not to feel invigorated, being able to lay your head to rest, to the sound of rushing water, knowing the thing you care for most in this world is not a stone's throne away from you.  
If I fell asleep now and never woke up again, I would not lament anything.

# 7th of Zephyr; 1329

Longest day in a while; so much happened.  
I woke up, forgetting where I was, and thought I was still dreaming for a good few minutes before the sleep left my head and it all came back. First thing I did was to take a wash, clean out some of the dirt and and grit that the jungle seems to otherwise attract and accumulate on me. I even took the time to scrub the padding and dressings of my armour in a bucket, before dressing fully for the day. The damp evaporated fast, but I felt clean for the first time in a while, with not dried mud between my toes or grains of dried salt inside the cuirass padding.  
  
We took to the jungle with the squadron as usual, heading all the way back up to Northwatch in order to repulse the help re-establish the camp there. It went pretty smoothly, just some Mordrem that succumbed quickly to our force of arms. Only thing of note were a number of disturbingly grey-skinned Hylek, both the Itzel and Nuoch breeds, that seemed to be fighting along the Mordrem. I'm not sure if they were entirely alive, but they weren't easy to kill. Especially the large ones seems to function as shock troopers in some numbers; big as they are. We also exterminated a nest of them below the Northwatch pylon, taking them apart in an organised sweep, before pulling out securely again. A detachment lead by Mire also went along a stream, up to the source, which was a waterfall falling down over a gilded pylon like they have at the Skritt camp. I don't know what it was for, but I think it's the same stream that feeds the waterworks in Tarir itself. We saw some movement above us, on the ledge, but it was hard to see what it was, exactly. Any case, we moved back to Tarir in some order, having a comparatively quiet day, as far as the war here goes.  
  
We were back up at the camp in the waterworks when all it turned out Lance had shattered during their operation, or at least, that was the impression. Ironside was no-where to be found, and Rel and Sigra got separated from the others when their unit tried to use the Exalted portals to travel between level. I'm sure that if Freyja hear about this, she'd have thrown them off the side of the aquaduct. Pretty sure the Warmaster explicitly ordered us not to touch anything. Regardless... so Lance was shattered; even worse, they apparently were trying to get Xeyia into the medical area, after she'd apparently got caught in an explosion of some sort. We set out to find them, only to run into the just as they made their way back. Xeyia's alive, through some sort of miracle; apparently she's even talking, though I find that hard to believe. The way she looked, the shock would've put her out of commission for days at the very least, if not longer. But she lives, even though I doubt she'll ever come back to combat service. I swear, that woman has taken more near-fatal injuries than all the rest of the Chapter combined, and walked all of them off as if they were nothing. You'd think one of them would kill her these days; but then, I guess Xeyia is as stubborn about dying as she is about everything else.  
  
We also found the Knight, apparently accompanied by some sort of Asura that was presumed dead seasons ago, but somehow managed to appear here out of the blue. Demanded to speak to the Warmaster alone, despite my strong objections to the contrary. With half the camp is disarray, we left the commanding officer alone with a masked asura presumed dead for more than a year; I thought we were smarter than this after Orr. Apparently we're not.  
As it stands, though, the Asura is harmless enough, if annoying. About as bad as Asura can get, actually; to the point I've nicknamed them "General" for all their posturing. I remain patently unimpressed on that regard; loud and obnoxious Asura are easy to come by and difficult to get rid off. Regrettably. Still, I might as well treat them with some courtesy for the sake of dignity, rather than letting some little brainy-skritt derivative get to me.  
  
In happier news, it seems Ema and Darksbane have not sat still, and the girl is with child. Always a little awkward to have that occur in the middle of a warzone, but a child is always a happy gift to the world, and I cannot imagine a more gentle woman to take of another being than Ema. It is unfortunate that we will have to miss her from the war effort, but that's the way it is. We'll have to fight doubly as hard, to make sure the little one has a world free of dragons to grow up in, and a bright future ahead. If anything, she's already used to carrying a heavy load and sleeping poorly, so it will be easier. Besides, she's got good hips for a human. Spirits willing it will be an easy birth. But that's in nine moons; they have time.  
  
Aside from that, Freyj is somewhat restless, occupied with her work, and annoyed about us stomping around with little regard to where we go. She's trying her best to be amicable, though, even though her biting directness sometimes worries me. When Athy came up, distressed about the entire situation with Xeyia, Freyj actually punched her when the lass asked her to "hit me". Not entirely sure she's supposed to do that.  
Sinclair's brother has been telling everyone how Freyj saved his life, too, though she herself doesn't seem particularly boastful about the deed. I asked her about it, and she said she didn't want to celebrate the deed that lost her Grace; or at least until she was again certain if she was alive or not.  
I wasn't sure how much Freyj felt for the lass, but I feel guilty for letting the girl go when we had her in the Brink. If she'd stayed with us, Freyj would've found who she was looking for too.  
I don't know.  
  
Three more days until it is the tenth, and my thirty-fifth year on this world. Might as well be my one-hundred and thirty-fifth. I've never felt as old as I did today, telling a young woman how to raise a child, and hearing a man tell about the deeds of my own. At this rate, I'll have to ask if there's a rank for Chapter Elder, and I'll be teaching them all how to tie nappies.

# 8th of Zephyr, 1329

The golden city still stands, we her proud garrison. Hard work today, which left most of us tired and exhausted. We moved north, back towards the Skritt living in the destroyed ship, in search of remnants of Talon Chapter. We found them, but not without some difficulty. First we ran into some Mordrem creature that used shielding magic to turn our blows away when we struck him, while other smaller ones rushed us with some sort of misshapen growth. It looked like we were going to get overrun, but then we noticed that the growths popped with some force. I guess they're some sort of primitive explosive. Athy figured out we might as well use it against them, and a few well-aimed pods staggered and disoriented the shield-caster enough for Force, Darksbane and I to rush him and pound him into paste. Didn't stop there, we had to work with the Skritt, trying to find back a mirror piece we needed to fix the beacon pylon out the western gate. We managed to repulse the Mordrem trying to get to it, after which the Warmaster was able to extract some more information from them. We ended up splitting Blade up into task teams, with us heading north through a narrow passage into a deeper cave. The Warmaster got bit by some vampire creature the size of a small hound, too, though she seemed fine at first.  
  
We found Talon, inside the cave, butchered. Seemed like they tried to make a last stand, and got cornered by an overwhelming force. Ripped them apart. We were in the cave when the Warmaster collapsed, bloodloss. Thankfully, we didn't lose control, and managed to organise oursevles quickly. Served us that all of us were veterans, apart from the Sylvari, Dieson. Mire and Force are able to deal with this sort of thing. I decided to carry the warmaster back to the pylon, leaving Force and Mire to quickly recover the tags and accomplish the mission we were set out to do. Dieson, the Sylvari that posed as a Priory member earlier, proved invaluable, cutting a swathe through the wildlife for me back to the exit of the canyon. Unfortunately, the Moredrem were smarter, and trapped us inside with a vine wall. We had little choice but to double back and risk descending down a cliff-side by rope, together with Mire and Force. We got down without too much hassle, me carrying the ma'am over my shoulders on the way down; and Mire with the tags of her dead comrades in her pocket. We had hoped to find them alive, but it was the best we could do. Mire also made sure their bodies were burned, I think.  
  
Anyway, we managed to link up again with the rest of Blade, now commanded by Marcus. Seems Athy also staggered, hearing the Dragon's screech just then. Left us with two people to carry the warmaster on a stretcher, one to support Athy, and two down, leaving only a handful of us ready to fight. Had to punch through a number of engagements, with Force and I fighting a hard rearguard, making sure we all got away clean. Seemed the Mordrem tried to spring a trap on us, but we evaded them at first, and fought our way through them, at the end. Eventually, we marched back into Tarir, mission accomplished, with only lightly wounded to our name. Marcus says the warmaster will be fine after some rest, and Athy was already talking and on her feet by the time I went to rest. Work well done, even though I'm sorry to say Talon is another Chapter for the black book of the dead. I hope Mire takes it well.  
  
As for the rest of the day, well... Tarir stands like it apparently has always stood. Freyj still wanders around our camp, talking occasionally, though she seems a little preoccupied. We'll see what the next day brings.

# 9th of Zephyr, 1329

After all the relative hustle of yesterday, it seems we've decided to count our losses, and shelter within the walls of Tarir. The Warmaster was awake, but not in a state to field the Chapter to battle, which suits most of us fine. It's easy to forget where we actually are over here in Tarir. Xeyia's awake, though i'm not sure if that's good or bad.  
  
Aside from that, I crossed into the next year counted on my own calendar. Freyj remembered, and she came to see me when she came back from her business around the city today. She was tired, but I appreciate the token. That's the extent of it, though.  
  
Tarir itself just... stands. The gilded walls are encroached on by moss and thick green growths all around us, but most of the city itself stands with surprisingly little damage. Freyj's been making progress on her work, along with the Priory members, in deciphering the Exalted tablets, as she calls them, found around the city. From what I can tell, it speaks of an entity called Gloust, and the purpose of this entire structure. Perhaps we will know more before we leave. I don't know what to expect here anymore. Tarir seems a haven, but the Mordrem stalk outside the east and north gates, and west as well. We haven't ventured south yet, but I doubt we will get far before we encounter anything else. If anything it feels like Tarir is besieged by an enemy that might not know where it is, exactly. I doubt that once we leave here we'll have to fortune to find shelter again, and the war might become a lot harder again. It seems that luck favoured us by giving us the ruins and remains of the Exalted and whatever came before even them. They served the Pact well, and sheltered us when we could have been broken.  
I hope we are not relying on luck to carry us all the way to the Dragon's lair.

# 10th of Zephyr, 1329

Quiet day again, just some training exercises with the guardians. Kath suggested I attend, so I did. Felt like the idiot of the bunch. When they had to do some sort of shield spell called "Aegis", I didn't even come close. Kath tried sending a wrath ball at me anyway, and I tried to smack it away when I couldn't summon the damn thing. Thing stung, hurt my hand a fair bit.  
  
Also spoke to Roeland; he was admiring the stained glass; spoke about wanting to become a glass-maker. Seems he'll never get to do that, now he's in a warband. I wasn't sure if he lamented that or not. I have to say, of all of us, it is Roeland who certainly has gotten furthest from the craven he was not a year ago. I'd be proud, but it is all his own accomplishment, and I don't feel like I merit the credit.  
  
I ran into Freyja talking to some white-haired Priory member who seems to have been stuck here a while. Nothing of note, except that she's apparently been eating fruits and vegetables from the jungle itself. I've asked her to show me a number of these, as it would be invaluable if I know what was safe to eat and what not. If anything, we could improve the forage rations to include more than just meat and the very small number of roots and tubers we know are clean. I'll have to see if I can't get them to come along into the undergrowth after regular duties, so she can point them out.  
  
Freyj's also done working with the Priory about the tablet transcriptions she's been talking about. Apparently scholars and Priory folks throughout the city have finally managed to piece it together coherently, and the content is staggering. Seems this place was built to stop some sort of magical collapse, with the dragons devouring energy, or such. They're related to Glint or "Gloust", or at least in the same sense that the Zephyrites used to be. Freyja seems convinced of something big nearing that will have an impact on the war on the dragons as a whole, and may shift the fortunes of all living beings that oppose them. I only made sense of half of it, truth be told, but I've rarely seen her as excited as she was. She also said that Dustbowl is likely one of the Exalted's old dwellings, or some creatures called the Forgotten and their servants, at least. It seems to make sense, I'll give her that, for the first time since we reached the Falls. More, she's fairly certain there's another abandoned city somewhere, possibly even deeper below Tarir than the caldera we are in now. I'm starting to think we are in the skin of a dead vulcano myself, which the Exalted built out into a city, using the natural walls to hide themselves.  
  
Regardless. The golden shine of everything here is becoming slightly unnerving. The constant glare of light reflecting off the surfaces makes me feel like I'm always blinded. Finding a bit of shadow behind pillars or inside alcoves helps, though it is still hot. At least there is plenty of water to keep cool.

# 11th of Zephyr, 1329

A quiet day in the golden city, marked by the arrival and departure of a chopper; extraction for Xeyia and Ema back to the Dustbowl, the first step on the way back home. They both have a long journey ahead of them; Xeyia the long and painful recovery, and Ema the discovery of something that will likely change her forever. She will be a mother soon, and bring forth something beautiful. I hope we can do what we can to provide a safer world for her and Elamros' child, so it will not have to know war when it grows up. Perhaps, one day, their son or daughter will claim a legend for themselves greater than any of us, but let us hope that will be when the dragons are but memories and the cornerstones of our own great epics.  
  
I hope they know, like I do now, the pride of seeing their flesh and blood stand besides them, performing great deeds worthy of song and tale. It remains strange to see my own Freyja stride with purpose through the gilded halls, carrying her sword like a true warrior. It feels both like it was yesterday, and ages ago at the time, when she was put the length of my forearm, swaddled in the skin of a buck hare, that I carried her for the first time. I wept with wonder; even the death of her mother could not break the joy I felt for holding my own daughter in my hands. For everything we have gone through, for everything I did right and for everything I did wrong, this is something the dragons will never take from me. And it a memory I will cherish until the day they turn me into ash, and commend my soul to the Mists.  
  
Now I think of it, I think Mithra made me an odd-looking little sculpture out of the piece of metal I was going to discard from the auxiliary engine block. It would be a lie to say it is well-crafted at all; even a novice metalsmith would scoff and throw it back into the furnace, but it somehow touched me simply by the virtue of the gesture and the intention. I think it depicts me warding Freyja off from some danger. As with all things, I am divided if I should keep it as it is, as a memory that the true gift of giving is the deed, not the gift itself, or if I should complete what the flower attempted myself. It might never be pretty, but it will always be beautiful.  
  
I think I see some people down below buzzing about with an Exalted. The golden-folk have not been exceptionally talkative, to tell the truth, but when they do, they are usually helpful. For the most part, they seem content to let us be if we ignore them and respect their sanctuary.

# 12th of Zephyr, 1329

Another long day, with a lot of things to recount. I'll start from the beginning, I guess, and give my report for the day.  
  
Scouts were sent out earlier, with another exploration task due south, before the remainder of the Chapter headed north again, with the intention of wheeling west to check on the respective watch pylons, and combat the encroaching Mordrem. So we did, patrolling between the river-bed, until our route was suddenly caught off by vines, and we found ourselves trapped. Thankfully, the Warmaster managed to maneuver us a fair bit; we had to rappel down a cliffside and cross a fast-slowing, if undeep, stream. We almost got lost, but then I suggested following the stream might lead us to Eastwatch, as the water from the waterworks must be coming from somewhere. So we did, encountering a number of unpleasant creatures, including something horribly spindly with razor-teeth that looked like some had crossbred a raptor with an especially nasty saurian, and a huge rotund beast with pointed scales that menace around its head. Apparently it can shoot them out in self-defense too, though we were lucky to avoid that. Regardless, we reached Eastwatch after some measure of time, eventually returning to our campsite.  
  
Scouts had already returned, apparently, with news about a new Blighted Tree somewhere due south which engineering will need to torch one of these days. Seems that's where all the local Mordrem seem to be coming from. Not only that, but the scouts picked up a hanfdul of Talon Chapter survivors, against all odds, as well as a number of people from Freyja's Priory group, including Grace. She's badly wounded, and Freyj is refusing to leave her side, so much that I found her slumped asleep next to the girl earlier this evening. I'm happy to know she is alive, but her wounds are bad, and I fear for the girl's mental health when should she wake. They were apparently held in Mordrem captivity for some time. Regardless, through Freyja, the lass is kin. Spirits guide her to better health; she is strong to have survived at all.  
Should never have let her run off like she did; Freyj'll be angry about that, I'm sure. She didn't want to speak to me at all today.  
  
Also amongst those new in camp, one certain Slayer Bradain, marked with a number of scars on his face.  
No idea how he got here, but he says that the spooks have allowed him to wash away a number of sins for the sake of allowing him to fight the dragon. I was surprised, if anything, though I am unsure to claim it was pleasantly or not. At best, the spooks give me mixed feelings. I suppose it was good to see that he was alive and well, in a sense. Hah. "Bradain". Seems he's got his eyes and ears about, though; the dragon is south. Much, much more south, across a region known as the Tangled Depths. Knowing them, the name is probably unerringly apt, and moving troops through it it will be like crossing the Desolation. What's even worse, there are apparently karka-like bugs that spray acid, fly and do all sort of other things which make them generally nightmarish to fight. When I joked that our luck ran out at Tarir, and we'd be in for a rough march once we left, I half-hoped I was wrong. Seems not. We're going to have to fight our way through to the dragon, tooth and nail.  
  
On a final note, I got the Scholar, Lia, to lead us out on a foraging trip to gather some berries; some were rather sweet, others sour. Regardless, we gathered a good collection of the things, and I stored a number of them for later. I also took the time to make notes about the plants on my fieldbook, so I could potentially pick some myself once we move away from Tarir. It should help rations, and provide some much-needed fruit to the soldiers. I can't keep feeding them on tins and meat, they'll develop mouth sores or some such. They're not the best tasting, but grilled, they make up a lot. The Scholar herself thoroughly enjoyed the meal; I have a feeling she's been starving because the supplies here were running low. Regardless, she affixes me with the most radiant smile whenever we speak; probably spent too much times in books and oo-ing over the Exalted, rather than talk to people. At least that's not something we'll have problems with; we're not smart enough to keep ourselves occupied for long, and we'd start talking purely out of boredom.

# 13th of Zephyr, 1329

Duties, more duties. We're in Tarir. I suppose it's worth noting down the overheads again, explain something about the circumstances here. It's fairly quiet in the skies, or at least what little of it we see beneath the enormous trees that dot both Tarir and the land outside. There are clouds, but it hasn't rained yet. I know that it might unleash a torrent as sudden as it is furious, but we've been spared the lethal rainfall of the jungles.  
No wind down here either.  
  
We went our south, this time, headed out to help with the Exalted pylons we see everywhere. Found a tiny Pact camp, and a lot of encroaching Mordrem. Some pretty hectic fighting followed, until one of the Exalted led us into some sort of nest, or animal graveyard. There was a pylon alright, but also two huge flat-heads that were infused with some sort of energy; the same sort we saw on the grey-skinned Itzel fighting alongside the Mordrem. Doesn't bode well. We were in for a hard fight, but we managed to put them down, allowing the Exalted to light up the pylon for what-ever reason. I suspect they're likely doing it to keep the Mordrem from breaching into the golden city.  
  
We were on the way back when I spotted some machinery and metal in the overgrowth we were standing, and spotted a large piece of wreckage nearby. Got permission to pick it clean, which I did; turns out there was another engine case, just sitting there, alongside with a number of hardened supply boxes. Pilfering them cleanly gave me another pair of energy crystals for the Aegis when we return to the Dustbowl. I need Sel to look them over before we get them installed, but it should our immediate engine problem. I hope they haven't beached the vessel when we were away either, or that some idiot fiddled with the wrong bit when we weren't there.  
I should have put up a sign.  
  
Anyway, I'm getting sidetracked. Warmaster sent us to investigate some thick vinewalls that we'd spotted earlier. Trying to find a way around, we came into an opening with a huge and magnificent waterfall overlooking it, that water falling deep down below us. The Warmaster decided to bring us around that way, based on a report from Lance, in the idea that it should lead to Westwatch. We stopped to admire it for a moment, and we spotted both Itzel and the suggestion of a hollow behind the curtain of water, back-lit by what I can only presume is an Itzel torch of some sort. Regardless, we moved away too soon, and made our way back to Westwatch with little issue.  
So aye, aside from it being an unusually long patrol, not much else has happened. Grace's still out cold, though Freyj is in a slightly better mood. Still doesn't leave her side a lot, but that's not unexpected.

[added in the margins]  
  
Swirls of grey and tongues of red  
Never could belie hearts of gold  
Nor the swords they wielded  
  
--  
  
A lone man on a plain  
Looked up and saw the stars  
Never was he more lonely  
  
--  
  
The feather cut a line  
Soft blood welled  
The arrow never missed  
  
--  
  
I can't sleep at night  
The moon shines off gilded tiles  
I write terrible poetry  
  
--  
  
Don't even think the morae are correct.  
Screw the rules, live forever  
Six weeks of latrine duty  
  
--  
  
Poets are shit  
So are my lines  
The previous one had latrines  
  
--  
  
Kristen Kristen Kristen  
Something something your eyes  
And you have a magnificent pair of tits  
(I miss you)  
  
--  
  
At a feast of hundred  
She laughed loudly but once  
None were left but us  
  
--  
  
Kath's indifferent  
Alleshia's lonely  
Vethrir's mad  
  
--  
  
Ashen banners  
Empty words  
The cost of war  
[ink smudge]  
  
--  
  
Tired hands  
Make inky smudges  
I still can't sleep

# 14th of Zephyr, 1329

Seems the operation went off early; we headed to Southwatch, intent on destroying the Blighted Tree the scouts found there. Found significant resistance, but we were able to punch straight trough and butcher the Mordrem. Seems this... "tree" was spread between three pod-clusters, guarded by big and very tough Mordrem husks with bark that turned away a sword with ease. We managed to batter most of it down, and the guardians and others lit up the place with conventional magic and tools. Only figured out some of the pods had people inside it. Disgusting. We managed to cut some open, but only one was alive. Carried him back to Tarir once we were done.  
  
There was also an enormous mordrem beast with two curved blades that stood nearby and mocked us. It didn't come down to fight us, preferring to mock us where we couldn't answer with our blades. Bah, worthless foe, I bet I could take it down on my own, if it came down to it. Anyhow, we destroyed the "tree" and the damned pods, or whatever they were, and marched back. Besides it being the slowest extraction from a combat site in a while, it went smoothly. Felt confused, though. The Exalted are mercurial allies in the field, they speed off into danger, dragging us along with them, and not speaking much. They do seem to have found a way to blast through the vinewalls, though.  
  
In better news, it seems Freyj's Grace has finally awoken. She came to get food for her, so she's eating, at the very least. I suppose that's for the better. Freyj'll look after her, and it's safer here than for many miles in any direction, I'd wager.

# 15th of Zephyr, 1329

Another day in Tarir. It rained, briefly, but not as badly as I expected. Just a very short, faint drizzle that dried was lapped up the by the jungle growth, and evaporated from the floor tiles within minutes, except in a couple of shallow pools. The city glows hot during the day, when the sun reaches down to touch the golden walkways, heating it with its rays as it lingers at its zenith for most of the day, before suddenly falling back down below the jagged skyline drawn by the walls. It is never dark, however, as a thousand lights are reflected endlessly between the struts and passages. If you didn't know any better, you would think you walked among the stars themselves, as if the soul had left the body and reached the fabled Hall of Heroes in the depth of the Mists. It is only the lack of singing and feasting kin that makes me believe it isn't already so.  
  
We went south, today, to avenge some fallen by destroying an Itzel village that had fallen to the Mordrem. We fell upon them like griffon on a snow hare; they didn't realise they were dying before we were already between them, cutting them down like the vermin that they are. Rajani and I took out six of them in short order, skewering and hacking them apart before they knew their doom had arrived. Raj knows how to swing that sword. It didn't take long for us to take what we needed, and destroy the rest. Asides form that, there duties were mild. We came across and killed several of those "Vinetooth", and passed by the wreckage of the ship where Lance picked up some of the stragglers. All in all, a good reaping.  
  
At camp, it was quiet. Rel is still in custody, after going berserk. Not sure what to think of it; an unpredictable and violent Charr is dangerous, especially if they're not very smart either. We don't need folk that charge off or risk injuring others. That's bad soldiering. What else... Roeland tripped and squished Athelstan, though the latter was knocked out, I doubt he'll suffer any serious injury. At least it wasn't a long fall, and it was Roeland, not Force. Getting smacked down by a Charr still can't have been very high on his wishlist.  
Raj forgot to make food when I asked her, which annoyed me a little; thankfully, we rectified that quickly and easily, before any of us went hungry. That's something, at least.  
  
I also spoke with Mithy; getting a little worried. She doesn't seem entirely certain about being strong enough to keep fighting, but she insists on doing it anyway. I'm afraid she'll push herself to hard, and go down the slippery slope. If the Dragon finds a crack, he'll work it until he's inside, robbing you of your sanity. Like what happened to Vanholm, but so much worse because she's a Sylvari. I'd almost want to send her back to Resolve or the Grove until this is all over, but then she's got as much right to fight the dragons as any of us, if not more. It'd feel unfair. Still, doesn't stop me from worrying about it. I'll just have to keep an eye.  
  
I spent some time talking to Kraxxi before I went to bed; poking around my old carvings from Orr and the dragonbone carving I made. She said I needed to be more careful, because they're sort of magical artefacts, and could be corrupting. I don't think I've got a dragon in my head right now, so I think I'm alright. Still, I'll need to talk to Freyja about it, she might help. Her, or maybe Dannoel or the pale-skinned Scholar that I've seen around. I'd hate to bring back tainted gifts for Kristen.  
Talking about her with Kraxxi made me think, too. I hope I don't come back to find her run off with another. I'd be angry, I think, though I wouldn't blame her. I doubt she's been getting my letters, with all that's been going on; she might just think I'm dead. Well. I suppose it'll be a surprise for either or both of us when I return home, at last. If she isn't off hunting, I might need to track her down first!  
I'm getting side-tracked by my huntress.  
  
Ah yes, Kraxxi; she also said that I'm no-longer radiating from that time I got zapped by the ley-line in Lion's Arch. That's a big plus. She did remark that it might have been what's causing the magical fire I've been using while fighting; she'd need me to come down to Rata Sum and her krewe to know for sure, though. Maybe on leave, if there's time. I could bring Kristen; go hunt in Metrica, though I'm not sure I'll stomach much jungle after this is over. I'm writing about Kristen again, spirits bless her fair hair and strong arms.  
  
On another note, Kraxxi's been refining the drone things; the one's she's made based on me, and testing them. Seems they act a bit like small shield-casters. There was a lot of jumble, but I think it comes down to having a small golem that tries to actively intercept projectiles once it is turned on. Not a lot of battery life in them, but extremely handy in a pinch. She's offered to teach me how to handle them, though I don't know if it's something I should do. I already carry my own shield, after all. I guess we'll see what happens, eh? Golemancer Tzahr sounds preposterous.  
Oh, also "tzahrgantuan" can become a real word if I use it often enough. The issue is, I can't think of a lot of things I want to describe like that.  
  
Maybe Tarir itself can be tzahrgantuan. Still don't know why it's here, though. An Exalted came by to thank us for what we've been doing, and we asked it a couple of questions. Didn't answer many, or at least, in a way that isn't cryptic. I asked it directly why they built Tarir; it's an empty city; tzahrgantuan, gilded, but empty. If there was a greater or more steady supply of food, Tarir could be used to house an army of thousands, if not more. Half of the Reach could live within these walls, and each person would have room a plenty for themselves.  
I don't know. The Exalted claimed it was all for "Glint's Legacy", and it seems large enough to house a dragon; but Glint died, far, far to the east of here. I know the songs of Gleam, Glint's ancient hatchling, but I doubt very much they are anything but myths and tales. Freyj believes, though. She doesn't know in what, but she believes Tarir serves a purpose it has yet to fulfill, and it will be used to sunder the dragons. It has to do with ancient peoples, from the last rise of the dragons, leaving their mark on the world to ensure its passing.  
I hope she's right; I hope we can end this war, so all the young people that are dying outside these golden walls can go home. I know I will see all of the fallen in the Mists, but I am getting afraid it is getting crowded in the afterlife.  
  
Pessimistic, perhaps.  
Spirits, I wish Kristen was here. Freyj's still up in medical with her Grace, guarding her like an angry minotaur protects her wounded young, so she's not much talk. Still, it's good knowing she's here, in a way, even when the Chapter inevitably moves off again. At least, that way I will know that I am ahead, and there are others coming behind me that will make sure she'll remain somewhat safe. And even if she's not safe, I don't doubt she'd hack her way through anything the jungle can throw at her. It was the uncertainty that killed me.  
  
But now it's getting late, and I must get my rest.

# 16th of Zephyr, 1329

The day passed in rest. Tarir is still here, filled with few people, and many secrets. Not much has happened, though. I fixed up Alessa's armour earlier, but that was about it. We spent some time standing around, talking, with various people making fools of themselves but that's it. I suppose I'll keep it at that, and take my rest.  
  
[break in page]  
  
Freyj woke me earlier, something about the Sylvari acting weird. I went down, looked normal enough. Athy was alright, holding Mithra, who had been crying. Probably still the doubt gnawing at her. I wish I could do more than just offer words. Seems Freyj was right, though, Cheery seemed very angry again, like she was in Resolve. I tried to tell her about Vanholm, but... I don't think she understood. I tried to explain to her that we'd be there for her until the very end, and only do something when we were absolutely sure that all else was lost. But she only heard the part how we took him away, or I wanted to slay him to keep his memory from being soiled by the corruption too. I wish she'd understand that this hurts us just as much as it hurts them; they are our kin and comrades just as much as any other, and we've been enduring corruption since the rise of the dragon in the north. It hurts, when kin and friends turn to Dragon, and you are powerless to stop them. Vanholm fell. It is not different. There is nothing we can do but trust eachother; but when someone falls to our enemies, we end it quick, for their sake and ours. There is nothing but honour in that idea. In that sense, Mithy is braver in her youth by accepting this than Cheery ever will be in all her wisdom.  
It is selfish of her to think they are special in this, and weak that she allows her griefs and pains to tear her apart, and drive her into madness. I thought her stronger than that.  
  
There was doubt, if I should alert command or even Marcus about what was going on. It would feel like betraying them, against everything I claim to be, but I know it is my duty to be vigilant for exactly things like this. My heart says that they are strong, and won't turn against us as the others have, but my mind can't help but seeing the signs of them weakening. Cheery is angry, Mithra is afraid and Athy is stuck between them. I spoke with Kraxxi about it, and bless her Asuran head, she spook some sense. She said almost exactly what I wrote down almost a year ago, in Orr, when everything seemed so bleak. I should let this crash over me; doubt is as much a weapon of the dragon as his minions are. If I start doubting our Sylvari, the Dragon will have won a victory over me, from whence I will never recover. We must all be strong for this war to be won.  
  
Spirits. I hate the dragons, with every fiber of my being. I hope we destroy them utterly.

# 17th of Zephyr, 1329

Tarir still stands, and we're still in it. Weather's still the same overhead, hot during the day, and surprisingly chilly in the evening, though not enough to stop me from sweating. I'm still wondering it the rains will come, or if they are seasonal. I can only imagine Tarir in pouring rain; I wonder if the waterworks would run more furiously then? Maybe the lower courtyards fill with water, like lakes, before it slowly seeps away into the earth.  
  
Today was quiet, again. There was some talk with Eyepatch, Saint Clair's brother and Drakemoor, but that was the gist of it. Nothing else really stood out, truth be told, though I did manage to get some apples for Mithra. Seems Dannoel has a magic bag that spits out fruit. Damned handy, that, wish we had something of the kind. It'd help with the forage; solve all manner of supply issues.  
Anyway. We'll see what the morrow brings.

# 18th of Zephyr, 1329

Last day in Tarir, the order came through for us to pull out, back to the Dustbowl for rest, recovery and as far as I'm concerned, repairs. Lots and lots of repairs. I'm surprised we didn't push in further, it doesn't feel like we've made a lot of ground, but then we've been sat in Tarir for most of this stint. I guess our operations around the gilded city have paved the way for fresh troops that can move in and make it into a proper staging area. Anyway, guess that's a period of boots up for us, before we're going into that Tangled Depths mess Celdric said is waiting for us ahead. Pity, I was getting used to flowing water and a scenic view.  
  
Freyj and her lot are staying here, of course, for however long it takes them to crack open the remaining secrets. She seemed both happy and annoyed that we were leaving; I suspect she'll miss the food. On that matter, I went out foraging with Drakemoor, Eyepatch and Lorma, and we got enough to set us up for another while. So much, in fact, I might have to leave a good bit behind, if we're moving camp. Can't carry all of it. Also, eggs! Lorma, wonderful shadow cat that she is, nabbed four Saurian eggs the size of my head right from under a couple of shovel-faces. That'll means I can make actual pastry dough! I might actually just stir up a good breakfast; I remember the Warmaster say she could use a good fry up, and the Freyj'll die for a couple of good greasy pastries. I can chop up some of the boar that'll spoil faster, open a tin of peas... Aye, I'll do that. Give them a full stomach as we say goodbye to Tarir.  
I'll miss the lass, I think, but knowing she's in Tarir is good. She might be out in the Falls much longer than I am anyway; Tarir will be the crown jewel of the Priory's many finds. I guess Freyj's got her own part to write in that history.  
  
As for the morrow, I can't say I've missed the prospect of the Dustbowl, but being out away from the main lines for a while will be good. Might not even have been necessary; many of us have rested plenty in Tarir, and we're in good shape. Still. The Chapter itself might need it more; I doubt we've been in any direct command with Vigil reinforcements from central Tyria for a while, all we see are remnants. It might also be good for Mithy and Cheery, now I think of it, they both seem to start to bend a little under the dragon's pressure.  
That, and it means I can work on repairing the Aegis with the asuran power crystals we found. I'll need to get Sel into the engine compartment first thing, and then we can finally move on to external repairs, if other work crews haven't arrived by now.  
  
Spirits, maybe I'll even get a letter through to Kristen, let her now I'm not dead, and she doesn't have to start looking for a new mate. Not yet, anyway.  
  
Aside from all of that... today was good. I spoke with Raj, Force, Eyepatch (he still hates "lad"), the lot. Good people, all of them. It's nice to feel at home at the enemy's doorstep.

[margin]  
Lorma was in a better mood. Said more today than all days prior.  
  
Cheery sad, pressure. Need to be nicer.  
  
Drakemoor and Layfon? He needs a bigger gun.  
  
Realised Force and I been through a fair bit. Solid.  
  
No norn! Just me these days. Miss Sana a bit for talk.  
  
Wonder if I can call Warmaster by name?  
  
Four chicken eggs to a moa, about eight moa eggs to a shovel? One + half dough, one half fried.  
  
Lorma & Kath; no fish. Eye patch; some fruit, ask. Tea!  
Ruthford; greens, doesn't like them. Sana; likes noodles.  
Charr will eat anything that bleeds.  
  
1) Kristen (of course), 2) Astrid "Legs", best when she walks away, 3) Hrist and all her kin, 4) Sana (here be Kathleen, ye be warned), 5) Kay :( , 6) Sjofn, 7) Scout from Storm Chp. w/ fiery hair (never knew her name alas).  
  
Haiva Tzahrsdottir. Kristensdottir? Tzahr Tzahrsson. David Tzahrsson. Kristen Tzahrsdottir. Vanholm Tzahrsson. Burunk Tzahrsson. Crag Tzahrsson?  
  
[poorly drawn butterfly, followed by a cartoon drawing of a butt]  
I can't draw flower-bugs, but I drew Force instead.  
  
I should name my sword. Something smart, yet fierce, but also funny...  
"Overthinker".  
  
[Another drawing of a butt, but more refined]  
Kristen, I'm drawing asses in my fieldbook, because I really miss you(rs).  
  
I need to marry this woman, she's driving me mad, and she isn't even here.

# 19th of Zephyr, 1329

We're back at the Dustbowl, said goodbye to Tarir for now, and onto a period of rest. I don't know when we're going back into the fray, but the Warmaster said we're looking at retraining and exercise; so it's going to be at least a couple of days, likely a lot more. I said my goodbyes to Freyj already, as well as her folk. The Priory group is staying behind, working on unearthing the rest of Tarir. Freyj seemed mostly preoccupied fuzzing over her wounded comrades, though. At least I know she'll be somewhat safe as long as Tarir stands.  
  
On a related note, Dannoel, Saint Clair's brother, gave me his funny fruit bag. Didn't question it too much, truth be told, with all the magic coming out of the Priory these days, but simply used it to pull out half a dozen or so apples I chopped up into the evening mess. It was only after, when I showed the thing to Lyralii, that she started to remark how it might be potentially hazardous. I'm not so sure, Freyj's apparently been eating from these for near-on half a year, but the magical disruption that makes this possible is so odd it might be dangerous. Lyralii was in quite a panic; I've sent a letter to Krax about passing it on to her Aetheromancer just in case. I'd hate if everyone ended up filled with illict magical radiation of some sort, like Krax explained after I got zapped by that ley-line in Lion's Arch. Regardless, I've tied the magic bag shut, and stuffed it down the bottom of my pack until then.  
I just hope Freyj's alright. Knowing her, she's been stuffing her face with the things for a while.  
  
We also let Rel out of his confinement for a while; he seemed to be doing alright, truth be told, until we found him KO'd next to a tree, after the evening mess. I don't know what happened, but it looked for all intents and purposes like he tried to fight a tree or something. I'm not sure why, or even how. We dragged him off to medical, and we'll likely have to keep him under further observation again, for however long. I'm sort of starting to see why he's no longer in the Legions...  
  
What else... Ah, yes; we say Xeyia, who's apparently on her feet, walking around and wearing armour, though she keeps fully covered, and can't be anything but in immense pain as her wounds are healing. Wears a big mask of sorts, obscuring her face like some sort of golem-thing. I'm surprised she's not being invalidated out of service, truth be told. After an injury like that... you deserve to be sent home.  
  
I'm prepping on the morrow for airship repairs; they're keeping guards on station around it now at all times. Sigra's apparently unpacked our repair equipment already, and I'll be able to get to work relatively easily. First thing on the list is replacing the energy crystals and repairing the auxiliary drive. Next, exterior assessments and then it's all routine repair. We've got a lot more spare parts and working materials now, though, so I hope to catch up, or at least bring it further to the point where the few Pact mechanics that seem to drip in can finish the job entirely, and get the ship airborne. I'm claiming a place on the bow for the first flight once it's declared airworthy, though.  
  
So, aye, back in the Dustbowl. It's being used more, now, and nit just by us. There's Pact personnel on site, moving about, and I think I saw remnants of Blade Chapter ambling about nearby. Seems it's been serving as a strongpoint ever since we left it, with more and more supplies and materials coming through to us.  
I need to send Kristen a letter too, the Warmaster remarked about there be the possibility of them even going through all the way to central Tyria this time around.

[margin]  
Grey-furred female charr with black patterns. Shime? Chimay? Doesn't eat nuts or wheat (I think).

# 20th of Zephyr

Still alive! Dustbowl's still the Dustbowl, for what it's worth. Seems Freyj's theory about this being part of the Exalted and their creator's cities seems to hold up, because Mordrem don't seem to have reached us anymore here, even though i heard fighting still goes on in the Brink, not that far from here. Not a lot of other news, though, but that might be mostly because we've just returned from Tarir; predictably, the bulk of the rumours seem to be centered around it. Several are also claiming it doesn't exist; mostly newcomers who've fought in the Brink, but have not yet gone far into the Auric Basin. Can't blame them, it sounds like some sort of fake myth. One or two older Krytans seemed disturbed by the idea of a lost golden city, and kept asking that I was sure it wasn't Mursaat after all.  
  
Spent most of the day on the Aegis, finally repairing that engine. Seems we hit the nail on the head. Once we got those crystals replaced, we were able to trim up power gain neatly, and we could bring on the auxiliary engine. That spare engine block we picked up outside Tarir did wonders for us. We got the ship down to half-lift, and then turned off the main, before we were able to finally patch up the fuel leak. The rest was just patch-jobs on ruptured lining and two main struts. It's going to take a lot of time just to patch up all the metal. Thankfully, Aramis seems to know how to handle a welder, and I might be able to set him to work on helping with non-essential repairs to the deck-plating while the cog-heads and ship-wise start patching up the breaches. I don't know how long we're going to be on station here before we're sent off into the deep end, but once I get a look at the crewman's repair assessment, and compare my own, they might be able to finish the work while we're away, as supplies come in.  
But first, I need to strap a rope to myself and go for an exterior pass. That's going to be rough.  
  
I've sent Kristen a letter, though Raven confound me, I don't know if it'll reach or, or she'll be able to send anything back. I miss talking to my own people on a familiar level, and I keep wishing I'd wake up and find her next to me. Spirits, I know we're not through this war yet, but I'm starting to miss the snows. Perhaps I'll just bring Kristen with me next time. She's small-ish; maybe I can put her in a bag, or carry her around on my back?  
Now that'd be a sight. I'm sure Kristen will protest in a hundred-and-one ways anyway, hah.  
  
What else? Oh, right. We had a medical examination today, which took all evening, as usual. Miremel didn't say anything was out of the ordinary, so I'm assuming I passed and am fit for duty.  
Oh, Alessa needs to pay attention. That quiet Charr I almost cut in two asked her twice about what I suspect is an allergy, and the lass didn't even hear it. turns out that of my kitchen staff, one's forgetful, and one is deaf. I might need to impress on them that what they do when they're in the kitchen it's their job; if they can't do it well, they're not supposed to be in there.  
The food is pretty great, though!

# 21st of Zephyr, 1329

Another day in the Dustbowl, another day for us to get work done before we're being flung back into the frontline. Been a long day, and my stunts from earlier leave me aching a fair bit, but I'll get to that in a bit.  
First off, I found the sneaky Charr in the mess this night, looking for food. Apparently her carry rations didn't suffice, so I made her a sandwhich and noted her allergies down for the future. Could just have asked, I thought someone was trying to steal food for a minute. Anyway, with an intolerance to nuts, it's not surprising; half the carries are trailmix.  
  
Regardless, I went to sleep, and woke up some time later for breakfast anyway. I spent the rest of the morning and early afternoon on the outside of the Aegis, roped to guidance spars, doing external damage assessments. Hard work, I had to move with the sun and stick to the shadow, or I'd have gotten badly sunburned. Getting a sunstroke while clinging to the side of a ship over a good drop isn't a very good idea, after all. I feel the ache a little in my arms, it's been a while since I've had to do this sort of climbing. Still, got a lot of work done, though I've been grossly underestimating the patch work we'll need to do. I swear, it seems like something tried ripping off the port assembly entirely. Worst news is that we'll need to build some scaffolding to service some of those areas. Not enough room to work on the exterior otherwise, and one of those main ailerons needs to come out.  
Better news, that Blade Chapter knight, Steelclaw says he knows his way around the instrumentation. Good! I hope he comes around for the assessment pass on the external assemblies, then, so he knows what he's dealing with.  
  
I cleaned my kit today too, half-expecting a fear check from the supply corps. A bust that, though, we got summoned for a medical demonstration. Apparently, we're getting very basic treatment kits including some basic bandages and other fundamental medical equipment that should hopefully mean we're better able to deal with the immediate realities of suffering wounded, without having to be dragged back to a medical station.  
The demonstration was alright, I got to splint Cheery's leg. It got a bit weird when Marcus cut open his own arm and then had it sutured by Miremel while we were watching. I think some of ours went a little bit yellow. Don't know why though, it's not like we split open and burn things on a near-daily basis out here anyway. If anything, it was more funny than anything else.  
  
Rel was stomping around a bit too, but was obviously acting odd. I'm not sure why he's supposed out and about already, he really should be under observation, or at least treatment, or something. He spoke a bit to Grunt, before he marched off and apparently beat up some crates? I don't know. Odd fellow; I'm starting to understand why some of ours feel a bit strange with him stomping about.  
  
Oh, and I spoke to Legs, for a bit, about Tarir and what I could remember from Blade Chapter out in the Basin. Not part of Lance squad, though, so it was rudimentary at best. Still, some news is better than no news, I suppose? Anyway, the rest of Blade Chapter have been on garrison since we left, and they opened up some passages further north, beyond the big "temple" area we saw last time. I went over for an evening walk, but ended being out for more than two hours, and almost got lost. It's certainly something, out there, like a monastery or something filled with statues. There's a big one of a woman sitting down, not unlike the humans depict their gods. I'm not sure, maybe it's Life or Nature? If anything, there's plenty of green around it, in contrast to the rest of the Dustbowl, which is more or less just dust. The waterfall here is what forms the lake below us, and the rock has lichen and even flowers clinging to it.  
It might be a much more pleasant place, if not for all the sheer drops and narrow stone bridges.  
  
And now I'm exhausted. I might take it easy tomorrow, rest a bit more.

# 22nd of Zephyr, 1329

So, today started well enough, as it goes. We're still in the Dustbowl, weather's calm. I don't think it ever rains out here, truth be told, but at least there's plenty of shade in the rocky nooks and crannies around here. I was tempted to go for another swim, but turned out we didn't get the time for that.  
Spent most of the day going over every inch of the ship's balloon. I promised myself to take it easy, and I did; most of the thing is intact, and will need little repairs. I'm dreading tomorrow, though, there's a lot of work in the external engine components. I hope this Bladeclaw is good for his word, maybe he can live up to his name and scale the exterior with me.  
  
Anyway, today; first off, we had a gear check. A day later than I thought, but I expected it, with the medics and everything. Got lucky about keeping my kit around the corner in the mess hall, I was first in line, and got handled quickly. Even issued me a medical kit, which is always handy. I need to dig around a bit and make some place, though, all the little trophies and gifts are starting to pile up, and I can't bear to leave any of them behind. Kristen'll be showered in gifts when I return, that's for sure.  
Anyway, I passed first, so I served some hard tack with cheese and bits of cured boar to the line, as well as some water. Some people enjoyed it, at least. We got talking too; Eye-patch has this brilliant idea about a cheese-in-a-meat, with ham and cheese inside something like a burger. I suppose it's a bit like a pastry, but with meat instead of bread. I tried it directly after, ground up some of the boar, and filled each patty with a good chunk of cheese and chopped ham from one of the tins. And true enough, it worked like a charm. I'm sure Freyj will love these.  
  
An another, related, note, Sigra is working her brewing kit again, and asked me for a couple of things I can probably miss from the kitchen stock. Says she's working on some sort of elixir of sorts. I don't know, last time the Sylvari pups had some, they went loony on the sugar, but that was the omnomberry stuff. I hope she's not thinking about concocting more of that. Also turns out that Rel's been drinking unrefined juice, which is way more stronger than it is supposed to be. I don't know, but it does sound like the lad has a strong dependency on the stuff, and he needs it to stop himself from 'rampaging'. I suppose if Sigra made a more refined and less powerful cocktail of whatever unrefined stuff he's been swinging, we could wean him off it entirely.  
Still. Weird Charr.  
  
Anyway, when all that was over, the Warmaster called for a few volunteers. Aramis and I showed up, and acted as an honour guard for the retrieval of a civilian from the Brink. Apparently, we called in chopper for it and everything; so we headed over to the old Pact encampment we visited there earlier. Turns out our civvie is none other than Bridgit's sister, Danu. Lass of maybe fourteen moons, more? I can't tell that well on humans, but she's barely more than a child. She's come to claim Bridgit's body, despite the fact that anyone between the here and the Citadel would've been able to tell her we burn our dead. Regardless, we don't have a body, because Bridgit is missing, presumed dead. For some reason, the Warmaster yielded to escorting this human girl to the last place we saw Bridgit, in some faint hope we might still find her.  
It is crude to say, but I sincerely hope Bridgit is not alive; for if she is, she's likely in the hands of the enemy.  
Truthfully, I hope she's dead. Regardless, we now have this girl with us, here in the Dustbowl, and it seems we'll be heading out back to what was the noble's crashsite tomorrow. I just hope the girl doesn't cause a fuss if we don't find anything. I have half a feeling she won't be willing to come back with us, much less go home afterwards.  
  
Anyway. I'm going to sleep; I have to work with Steelclaw tomorrow before probably going out on another venture to the Brink, a place I'd rather not see too often again, if I can help it.

[continuation of entry]  
  
The roaring fire burnt  
Mother gently weeps  
All her sons are ash  
  
I wish I could go home. That everyone could go home. I can't sleep. Things keep walking through the hollow that is my tired mind, leaving bloody tracks that I can't erase. And when I open my eyes, I see the ashes of the dead heaped at my feet. I know it's just sand. I know it's just bloody sand.  
  
I want this war to be over. Not so we can start a new one, but so I can see Roeland became legions-be-damned glassmaker. I want to grow old in a world were my grandchildren do not believe my tales, even though they are all true.

# 23rd of Zephyr

A heavy head and a long day with an unforeseen ending. We're still settled in the Dustbowl, which is still as arid as ever. It is slowly turning into a new Resolve, though, with more and more troops settling in as a forwards operating base; and it, for all intents and purposes, our home away from away. I'm sure we'll wish for the sand. At least we can still see the lonely star, Dwayna's Heart, and we know how far away from home we really are.  
I slept badly, yesterday, even worse than I did in Orr. Seems going without interrupted sleep is harder and harder these days. It's always bad to wake up afraid. I slept sounder in the cold.  
  
Airship repairs for today were... lengthy. I think I spent too much time in the sun, and slipped off because my attention wavered. Spirits thank the rope for being strong and keeping me from plummeting all the way down into the water. I'd have survived, but odds were it'd fractured a bone if I'd landed incorrectly. Anyway, aye, Steelclaw and I went over the repair assessments for the ship's external components and rotors, so he knows how to get to work on the instrumentation. The Charr's knowledge seems rudimentary, but well founded. I guess he's more used to the practical work than the theory. Good, we can use that here. I don't know about the repair term, though. I was optimistic; we'll need a lot of time and materials to repair all of this. I'm going to keep the assessment logs with the crew here, so repair teams that pass through can continue the work whenever we're called back into the fight, or whenever the Pact finds some time actually ship in the raw materials we need to fix it up. I suppose we could go and strip a wreck, but some of these components are too big to carry on foot, and will need to be flown in specifically. I'm just going to hope the Pact flies in a battalion of Asuran peacekeepers. Or better, a squadron of Charr gearheads from Iron Legion.  
Anyway, it's not going to be tomorrow, after today's drip overboard and the damned Wyvern, I'm taking a day off.  
  
Yeah, Wyvern.  
I thought we'd go look for Bridgit's kin's request today, but it seems something with a higher priorty came through. We got called in to reinforce some sort of attacks happening on Pact camp in the Brink, help out a hand and make sure the entire place was being held onto. So, good number of volunteer and we get airlifted. Turns out the camp is that Bogo man's place, near the cave where the airship crashed through the roof. First it was just a bunch of those red-skinned Itzel and Nuhoch. We managed to fight them off pretty handily, I don't think they expected us to reinforce the camp. They're tenacious, though. The big ones don't go down easy. At least they weren't grey-skinned critters, so that's something. Local troops then dragged us up to some sort of ledge when a bloody Wyvern swooped down and started breathing fire. Not a small one either, but a proper monster the size of a small dragon. Hard fight followed, and I can only be happy that I carry around a shield as big as mine is, or I'd have died, for certain. Keeping the blasts of fire at bay would've been hard. Most of us got away battered; the guardians were able to summon spells to hold it all back, but only for so long. Eventually, they succumbed. Eye-patch and Saint Clair were injured, Athel looked shaken and Lorma took a bad fall, too. She was just knocked out at first, with burn wounds, but then the damn critter flung her off the side. Short drop, thankfully, and we carried her back, afterwards.  
  
Still. Wyvern. Fighting that thing up close was terrifying. It had a spiked tail that swept, and it's breath carried fire everywhere, until the ground on which we stood was nothing but a scorched, desolate wasteland. Still, we managed to finally pin it down and deal the killing blow. I'm not sure how much longer we'd have lasted, truth be told. The good thing, I managed to get a trophy; hacked free one of it's curved horns. It's easily the size of my arm, though, and heavy, but a worthy damn trophy if I ever had one. Kristen'll be jealous she wasn't there to slay it with me, my Dragonsbane.  
  
Anyway, once we cleared it, seems we dealt with the issue. Turns out the Wyvern had been going after choppers in the area for a while. Anyway, we extracted with out wounded, and I was then tasked with dragging Lorma all the way up to medical. Bloody cat is pure muscle and scary-stuffs, weighs half a ton. I'd never think she'd move as fast as I've seen her, weighing this much. Regardless, I dragged her up to medical, but by the time I got there I was on the verge of boiling to death. I all but ran back down and just walked into the water in full armour, all the way up to my neck. Spirits, never has that felt any damn better than then. Of course, I had plenty of flash burns and even a couple of painful blisters where the Wyvern's dragon got a bit too close. Liberal application of medical's burn salve eased that a lot, though I don't think I'll sleep well for a few days. I might just spend all of tomorrow in the water instead, and consider a life as a Quaggan.

Spoiler: -and consider life as a Quaggan[Show](javascript:;)

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:p

Don't even ask.

[margin]

# Song of the Dragon's sapling

*Dragon, dragon in a tree*  
*When I'm alone, he sings for me*  
*Are those leaves, or scary scales*  
*Are your claws those of fairy tales?*  
*Dragon, dragon in a tree*  
*They'll fight for us, and set us free*  
*'Till there's nothing left*  
*But me*  
  
I promise.

# 24th of Zephyr, 1329

Dustbowl, hot winds, dry sand and emerald and sapphire waters deep below. Took a day off, as promised, and just relaxed. Spent a good majority of the afternoon near the arena, on that one stretch of beach below the airship. It was needed; never felt so overheated as today, especially after a night of uncomfortable sleep. It's not the first time I've had burns, but I keep forgetting just how much they keep you awake. It's gonna sting with the armour on; sand gets between the padding and the skin, and rubs it rawer than usual. Anyway, yes, the water helped, and I think all of the bear grease washed off my hair, too. Little matter, I had some boar fat left instead, so I used that. Aside that it now smells oddly of bacon, it does the trick.  
  
Oh, the Guild Initiative has apparently brought in the Wyvern for dissection, and are stinking up the old docks with the damned thing's guts and juices. In this heat, exposed like that, it's stinking like you wouldn't believe. I was almost as glad to be out of the stench as I was to be in the water. It's going to last, too. Anyway, I've got my own trophy of the beast. On that, command's sending some our letters home, so I passed along the letter to Kristen I wrote, in the hope she gets it soon. I don't know, I guess we'll know soon enough. Word's that we're likely moving out soon-ish, so that's something. Wonder if were going to hit that "Tangled Depths" place anytime soon. All the stories we heard of Tarir hardly did it justice. I wonder if it'll be the same for this place.  
  
On another note, one of the soldiers, a Krytan recruit, discharged his rather hefty shotgun into the ceiling of Lyralii's depot in an attempt to 'wake her'. We disarmed the man soon enough, and I've tied him up in the mess simply because I don't even know if we have anywhere else to keep him. He seems harmless enough, truth be told, and I've made him somewhat comfortable for sleep. He's right around the corner, so I'm keeping an eye on him. Officers can deal with that.  
Bah. Krytan Drakehunter and a rancher, from the sound of him. Sometimes I wonder why we let them have guns at all!  
  
Anyway. I've powdered along some stronger smelling spices to ward off the damned dead Wyvern smell. Oh, and I prepared and chopped up those mushrooms fellows, once Sigra told me they weren't toxic. They're not half-bad truth be told, a bit like those big white ones you'd find along the forest paths, but with a sharper tang at the back. Anyway, I've set them aside for the mess team to enjoy, so that'll be good.  
Oh, now I think of it, Lyralii's put me aside a cooling crystal thing for my armour. I'll go around and pick it up tomorrow, apparently it's fairly intensive.

# 25th of Zephyr, 1329

We're still in the Dustbowl, clear skies overhead, as usual. It's one of those strange days, when suddenly everything just seems to go a slightly left off the center, leaving me rubbing the sides of my head trying to make sense of it. So, first of all, Layfon got poisoned with a hallucinogen, much in the same way as Rowasent was when he inhaled those spores from the standing mushrooms in the Brink. Odd thing, it's apparently because of the pieces of the mushroom-folk we've been eating. That's odd because neither me nor Boyd got sick off them, which makes me wonder if we even ate the same thing. Regardless, I've sent off samples of the suspect parts of Sigra and Marcus, so they have a look at it. I'm not sure what's going on, truthfully, if they were outright toxic, I'd have noticed it myself, so they're not. Maybe something went wrong overnight? I'll know soon enough I guess. I just hope it doesn't destroy the confidence in the cooking staff; we've been doing well since Orr; this would be the first major incident.  
  
Aghi, the young shaman, has joined up as a reinforcement. Seems he managed to make his way into Crusader before even getting here, hah! Damn kid was still swigging ale last time I saw in Hoelbrak, rather than anything else. Still, it was a good surprise to see a familiar face; pity he missed Freyj and Tarir by only a handful of days. You can bet gold on the fact that Freyj'd have enjoyed seeing an old friend. Used to think that maybe him and Freyj'd hit it off somehow when they both were just bairns, before '25, but I guess that doesn't matter anymore. Looked well; always surprising to see them all grown. I'll be fair, seeing his wave around a staff, all serious, is a bit like when I saw Freyj heft a greatsword and cast a serious spell for the first time; or that time when Hrist turned out to be more than just a little girl. Huh. I wonder how that Thorun lass from Orr is. Almost forgotten she existed for a moment.  
But I'm getting sidetracked.  
  
Oh yes, we ran into a devourer today, which I can only presume is a wild one, wherever it came from. I haven't seen anything alive around here, aside from those damned cave bats, so that was a surprise. It scuttled off into the airship, and half the Chapter set off in pursuit to catch the damned thing. Turns out it was Boyd, newly released from captivity by Ironside, that managed to wrangle and capture it. I was hoping to kill it and boil it inside its shell, like the Charr sometimes do, but Ironside says it's more use as a utility creature. So, we're letting it scuttle around, and we've even got instructions to feed it thoroughly.  
Several people seem to disagree violently on the notion, though it hasn't attacked anyone yet. I can understand their reasoning well enough, devourers aren't exactly hound pups, and some of them have pretty nasty venoms in those tails of theirs. Anyway, I don't mind overly, I'm easily ten times its size and mass. If I can assert my dominance over it early, it'll leave me well enough alone, I figure. Just like a young minotaur bull.  
So, of course, the first thing it does is try and make a nest out of my kit and bedroll, trying to chew through my pack. It only got so far before I discovered it's efforts, but still. I've jammed a length of wood between the carved stone portals and suspended my pack from it on a loop of rope. Unless the devourer learns how to jump, it won't be able to reach.  
Raj almost fed it inside, learning it bad habits, too. I have a feeling that if we're going to tame this critter, it'll get an eclectic education from all of us.  
  
We also hauled some furniture halfway across the entire town for Kath, who has apparently claimed a 'house' near the temple to Nature I mentioned some days ago. We had to carry crates all the way over there, along all the bloody staircases and bridges. I'm thankful for Lyralii's cooling crystal gimmick. I carry it between the two layers of padding on my chest, and it's like having a snowball pressed down there. Anyway, seems the Guild Initiative is shipping in more and more materials, including, apparently, furniture. There's a prospect some of it will end up coming our way, too. I wonder if they'll let me make the mess into a proper drinking hall. We could use some good ale.  
  
So, aye, that was the gist of the day. Mithra was under the weather; probably exhaustion catching up with her and tiring out her mind. Sometimes, it just feels like we sent a child off to war. But if anything, they've got more right to be here, fighting this war, than many of us. She just needed a hug, and be told it was all okay. I almost made her some honey-milk, if not that we lack honey. You can be strong, lass.  
  
Now I'm going to sleep, and hope the devourer doesn't eat my toes or something.

# 26th of Zephyr, 1329

Dustbowl, day of surprises, so far. First off, I woke up without any missing bits here and there, which at least means the devourer understood that this was my perch, and that it needs to scram. Actually, now I think of it, I don't know if its male or female. Which of the two have nesting behaviour? I should probably ask Ironside.  
  
That brings me to the next part; I've been promoted to First Crusader *and* chief engineer, while Ironside keeps his focus on being a knight. Joined up there by Marcus, like Blade lead. We also formalized a number of the "lost and found" folk we've been dragging behind us. Seems Eye-patch and Aramis are with us formally now. Alessa made Crusader grade too, which I guess is something. I heard Xeyia raised a ~~titanic~~ tzahrgantuan fuss over mealtime, and then resigned. I did my best to keep the rest of the boots inside while the officers dealt with it, but... I don't know. We're to treat her as a civilian until she's sent off home. I suppose that with her injury, that might be for the best. She was a good fight, not just always the best soldier. Distinct lack of understanding what morale is. Either way, yes, so that all came sudden. We're also deploying on the morrow, so I've made some preparations for that. The crew from the ship should be able to continue the repair work I've noted down for the *Aegis* while we're away, so that they'll continue making work, even in the absence of the Ashen's engineering corps.  
In other matters, I've resolved to try and remain as much myself as I am, and keep it relaxed with the troops. I'm not sure if I should insist on them calling me sir or anything, yet. Going to hard on it might just make me look like an overeager idiot. I'm positive I've got the respect of at least most of the regulars, so we'll start there. I'll have a chat with Marcus too, if he's indeed Blade lead, see how much he wants me to do, both in and out of the field. Should be a pleasant enough chat.  
  
As for the rest, I've set Sel and Aramis to pack up the engineering supplies. Kraxxi is taking care of some paperwork concerning shipping off the magic bag to her krewe for analysis. Oh, right. I ran into both Krax and Sel's golemites, being prodded by some red-haired Asura; another Golemancer of sorts, as it turns out. Sel's golemite, Rustbucket, apprently was out of order, so I had Kraxxi's one tow it over to the barracks, so Sel can find it when she goes to sleep. It got better when Kraxxi and the red-haired golemancer bumped into eachother and essentially devolved into proving who was the alpha of the two. I managed to trick the other one to 'prove' she can fix the *Aegis* faster than Kraxxi could. So now we have a golemancer intent on winning a wager working on repairing the airship while we're away. I'm sure the ship's boatswain is able to direct her energy towards something productive. And if I come back find it a wrecked hull, I know who to blame.  
  
[break in page]  
  
So, aye, Athy just walked in for a talk, and broke down in tears. I knew Mithra and Cheery were getting shelled by the Dragon in her head; turns out Athy isn't doing much better. She's been chewing it up and keeping it to herself; which only means she hasn't had much people to talk to. I don't know what to do, truthfully, except telling them to hang in there, and keep their mind directed towards slaying the dragon before the castle comes crashing down.  
I don't know.  
  
The one thing I do know is that we'll come down on this damned dragon with the ferocity of all our ancestors combined.

# 27th of Zephyr, 1329 AE

Right, location... unclear. An Order of Whisper's campsite on the edge of the location I know is called the Tangled Depths. Yes, we're there. Weather... difficult to determine through the foliage, but clear. No wind down this low, just a lot of hazy half-lights and shadows. Supply situation, tenacious, but being held intact by the efforts of the spooks, who seem to run access in and out of the area. Of what I managed to catch from command's briefing with what I presume is the senior spook, they're pulling Pact forces through into the heart of the jungle, but the terrain is hindering them. That means we're on the main supply line; this is good because we'll be as well supplied as any other forwards position we'll encounter. And it's bad because that means the main supply line is one Chapter and a group of spooks away from being completely severed. Worse, Blade Chapter has apparently been hitting convoys, and the terrain literally goes underground through a series of tunnels. Oh, and the karka-bugs are apparently pretty much on the dime as far as naming conventions go. They're called Chak. I'm betting the occasional tremors we're feeling aren't good for us either.  
  
There's Mordrem literally on our doorstep, and because Roeland's idea of a perimeter check includes "running out into the open because he spotted a stream", you can be damn sure they know we're here too. They're everywhere, with spotters up in the trees and on ledges, just waiting to pick you off. You can see them, right from where I'm sitting now.  
But I'm skipping ahead through most of the day.  
  
I woke up today, for the first time, as a First Crusader, so I made sure that all my duties were firmly covered, long before anything had a chance to surprise me. All the materiel and equipment of both the cooks and engineering was safely stowed and ready for transport, and I made sure all the troops I ran into were aware of our departure and had their kit packed. I got back a request to look into our gas-mask kit, probably something to do with the mushroom spores. It's a piece of equipment that could use an overhaul, I think, keep us safe and sound from poison. I got an idea, but I don't think I'm in a position to work them out into practical applications just yet. I'll need to talk to Ironside, and take one of the devices apart. Oh, on a related note, Sigra's analysis came back in; it was probably spores that weren't correctly removed during preparation that caused acute allergic reactions. I'll need to be more careful if we're bringing that back into the menu cycle. Also something about acid in the red ones. I'm glad I didn't prepare those, that'd have burned a hole in someone.  
  
Mentioning holes, it seems the Chapter is steadily losing people, and not to attrition, but to exhaustion and stress. Force was recalled, Darksbane has gone home, and bloody Ruthford. Left me a note in my back. Ever since Monty fell ill, he's kept himself hidden. I don't think the entire thing with Cheery and then Monty did him any good. Force leaving has made Roeland sullen, too. I need to make some time, speak to him, and keep him able and ready for war. It might be an idea to assign him Rel as a trainee for the time being, give him something to focus his energies on. That is, when Rel's finally back in fighting shape. I think Marcus is weaning him off of the omnomberry juice.  
  
Anyway, we eventually got airlifted, only for the two transport choppers to get confused. One dropped us too far in, and we had ti push back towards Lance squad before we were able to continue the march south. We passed that Hylek village the Mordrem had destroyed some time back, and continued south. Until we got intercepted by an entire ambush party of spooks. Apparently they've been hunting down rogue elements, and had us pegged down as a potential threat approaching their campsite. The Warmaster talked us through, and we eventually made our way to their campsite, which I described earlier. So yeah, now we're here. The place itself isn't much different from the rest of the jungle, at first glance. You've got your giant trees and sprawling roots, though apparently it becomes incredibly difficult to navigate further through, and you have to press through underground passages and tunnels. Marcus was considering lighting options, so you know you're in for something of a Dwarven dank dark Deldrimor depth passage. I'm pretty happy, though, that getting angry lights me on fire. That means if I get lost and frustrated, I'll be my own torch.  
  
Something else; the spooks seem decent enough, despite their cold welcome. I'll make a note that the chief spook seems to know who Kath was, or at least her family, which is a little odd, but then I hardly know how commonly known Beaumont's name is among the human nobility, and it *is* a spook. They treated our Sylvari well enough, even offering Mithy a chin-up, which is reassuring. That brings me onto the next part; Athy came to find me again, earlier, worried about Cheery. Hardly surprising, truth be told, but worrying nonetheless. I think she's got it down, though; saying Cheery's been closing herself into a shell to shut her off from the outside world. An easy if not healthy way to deal with problems, I suppose. I've got an idea to maybe help Cheery cheer up. Just something she used to do, before Cheery stopped being cheery.  
  
What else? Yes, I've talked to Marcus, as I intended to, see what he wants and expects. Lorma is the SFC, so second squad command we'll remain with her, as expected. He does want me to work on some training in the future, something I'll be happy to oblige him with. Getting them back into fighting order and proper discipline will help. They won't enjoy it, but it'll help.  
Another thing they're not going to enjoy is the entrenchment detail I've been tasked to set to work on shoring up the location's defenses. I've got some rudimentary ideas, but the location is easily enough held. The only problem is that there is no clear escape route should our exit get cut off that wouldn't have us pass by the enemy holding it. So, priority is making it difficult to hold from the outside, but easy from the inside. I'm thinking spike traps.  
  
Also can't forget to issue the scouts their gliders tomorrow; I've had them packed with us specifically because they might prove to be useful. Not sure if they'll work well underground, mind, but it never hurts to come prepared.  
Oh, and Wynn has asked me to give her the opportunity to prove herself worthy of being a Crusader, by giving her easy tasks to complete. I'm not sure I can do that, though. I can give her tasks, yes, delegated from my command, but only in the confidence that she'll bring them to a good end. If she can't, it'll only be dangerous.  
I might just notify the officers directly about her case, and see if they can't put her to work without relying on fishing for favours.  
  
Anyway, I think that's all for today's duties. Guess that leaves a small bit left for the rest of me.  
First of all, I hope Kristen's received my letters. I wish I could write her more often, but it sometimes feel like I'm just sending pieces of paper into an endless void. I know full well that post isn't a high priority, but I miss even a written word from her. I'd like to show her the trophies, and tell her in person about all we've seen so far, boast about the kills we've made, and the enemies we've fought, before hearing her try and match it with an outrageous deed herself. It's been a long time since I've felt the snow on my skin. I remember why I wanted to go back home after Orr, rather than spend another half a year on garrison.  
  
Ah well. We're in this until the end, this time. The Warmaster said so herself, we're not pulling out until this dragon is dead this time. We're committed, ready or not, and maybe we'll write a bit of history.

# 28th of Zephyr, 1329 AE

Still in the spook camp, looking over the few surface trees directly outside. Seems when they called this place the "tangled depths", they weren't joking around. The name makes perfect sense, after today's operation.  
  
We moved in through an underground warren, following a path I suspect was plotted out for us by the spooks deep below the surface. We had to punch through Mordrem first, killing them by the bunch, before we reached a deeper-positioned spook outpost, near a waterfall. I have a suspicion it's the same stream as the one right outside camp, meaning the two spooks camps are only a few hundred meters apart... the largest part of that being a substantial height difference. The caves go deep, though, and I saw what I think must be a vast underground lake at the bottom of the waterfall. The tunnels up to camp are a warren, and its gets much, much worse the deeper you go. Rotten trees, porous stone, root systems and tangles, and even corridors ripped straight through solid rock all wind and twist. Some passages are so dark that that you couldn't see a thing outside the cirlce of light thrown up by our torches. In other places, however, glowing lichen and spores light our way, growing wild in the floor and along the walls.  
So, we passed the spook camp with the waterfall, and headed even deeper, through caves filled with mushroom people, and some grounds taken over by a rather large and ferocious collection of cave trolls, apparently keeping numerous trophies in the forms of skulls and helms. Enough for there to be... hundreds. I don't know how old they were, but I hope by the spirits they're not recent.  
Also found some weird crystals that had some folk interested. Not sure what those are, but the place was strange enough. I hate being underground; I feel overly large, and the room always seems overly small. Bah! I liked it more when I could see the sky, like in the Shiverpeaks.  
  
It got worse, of course, and we had a run in with the damned karka-bugs, the Chak. They didn't seem so bad at first, until one popped a spirit's damned shield spell as if it was nothing. Another spurted out a glob of bright blue goop over Marcus. Thankfully, his armour protected him just fine. There's an entire hive of the damned things down there, huge, with weird deformations in the wall which I think might be egg clutches. There are also bigger ones, like the Karka, but with bodies lower to the ground. They carry great stingers and acid sacks above them, like scorpions. We didn't fight those, but I have a feeling I'll be dealing with them soon enough. We collected a smaller one for transport, but also marked the hive as a potential demolition site, though I wonder if they're not far enough for that to be futile. The site is huge enough to dent our explosives, but distant enough that I don't think they'll be a threat to us. Unless, of course, the hive is what is causing the tremors. Worst case, it's one of several, and they're all interconnected, meaning we'll have to blast them out on by one. We'd need another few airships full of explosives to accomplish that, I'm afraid.  
Kraxxi volunteered to take apart her last golemite, the one I ran into before departure, to make a tremor-detector that could possibly help us at least determine the general direction of the tremors. Not much, but better than nothing at all, I suppose.  
  
Anyway, we returned to the camp easily enough; seems being underground came to Marcus with little issue; if anything, it's improved his sense of direction. There was a slight run in with some very big mushroom folk we apparently agitated, but they didn't last long.  
Mood at camp is alright, we got in a new recruit, called Sacra something. I set Drakemoor and Rajani to help her settle in, though I had ulterior motives to do so. With everything that's been going, especially Force transferring out, Raj and Roeland need something to occupy their minds. I talked to Raj afterwards and I wasn't wrong. I've pushed them to consider picking up the new recruit, also a necromancer and a Charr, as a trainee. Raj is, to be perfectly honest, not the best candidate, and only a very recent Crusader, but I hope they'll learn things both ways. If anything, it'll give Raj something to focus on, and help her fully mature her concepts of soldiering to what they should be as a Crusader.  
I need to do something similar for Roeland, give him something to work with. He's been doing so well, right up until Force absconded. It'd be a shame if all of that went to waste.  
  
On a similar matter, Felix' departure seems to have cracked Cheery, through and through. She spent all day looking at a single feather, which I can only assume is what she's got left of Monty. I know how that feels; I still have the big raven feather Sana dropped once. It has long since stopped being as significant, but it's familiar. I hoped, in vein, that the toffee I made her would cheer her up, even a little; they didn't. At this pace, I'm starting to worry it's becoming more than a personal problem. She's affecting the others, especially the two flowers. If this goes on for much longer, it'll become a morale problem.  
Thankfully, at least she remains competent of her duties; I saw her training Alessa earlier. Rowasent, the little troublemaker, decided to help out by attempting to make Alessa angry, hoping she'd trigger some of the more powerful emotions she needs to fuel her magic. Of course, that was discounting the fact that Alessa, despite her good intentions, is about as thick as a Charr called Dense Rockbrain. So that spluttered out with no effect.  
  
Anyway. I'm making ready for tomorrow, as I'm expecting at least a partial brief on the demolitions mission. In addition, I'm looking out for a report from Sel and from Krax about light-flares and her tremor-sensor respectively. We'll see what they crank out.  
  
I'm mostly happy to be out on my feet, doing work. I've slept better, mostly because I'm more tired. Lyralii's cooling crystal does miracles during idle times, and the tunnels are rough terrain that is tiresome to traverse, nevermind in full armour.  
I spoke with Kraxxi, too, briefly, about how it suddenly seemed that only very few people were left from when we were fighting in Orr. I guess we're the exception. The war strains the minds of others, and wears away the rest. Oddly, that's not a depressing thought. Just makes me happy I'm alive, fighting, waging war. Also reminded me of my priorities. I have some things to do when we get home, I think.  
  
  
74(bis). PM-01, disassembled on my orders and turned into glorified seismograph.

# 29th of Zephyr, 1329 AE

We're still in the spook camp, as usual. Didn't feel like we've mad much progress, but that's because the winding corridors make it hard to follow where you are. It feels we go in, walk for many, many miles, but always resurface in the same places. I know there's supposed to be paths through, but it simply feels we're just going deeper into the world's core, finding creatures in the deep that wouldn't ever see the surface of light.  
The weather is nice enough, though, even though there is still no rain. Perhaps it does rain, but we're so deep in the foliage it never reaches us? What I do know is that there is plenty of flowing water, quick, forceful. There are multiple streams cutting through the forest floor, and running deeper into the earth. It reminds me of some of the streams we have in the foothills. There are shallow caves and passages where skelk and drake nest, and the shaman go to meditate. I suppose the shamans from home would have many things to say about the jungle, and the way it stands tall over us, imposing and terrifying. Everything seems larger here, the roots, the trees, the animals, even the bugs. It's been a while since I've felt small. I can only imagine with the Asura must feel like. I suppose they'd comment that nothing dwarfs their intellect.  
  
Regardless. We went in for another mission into the deeper paths, but we crossed the stream this time. The tunnels all look alike to me, to be frank, but it's important to keep some sense of general direction. We moved steadily down, until we found another one of the blasted Chak hives. Not a small one either, but a huge on, that dropped down below us. There were clusters of big blue-greenish pustules that shimmered with magic. I think they might be eggs, as some of them seemed to have been burst open from within. There was also an exposed threat of raw, shimmering energy running through the entire hive. I heard that one Asura, the bald one I call General, say it's a ley-line. An actual, open ley-line. They don't look like I thought they would, but still. We were ordered to destroy the hive, or at least the section we were in, but didn't get very far. The necromancers decided to try and blight the thing, but I have no idea if that even the slightest effect. In the end, we pulled out and back to the camp, in what I feel was a fruitless mission. These damned karka-bugs are hard to fight, they're many of them, and they also seem to be completely out of way, until we decided to break into their hives. Though, like the karka, they seem to be everywhere once you delve deeper below the surface, and they're spreading. I just hope we're able to circumvent them, and find a clear way to where-ever the Pact is, so we can be there for the final attack.  
  
Not the only venture either, we got mustered up again for a second venture, back down the passage we went in yesterday, on a scientific mission. First of all, Marcus wanted another of the Chak to dissect, so he had us stroll all the way back down the first hive. We looped back and had another run in with the trolls in their cave of death. For vengeance to the fallen there, I cut off an ear from a larger one and ate it, though I did so where no-one could see. It's been a while since I've felt the need to put in practice Hejja's old rites, but this was one. The skulls, bones and the strings of helmets... disgusting creatures. Marcus had Athelstan break off some chunks of crystal for analysis, though not enough to spare Kraxxi a sample, I hear, much to her chagrin.  
Again, we made the walk back without much issue, but it left me weary of tunnels and passages for a while. As I said, they make me feel overly large and cramped, and I keep worrying I'll step off an edge if I don't watch my footing. I've never wished for open skies and the stars to guide us more so than now.  
  
At camp, though, everything seems to be going fine. The spooks come and go, patrolling the access routes, and occasionally running messages between the loosely-linked Pact outposts that dot all the way back to the Silverwastes and Resolve, Raven knows how far east of here. Not a lot of news, though, and what does come through are often repeats, or is long outdated. I keep hearing mention that Eir Stegalkin has indeed died, though no-one is able to confirm it.  
As for us, Roeland fell ill; I think he ate something bad, and he ended up in medical after throwing up violently. He almost marched off into battle with us, if not for Marcus intercepting him prior. I've fed him some prunes and ginger, what little we have left for this sort of operation, on Marcus' request. Hopefully it'll cleanse him a little.  
I also put forwards Wynn's case, as well as my ideas for Raj and Roeland to Ironside. He seemed pretty clear on the matter; I'm only to favour Wynn for the jobs I am sure she can accomplish, and tasking Roeland to Rel is out of the question. Sacra and Raj are fine though; the former was sworn in formally, earlier, so I informed Raj that she's free to commence mentoring the recruit. We'll see how that goes; I'll steer her here and there, if needed.  
  
I also had a talk with both Kath and Athel around the fire; it was good, long time since I've sat down at a campfire in any coherent sort of group, and just talked. We usually keep splitting up in little groups. Now I think of it, I did the same with Zara earlier, speaking a bit of how leave would go. Apparently Pryde's all but disappeared. Pity, that.  
But I'm getting sidetracked; I spoke with Kath and Athel, and that was good. About the war, being remembered, and such. That mirrior she keeps looking at? It's enchanted, apparently, shows you how you wish yourself to be. When Kath looks in it, she sees what she'd be, if she never left home. The life of a noble, a princess, as she puts it, of dressed made of soft cloth. An impossible fantasy, of course, as she admits. She understands that if she had indeed stayed at home for the life she know would have, she'd have been consumed by wanderlust before long. Whatever choice she made, she'd have lost. For what it's worth, I think she did the right thing.  
  
Of course, I also looked into the mirror, out of curiosity, before I knew what it did. It was odd, at first. I was older, much older, with hard lines and wrinkles in the corner of my eyes, my hair matted dark grey and white with age, and scarred, as if I had seen thousands of battles. But I was at rest, peaceful, smiling. Kath or Athel, I can't remember which, remarked it probably meant I wanted to see myself live a long and full life. I responded with something I wrote down before; I want to be able to tell my grandchildren tales they wouldn't believe,n despite all of them being truth. It is oddly peaceful, thinking about that. I wonder if they'll tell the tale of Tzahr Davidsson after I'm dead, hm?  
I might leave these battered little black books behind to my kin for memory. Perhaps, hundreds of years from now, when my my grandchildren's grandchildren think back about the wars of the dragons, they might find these books, and learn some truths from it, too.

# 30th of Zephyr, 1329 AE

Seems we're settling in, at least for the time being, at the spook camp. Figure we don't have a line of advance yet, so we're sitting tight to see where we're supposed to be going. Better to carefully probe, instead of just blundering off, so that's all in order for me.  
As expected, that means a slow day.  
  
Roeland's not getting better, I'm sad to say, he spent the entire day in medical, being ill. I don't know what's going on, but it's not good. I just hope he didn't get poisoned, or-  
Of course, you idiot. He drank water from the stream when we arrived, and immediately started feeling ill, the day after. How could I not have noticed this?! I need to write medical about this, now.  
  
[break in page]  
  
There, that's dealt with. I feel stupid for not making the connection earlier. Hopefully, this'll help, late as it is, to prevent others from going ill. I heard from Saint Clair that Wynn is to undergo another operation on her knee. It had the man worried; it was interesting to see him so... human. I suspect he's a good man, somewhere in there, just shaped too harshly by someone who knew little of soldiering or how to motivate them. A pity, I think, though I suspect he can still be molded, in a way. I hope Wynn's surgery, for whatever reasons, goes well. This is not an easy place to be operated on.  
  
As it stands, we're doing alright. We had a new recruit drop in yesterday evening that managed to finally report in today. A special man, with a rare way of words that could put Athel to shame in more than one way. A Seraph, as I hear it, who decided to make his worth count with us. He seemed to make a point to be obtuse when Eye-patch questioned him, though I found that amusing at best. Guess his curiosity can't be stumped. As it stands, though, Kath had me run him through the basics. I'm a bit worried he's short on actual training, though the Seraph usually provide a solid enough foundation of basic skills. I hope he's a quick learner; we don't have quite as much time to provide formal training. He'll have to earn his spurs on the job, as it were.  
  
I got a letter from Freyj, bless her, dated five days ago. It was a scrambled mess; she does as she always does, and puts her entire train of thought on paper, as well as what she says, like a running conversation only glimpsed from one side. But it had some interesting things it, even though i suspect she underestimates how much I know of magic. It's not much, but I know my tales. She's convinced it's the ley-line that's sparked my ability to conjure up fire, as I do. Something about magic filling the world again, and seeping into the earth itself in the form of the ley-lines.  
Also mentioned a dragon-egg, and getting into a fight with an Exalted, but I'm not sure if I should believe that at face value. If there is indeed a dragon-egg, then... well. She'd be right about it being an event that could change the balance of this war.  
  
No letter from Kristen yet, though I doubt it'll find its way here soon, if she even sent any.

[continuation of entry ]  
  
Bad dream woke me again. It's dark. You know, when we were young, the old warrior's tales always had people dying screaming. You'd think the amount of people and things that I've seen die, the screaming, of all things, would haunt me. It doesn't. Few of them died screaming, really. Many simply died, on the turn of a copper. Others, the worst, gurgled and bubbled their last breaths. Only those truly in agony scream into their deaths. I am happy that my darkest dreams are filled with silence. It will break my mind, but Spirits grant me the strength to fight on, at least they're not screaming.  
  
I don't know what I'm saying, I'm half asleep and afraid of the shifting shadows of the fire.  
Wish we had strong drink. That always helps to quiet the mind. It keeps them all quiet.

# 31st of Zephyr

A bland, uninteresting day. Only thing of note was Thornton being sworn in and sectioned to Blade. Eye-patch enjoys that no-end, obviously. Apparently the flowery speech bothers the man, though Raven'll have to favour me before I know why, exactly. Finds it rude, he says. I don't know, he seems solid enough, when he's not flowering his words. Honestly, it amuses me, though I can see it getting tiresome if he persists.  
  
For the rest... quiet.

# 32nd of Zephyr

Still quiet, with more camp chatter. Topic hovered between several topics, none of which stuck with me overly. Just folk chattering to fill in the space, keep the mind occupied.  
The new Charr, the one I want Raj to work with, turns out to be a bit of an outcast in her own species; raised by renegades and deserters from the Ascalonian wars before the armistice. Mixed pair, too, which I urged her to keep to herself around some of the command team; I'm pretty sure Ironside would blow a gasket. It explains the name; human convention. Mordus was her adopted father. Bit of a background, apparently, did some treasure hunting in her past, and tells a tall tale. Not entirely true, obviously, but amusing enough.  
Mithy's apprently been learning a new spell, too, though spirits alone know what that means these days.  
  
Notice came through command is looking for ways to start damaging those hives. I don't know what think yet, I'll need to send in a reply in the morning. Whatever they want us to achieve, blowing it up with any kind of force would bring the place down on our heads, so that's almost patently out, unless we're desperate. I'm still not sure how or why we're going to blow out the Chak, but I have a feeling we can't do much against them unless we blow out their queen, if they even have one. It seems a bit extreme, but if the Warmaster decides that's where we're going, that's where we're going.  
  
I slept horribly. Tremors kept waking me up, and I forgot to slip on the cooling crystal, so when I did finally get some sleep, I woke up bathed in sweat. Bah.  
We're looking forwards to some more action, though. Everyone is.

# 33rd of Zephyr, 1329

We're still waiting, though it seems the plan that's been brewing over in command is slowly coming together. The scouts went out today, and came back with some much-needed information. I don't envy them, it was a hard operation for them, I heard, with the tunnels funneling them through plenty of enemies. Two important things; first of all, the magical attack our necromancers directed towards the Chak hive seems to only have been superficially effective, and from what they tell me, it's already recovered or soaked up much of what it was supposed to look. That tells us that the Warmaster's plan to use it on the other hive might not suffice; or at least, not for any length of time. Lorma apparently said collapsing the place entirely might be the only way to be sure; I concur heartily, though it is too dangerous for us to attempt; our way out is too distant, and the amount of explosives we'd need to employ would cause a serious tremor that might collapse any number of passages for miles around us. Besides, if we are truly committed to rooting out the Chak, even though they've left us well-enough alone, we'll need to exterminate whatever doubles as their queen. If there are eggs, which I think there are, there's something laying them. We kill that, before we can move on.  
  
Second part of importance is Ogres. There's apparently a good number of them, roughly south-east of us, though we have to go underground to reach them at all. There's two routes, as they've shown on the map; one goes through the eastern tunnel, and is choked to death by Mordrem. We'd have to punch through in force; something we might accomplish, if we want to take that risk. The other passes right next to the Chak hive; the second one we found, and then climbs out to the Orge encampment. Bets are this is our line of advance; or at least, if we're heading towards the Ogres at all. I've fought with Ogres; Burunk and Unger were good... well, Ogres, I suppose. I can only imagine we can ally with them, considering we're likely fighting the same enemies.  
We'll see soon enough.  
  
As for the rest, Kraxxi finished her tremor-detectors, and we took out a detachment for the task of plating a couple. Two of them are set along the route to the first hive, near the second spook camp. For one, we had to be creative, and lower Krax on a rope down to that underground lake I mentioned when we first passed there. We still need to place one, ideally near the second hive. But, given the warmaster's letters these past days, I can only assume we'll strike at it sooner or later. We can find time to plant up that last detector. After that, Kraxxi should have a good eye on trying to figure out what these damned tremors are, and if they're of risk to us.  
I got a nasty acid burn that left me with an ugly blister across my face. Cheery lanced and drained it, though that was painful. Still, it could've been worse. Wouldn't have happened if I had kept my helmet on, rather than my gas-mask, but y'know. At least it doesn't eat into the armour too much. Thank the spirits for carrying as big of a shield as I do. heavy as it is, it's saved me from injury more often than not.  
  
In other news, today marks Freyj's 19th year. Despite everything we did to get over our differences, it is another year where I am not able to hug my daughter in celebration of her newest year. It is the fourth time, ever since she turned fifteen, in early '25. I hope, at least, she find someone to celebrate with in Tarir, while I remain out here. The urge to stand up and go back is strong; they are not that far away, in truth.  
Spirits, next year she'll turn twenty! How the years have gone past. I remember every moment since I first held her; I only regret not being able to see her now, though I am proud of her every feat, like only a father can be.  
Perhaps next year, Freyj. Forgive me.  
  
I wonder what happened to Forgewood's sister. We never did go out, despite the Warmaster's promise.

# 34th of Zephyr

Still in the spook camp, weather was overcast, and I think there must've been some local rainfall not far from here. The stream swelled a little, and I could see the darker clouds mover across the sun when it was still low, and castling long shadows through the trees. At night, Dwayna's Heart shines in the south-east, over distant Arah.  
  
After much deliberation, we did finally strike towards the first hive with the necromancers, in an attempt to clean out the Chak. It was almost too easy, truth be told, only a few of the bigger ones. But this Chapter's fought Karka in Southsun, so these were merely an annoyance, no real challenge. Our mages did their trick, and pulled out. I didn't even see a target to plant an explosive at, so I didn't. No point wasting them. From what the scouts told us, we might have bought ourselves a few days? Maybe less? I don't know. I hope the Warmaster took my advice seriously; if we're going to fight the Chak, we'll have to kill the heart.  
I'm not entirely convinced on the necessity of the extermination, but that's a different matter entirely. At the moment, if command deems it so that we should destroy them, then we will.  
Thankfully, we also managed to plant Kraxxi's fourth and last tremor-reader, so hopefully we'll get some readings in the near future that should help us track down the source of the tremors. Something tells me it's probably the Chak, chewing up the ground from underneath us.  
  
As it stands, we made our way back with little issue, and the rest of the day passed in some quiet. I nicked my thumb while carving a minotaur for Freyj, while talking to Eye-patch. I should've known better than to do two things at once. It's not deep, but I'll feel it every time I hold my pencil to write.  
The wooden carving is getting along, though. I found a piece of beautiful hardwood from one of the trees, the colour of blood, but streaked with lines of iron. No doubt worth a fair bit, I think. I hope Freyj likes it well enough when I see her again. Feels like forever since I've given her a gift; too long, really.  
  
Anyway, I have a feeling we'll be moving tomorrow, all of our plans getting into motion. Let's see what the dawn brings.

# 35th of Zephyr, 1329

Right, position; Ogre encampment somewhat south-east of our previous position, as marked on the scout's map I saw some days ago. Weather here is slightly overcast, though mostly bright. We're further down the supply line than we were in the spook camp, but there's water here, and some wildlife. The Ogres, apparently Pact folk that survived here and set in for the long fight, are many, and have turned it into a rather large and comfortable campsite. There's many of them, too, with their pets in the dozens. It's good to be with them again, people my own size, though they are much, much wider in the shoulders. From what I know, the one that fight on our side have been loyal and zealous; there's few people quite as ferocious as the Ogres. Back in '25, if it wasn't for them, I'd have died in Orr. Spirits bless the memories I have of Burunk and Unger.  
  
But aye, we moved camp, through the southern route Drakemoor and Athy described to me previous. It went smooth enough, punching through the Chak with little effort. There was some concern when we arrived when the sky was all hazy and foggy, but that turned out to be mostly harmless. I do think that's what causing all the oozes you can find around, even though Eye-patch seems to think they come up from the ground. Peculiar, at best.  
That's not the only strange thing, seems the Ogres have been taming Chak; or at least trying to. There was a small pen of the buggers on the eastern side, the size of my pouldron, scuttling about. Apparently, the Ogres have been nicking eggs from the hive, and attempting to tame them. To be honest, if anyone but an Ogre tried to claim he'd tame a Chak, or Bear give me strength, a Karka, I'd laugh. But these folk...  
  
The good things is, plenty of wildlife. Most of it's been claimed by the Orges themselves, though, so we're going to have to be careful. They don't seem to have any interest in picking off any of the sand wurms or oozes, though they hardly make good eating. The Warmaster's given me permission to prepare sand wurm, and provide it under the guise of it being boar, or something else. The meat is perfectly fine, but people have a hard time to overcome their revulsion of the idea they're eating wurms. I can use the blubber to make Charr special, too. As for the oozes... they're pretty difficult. I know that the blue ones are what the Asura use to make their gooey drink, and that the green ones are supposed to be very toxic. I'll have a chat with the long-ears, see if they know anything. Worst case, we'll go with ooze-in-a-bowl. It's edible, but just not very enticing.  
  
Aside from that, we've got the same two access points as the scouts mentioned, both crawling with gribblies. The second Chak hive is close, and Chak occasionally drift up towards us; the other side runs straight under a tzahrgantuan tree that must've stood there for hundreds, if not thousands of years. It's hollow, though I can't tell if it's because of rot, beetles or even if it's just supposed to be this way. There's something beautiful about it, though, like being yourself the size of an insect.  
But I'm getting sidetracked; it's filled to the brim with Mordrem. We punched into it to clean some of them out, and ended up burning a couple of dead Ogres that had wandered off.  
I've been tasked to shore up the approaches from both entries, give our folk some cover while leaving the enemy out in the open. It's something we can do easily enough, I'll just have to put the grunts to work in the morning. They'll hate it, but maybe they'll sleep sounder, after.  
  
As for the rest; camp was mostly busy being set up, folks wandering about, and so on. Many were just tired. Rel, at least, seems to have enjoyed the fact he was allowed to fight with the column, and about the last slabs of cured boar I fried up before they went off. Calas' just... said he was having issues, the dead catching up to his thinking. Never good that. Difficult to sleep, if the dead wander around your head.  
  
Anyway, I'm done for today, I think. I finished Freyj's minotaur, but I think I made it a bit too big. It juts awkwardly in my pack. At this rate, I'll need to find a bigger field kit to carry around. Or take less trophies.  
Hm. But where do I find a bigger pack?

# 36th of Zephyr, 1329

Right, so, I'm near the ship wreck of an airship called the *Lagula*, the one that carried the Ogres here with the Pact. It's not far from the encampment, just up tiered cliff-side. The wreck itself is fairly stable, ground itself up into the floor until it stuck fast. We've been onboard several times, though the deck is horribly, horribly pitched, and it's easy to imagine slipping and sliding down all the way, through the prow and out into the canyon. A chilling thought. You can oversee the camp from inside, though. All of the cannons are missing, as is all the glass, but for a good part, the ship's not doing too bad. Scorched from some nearby Wyvern, but not warped or twisted, meaning it's ideal for us to cut apart. That's why I'm up here with the engineers, Ironside and Rowasent, as well as a norn woman called Soraya that's been stuck with the Ogres since the crash.  
  
Getting up here took a bit of effort; Athel and Row have set up portals on both sides which they can open, so we can flit between at well. Otherwise, we're effectively stuck up here, mind, unless we want to climb. Warmaster sectioned me to Lance, and Ironside took us up. Not much of a hassle. Going back down, though... When we tried to open the portal, Alessa and then Rel found it necessary to leap down a cliffside and seperate themselves from the rest of us. I had to take the long way around to pick them up again and drag them back up, so we could portal out. Second time I've warned Alessa about breaking away for an engagement. If it persists, we'll have to correct it.  
  
Anyway, we were back at camp eventually, with the Ogres, and Mire found me a big, fat river crab, probably from an underground stream. I boiled the critter thoroughly into a nice broth, which made good eating. Then all of the engineers left off to set up the secondary camp, where I am right now. We've got a lot of work to do, and only a handful of days, if I read Ironside right. Which means working in overdrive. I've already notified Lyralii that we could really use some better tools. Cutting through hull-plate is going to be bloody damn hard without a proper cutter. I'm hoping she can get her hands on one of those recovery tools kits the Iron legion carries around on their tanks. That sort of stuff would be perfect, made for this sort of work. I'll set out a work schedule tomorrow, and have the engineers start taking it apart, and have some others start sorting scrap. Warmaster said we'll be sending in a chopper to airlift the rough salvage back into the Dustbowl, which means everything we can get off the *Lagula* will go smack dab right on top of the *Aegis*.  
  
We also brought the survivor I mentioned earlier. She's the one that provided us with the ship's name, and the faith of some of the crew. Turns out the Wyverns started devouring most of the folk. She also said something about being deceived by a Sylvari. Apparently, from what I can gather, the ship was loaded with Ogres because they were heading very deep into the dragon's domain, to a place she called Dragon's Stand, where the dragon himself sleeps. Knowing we're close helps; we've come a long way, much closer to the enemy than we've been in a long time. Who knows, maybe we'll get the warship up and running before we're in the fight. Honour the memory of the *Ramming Speed!*, valiant ship that it was.  
Turns out, she remember a strongbox sitting inside the ship's hull. We recovered it with a little fiddling, and Kraxxi sparked and cracked the lock. Guessing it must've been the captain's stow; it contains all manner of odd Asuran gadgets, as well as a logbook and what Kraxxi claims to be a very advanced power crystal. There's also a sort of device in there with a trigger, but no barrel. It might be some sort of Asuran weapon, but it doesn't look like. Wood, inlaid with metal and copper. We've handed it in to the Quartermasters for safekeeping for now, but it might be valuable.  
  
As for now, I'll start by thinking up some work on the ship. Truthfully, I don't know where to start.

# 37th of Zephyr

Spirits, but I'm tired. We've spent virtually all day cutting apart the *Lagula*, stripping it for essential parts and sectioning off the pieces that we need. We're in dire need of heavy equipment, though. I sent Lyralii a missive; I'll likely get a response back from the low camp first thing in the morning. For now, we went to work with bolt-cutters, wrenches and the lighter tools we have. We stripped the cannon mounts and large parts of the engine, or what was left of it, as well as starting to clear up whatever we could, including a good number of deck plates from the prow and lower decks, revealing the skeleton structure underneath.  
First thing to do tomorrow is to organize the workspace a bit more. We stripped the cannon mounts, we should open up a side panel through the hull at ground level, so we can move all the salvage out from there. We'll need climbing space as well, do I'll lash some rope between the spars where the glass-tiles have shattered away, make an impromptu net.  
  
Just wish it'd all go faster. We've been working all day, and only came away with a handful of the bare, bare essentials we need to restore the *Aegis*. The next few days will be hardest; stripping away actual steel from the structure, without collapsing the thing. I'll have to clearly indicate what's safe and what is not, and hope I don't misjudge it. If I do, well... I hope no-one lingers below it.  
  
As for the day itself... mercifully, small amounts of sparse rain dropped, making the heat less punishing. If the sun starts shining heavily, we'll need longer noon breaks. That ship will become like an oven, and broil us alive otherwise.  
  
I also spoke with Aramis, after. About women, Freyj's mother, Kristen. Spirits, I miss her out here. Talking about it only made me realize how long we've been out here. Going home will be good.

# 38th of Zephyr

Another back-breaking day of salvage on the *Lagula*. I'm sad to say we're not getting specialist equipment to take it apart; or at least, not in any timespan that is of use to us, so we're stuck with our hand-welders. They'll do the job fair enough, but like a Dolyak's gait, they're slow. Still, we cut away a good chunk of the starboard hull, exposing everything to the open air, and the sun's glare. Aramis helped a lot, as did Soraya, but it's still slow. The two flowers popped up top to help too, though I had to relegate Athy to affixing wax seals, hardly the most pressing task. Mithy was able to help a lot, though, she's able to help burning through the hull with some sort of spell she conjured up, which does the same job about as well as a heavy cutter. Means I was able to cut out the mid-ship overhead section on the starboard side almost in its entirety!  
  
Mithy wasn't too... how to put this. She's thinking Athy's creating a distance between them, for whatever reasons. I suspect the dragon isn't helping, but I think Athy's just getting weary of taking care of Mithra through all of this. Like I told her, it's like those times when Freyj was six, and loved nothing more than to pour the fruit sugary fruit fillings I prepared for the sweet pies over the floor outside, and then watch it freeze. At first it was funny, but after a dozen times, it was hard not to get angry at the lass. Doesn't mean I don't love her, though, mind. I guess having to take care of Mithra, and she *is* young still, does strain Athy a bit. They'll be fine, though, I think, once we can finally head home. I think everyone could do with some leave, by now.

# 39th of Zephyr

We're making progress, but it's slow. We'll need to be here another ten - fifteen days to complete this without working our hands into stumps. Maybe seven at the pace I'm trying to push on the folks. That we have no decent heavy-duty tools doesn't help, neither does the fact that Rowasent apparently burnt out the portals top and bottom yesterday. I had to hang out a rope ladder in the evening, or we'd have been stuck up here.  
Spirits alive, but it's a task. Still, we'll get what we can before the order comes to pull out. Another few days of work, at least. I hope it's enough. We've got enough to patch up large parts of what I can remember of *Aegis*' repair logs, so we'll get somewhere. I'll have to keep working the folks raw though, to keep this up. They'll hate it, I'm sure, but that's the job. They can rest when they're dead; we have a job to do.  
  
Spirits. After we were done, when it got too dark to work inside the ship, or the rain made it too slick to continue safely, we sat under the ship's hull, overlooking the camp. It was one of those moments of reflection, talking about what had been, where we've been, and such... it made me feel old again. Mithy was there too, drawn into herself, thinking. We were talking about how she hadn't spoken to Athy yet, because she was afraid what she'd hear. Didn't manage to say much after that, Sel joined us, and it seemed too private to continue out in the open. We spoke about Orr instead, and places we'd never forget. Like the Vigil Keep. Bear's strength, but when you first arrive, it cows you into silence where it stands; and then, slowly, it becomes your home. I wonder if Freyj has the same thing with the Priory halls?  
  
I'm tired; work's wearing me down. Never thought I'd both look forwards to and dread a deployment order in equal measure this much. I want to keep moving, to kill this damned dragon, so i can go home, and feel snow on my skin. But I know I need as much time as I can get to cut up this blasted Ogre wreck, and ship it north for the war effort.  
Bah. I could use a keg of ale.

# 40th of Zephyr

Seems the clock has run out, we're due to move out and the engineering camp we've set up here will be taken down and returned to the main encampment, before we march of eastwards. Recovery crews from the Dustbowl will take over where we left off, if we're lucky, and continue patching up the *Aegis* while we're out in the front. Warmaster offered me to go back with some of the engineers, dedicate the rest of the tour on reassignment. Declined, though I was tempted for a split second. Don't feel like I can, truthfully, not after I've come so far into this jungle, searching for this damned dragon. I owe it to the flowers to be there when we destroy this, and to our honoured fallen. Backing off now... I don't think I could bear not being there for final storm on the dragon's lair. I'd never justify it. The crews in the Dustbowl are able, they can refit the ship without our engineers holding their hands. Besides, someone has to make meals for the boots!  
  
A lot of hard work today; we made a lot of progress, though Kraxxi went down with some sort of migraine, which meant she missed half a day of work. It's frustrating when things are going slower than I'd hoped, especially now I know this is all we were able to get. As I noted before, there's still so much work to be done.  
At least the day ended fair enough; Snowpaw dug up a keg of Bear's Brown she had hidden away from the Ogres! Wishes do come through. Spirits, but it was too long since I tasted good ale. It wasn't as crispy cold as it should be, but I've never tasted anything so delicious as that first gulp of drink, after almost two seasons...  
We talked, as well, about all manner of things and experiences. Curious woman, Snowpaw. Good heart though, honourable, if somewhat fatalistic. For what it's worth, I do hope she survives the war.  
  
As for the remainder... I've got half a kask of good ale left, which I think I'll hand out to the engineers before we hitch camp and are on our way. The way they've been working, they deserve it.  
I wonder if we're going to head into the dragon's lair, tomorrow. Message said "east", but I don't know how far, or where.

# 41st of Zephyr

Location... some old Asuran lab, hidden deep below the ground, gathering from the fact that our Sylvari don't hear the voice all too strongly. We're trapped here, though, between an inert and ancient Asuran portal and a bunch of very angry spooks with guns that seem to be on the wrong side of friendly.  
But I'll recap from the start.  
  
We left the original camp in some sort of order, with our supplies hitched and hauled, and the remains of the *Lagula* nicely marked for the recovery crews. I'd given some instructions to the supply master to direct them when they arrive, so they can continue our work, or at least retrieve the salvage we sent out.  
We departed in good order, marched all the way back to that small stream outside the spook camp where we've sat down previously. Turns out the Ogre camp was essentially a dead end.  
We took a break in what looked like a Nuhoch village set into a large, rotten tree. Big place, very impressive; I wouldn't have been too surprised if it was some sort of holy place, to be honest. Seemed like a good place to camp, really, but there was still a good chunk in the road ahead. Pity, the tree-village seemed interesting.  
  
Regardless, scouts pulled us into some tunnels that they'd apparently been shown by a Nuhoch scout. Real warren; they failed to mention half it passed through a bleeding Chak hive, of course, so we had to fight our way through. A mess, that, though it got so much worse. We pushed through into what seemed like some part of hell; gray and decayed caverns filled with spiders. A small golem was scooting around, but we lost track of it eventually. We pushed deeper into the tunnels, reaching one that rippled and glowed with ley-energy. We halted for a while, until there was a loud boom, and then a figure sprinting past us. The Warmaster urged us forwards, and we did, following. I had a brief glimpse of a massive cavern filled with the crumbling but unmistakable straight and geometric forms of Asuran architecture, before we were in one of their security tunnels, festooned with inert guns and other defensive devices. We rushed through until we reached an enclosed chamber, filled with terminals and other nonesense. Here, the stranger who had lead us, revealed to be none-other that the spirits damned Sanaje Marinsdottir her-bloody-self. She punched in something on a console, and an Asuran gate opened up behind, in an alcove. Meanwhile, the corridor we just were fleeing from filled with an onrushing sea of Chak. From what I can deduce, I think Sana was doing a demolitions mission on the Chak, and we just ended up sitting between her target and exit plan, dragging us along. She urged us through the portal, so we did, and now we're here.  
  
The room's shaped a bit like a short arrow; the tip houses the portal, and then there's a fairly long corridor studded with structural ribs. At the far end, there's a locked gate, and some force fields. Behind those, there's a great big room with what looks like the focal rings of a megalaser pointing at the floor. It looks like a huge cannon standing on the barrel. There's workstations littered around the bottom; we're elevated a good bit above the ground, looking down on it through the force-field. It's supposedly some sort dragon-lab, set up by Asura. It all looks old, though, it could've been here for a while. But that's not the worrying bit; the worrying bit is that it's filled with spooks and a scattering of Priory folk. They're not friendly either. Apparently, they've kicked Sana out for letting us in here, and now locked us in between the portal and that locked gate of theirs. The portal behind us is inert too, though I don't know why. I saw some of our Asura fiddle with it.  
As for Sana, well... her hair's grown. She's apparently a spook too, or at least introduced one of the officers to a Lightbringer. I saw Kath and Alleshia talk to her. I'm mostly angry. Damned woman lied straight to my face in Orr. I'm keeping the temptation to just punch her teeth out bottled up; it's not the place nor the time to deal with that sort of thing. We're trapped, and there's a large bunch of spooks out there that might be deserters for all I know. Warmaster made it clear; they make a move, we take them down like they're enemies. Which, of course, has everyone on edge.  
I'll deal with Sana later, when everything is less pressing. Raven curse her lying tongue. I have no sympathy at all.  
  
As for the rest... I don't know. I don't think I'll sleep well today, or at all.  
This is everything the Pact shouldn't be.

# 42nd of Zephyr

Position; the remains of some underground Asuran ruin, the same one we crossed through yesterday. Our folk for the portal working again, and rather than sticking in that shooting gallery, we moved outside and into the actual remains of what I can only assume was once a city, or a fortress. Certainly, it's defenses and sentries are still operating here and there; gun turrets in shielded bubbles and big sentry golems. Except in places where they've fallen in disrepair, they're still repelling the encroaching Chak. We saw a perimeter system chew through them like they were paper, chattering into life and ripping them apart. The city itself must've been vast, and the remains of it are in sad ruins. I see a lot of broken and crumbling architecture overhead, along with big round lamps that shine with the light of day, and dim in what I can only assume is night time. We've been using that as our clock, or we'd have no idea of the passage of time inside this place.  
There's water close by, what I think is an aquifer, filled with bug cave fish. At least that tells us roughly how deep we are; the pools of water I saw near the waterfalls of the spook camp, when we first arrived here? The water level should be constant between the two. So, aye, we're a good hike down below the surface, by any going rate. No idea where to head next either. We've camped underneath a sheltered arch, roughly in the center of the ruin, which fills a large hollow. Big geometric struts project from the walls at those typical Asuran angles, half-way short of a straight corner. The scale, though. It's like someone put a piece of Rata Sum down here, and then broke it down. I haven't felt this far away from any place I know than I do now; we could be on a different world altogether, and it wouldn't surprise me. No closer to the dragon, though.  
  
As for the rest... well. The mood is difficult to read. I'm still angry, which doesn't help, though I'm working through it. I feel some of the choices that have been made aren't sound, and oddly, I think the Warmaster is inclined to agree with that. Bah.  
  
Kraxxi was in paradise, so to speak, fuzzing over old technology, and a particularly battered old golem she's going to try and hotwire back into life with that Pact golem core we looted off the airship. Also turns out the "welding gun" we found in that crate alongside that core is more akin to some sort of cannon. Naturally, Drakemoor wanted. Again, naturally, I impounded it for the engineers, and stuffed the thing in my pack until further notice. I'll hand it over to the Quartermaster at a later point, see what they do with it. Probably sell it, if I know them. Anyway, yes, Kraxxi and her new golem-project. She was chattering on and on about a number of things, most of which seemed interesting enough, so I requested she put her ideas on paper, and file it to me. If we're in luck, she can use whatever that thing carries like an internal map to perhaps guide us around a tad. Logically thinking, if we can get back to the central command center, there should be tremor detectors for something like this, which might help us with finding out where the damn things are coming from. Our current readings apparently say they originate in two different places, but at the same time. Kraxxi's deduction is that they're, therefore, very likely to be artificial, and not the result of natural instability. Short version, that's not good news for us.  
Worryingly, I also think those spooks holed up in that nexus with the portal? If they can get their hands on the defense controls from there, we might not be in for a good spot if they decide they don't want us to leave. The old Asura - I'm told they're called Novans, and this place is Rata Novus - were thorough. If those defenses read us as hostile, we'd be hemmed in on all sides. Not a prospect I enjoy.  
Still, so far, they've kept to themselves though, which suits me fine.  
  
Despite all that's happening, though... this place is oddly relaxing. It's much quieter for, once, than the teeming jungle, and there's something soothing about the decaying majesty of it all.  
I don't want to linger here too long, but at least it's somewhat cooler, with the spray of water from a subterranean waterfall close by.  
  
Still miss Kristen; when we moved away from the Ogre camp, I sincerely thought we'd been nearly through it all. That the dragon would be around the corner, and we'd only been one more fight away from finally going home. Silly, of course. The last days are always the longest and the hardest. We're nearly there, or at least, that's what I keep telling myself. Just a little bit further.

# 43rd of Zephyr

Position; ruins of Rata Novus, as it were, surrounded by Chak and ancient automated defenses systems that could rip us into shreds in moments. Even so, one of our more peaceful encampments, perhaps ironically. The broken city shelters us somewhat and it's clear why the Novans made their home out here, when they did. The cave systems are filled with their own natural beauty; fluorescent fungi and lichen cling to walls and corridors, shining brightly and with surprisingly strong light, perhaps in an odd reflection of the Asuran holographic light that still occasionally flickers into life where an old terminal still works, despite the habitat or lab in which it was supposed to be standing being reduced to nothing more than a broken surface of smooth stone, inscribed with arcane lettering. The tunnels outside, dug out by Chak and turned glazing pink by their secretions, are equally draped in deep subterranean colours and lights; all this lit by enormous, pulsing beams of ley-line energy that scrawl and writhe overhead, as if alive. They pulse, through cracks in the ceiling, bright as daylight.  
And then deeper, where the ley-lines meet and intermingle in a great hollow, so seeped in their enormous magic the walls themselves are brought alive and pulse, like the beating heart of a continent. It's like feeling the pure, raw magic rolls through your veins. Even I could feel it, inside my head, the untapped and unrefined power. It's hardly surprising the dragon wishes to feed on this.  
  
But I am, once more, getting ahead of myself. Duties today has us look for a passage south, probably into a line of advance for the next steps in our journey. So, we wheeled west, and then south, the directions we assume we want to head in, passing out from the hollow of Rata Novus into a large tunnel; the one I described above. As mentioned, it was reclaimed by the Chak, who crawled around it in some force. When we passed through, we almost were overrun, and had to double back a distance to get out of the open. The tide lessened, but spirits, it was like Steampipe Steading, on Southsun, when Gutt died. They just kept on coming, like a never-ending tide. I was afraid we'd get swamped, and we'd lose someone, but that luckily didn't happen quite yet. We eventually pressed on, when the Chak seemed to run out of steam, until we hit this vast, roughly circular chamber, literally trembling and buckling with raw magical energy. It domed up, high, ley-lines crackling and whipping about like snakes. Interestingly, we found a jury-rigged Pact deck cannon, one of those you find on airships, meant to shoot down dragons, strapped to a crude fitting. Someone or other had jammed a ley-line energy canister into the loading mechanism, and substantially altered parts of the weapon. Whatever the purpose, it isn't firing regular shot. We spotted three more, dotted in semi-circular fashion along the chamber, each on an incline near another tunnel. I don't know for sure, but all of them looked like they had ley-lines pulsing out through them. We decided to press further on, and went into one of the tunnels when we noticed the tremors, followed seeing something... big, burrow around ahead. When we got closer, it erupted, and Bear grant me the strength to defeat it, but was it huge. A Chak, easily the size of a small dragon, or that Wyvern we fought a way pack, punched through the dirt. Marcus, wisely, gave the immediate retreat order, and we turned tail. Didn't have to say that twice. I don't know, but we'll need the Chapter to bring it down. If I know my things, I'd also say that it's the source of the tremors. Or at least, one of them. We'll need the whole damned Chapter to fight it, though. We're not denting that thing otherwise.  
  
Squad didn't do too well either, truth be told. Marcus' idea to shave them back into working order is overdue. They don't pay attention, and we nearly left some of them behind when the fall-back orders were given several time. Disengaging cleanly is a serious issue; they get bogged down, which means the entire unit needs to slow down for them to pull back from the fight. As I understand it, we'll be working on that soon-ish, as soon as tomorrow. If this sort of thing happens when we fight the Dragon... it'll cost lives.  
Thornton was also on his first proper field duty today; he did better than I expected, even though he made the rather painful mistake of thinking I was his commanding officer, in favour of deferring to Marcus. Doubly painful, because I did inform him Marcus was the Knight prior. He got wounded too, and seemed annoyingly obstinate it allowing it to be treated properly by medical. That's a problem. I made sure he understands that co-operating with them is mandatory, an not optional. That sort of thing cannot stand, however prideful he is or isn't.  
  
Kraxxi also went off wandering without permission, and tracked down some thingy for her golem. I made sure she doesn't do that; I don't mind her working on the golem. Indeed, I encourage it, but leaving camp without notice on a salvaging mission is both dangerous and unwise, and cannot be tolerated. Especially because I made a point to request engineering to set on a salvaging operation prior. We'll see. All in all, it's minor.  
On the same note about disciplinary measures; Grimstone got another food-related punishment from the Tactician for breaking cohesion during combat on Lance's side. Apparently their adventures included Nuhoch and acid-laced water or some such. I've been ordered to over-spice his food rations in order to make them taste bad; a bit of a waste, I think, but it's only for seven days, so that'll pass.  
  
Calas got sick earlier, too. Apparently retched up the fish stew I made for the troops; though it turns out it was because of fatigue, rather than anything wrong with the food. I'm happy it isn't poisoning; I like Calas enough not to wish him that sort of thing, nevermind the notion a second poisoning incident in the field kitchen would not help to swell the queue at mess call. I'll set out something light for him come morning; he'll undoubtedly be hungry.  
  
I'm tired now, though. After a day like this...

# 44th of Zephyr

Seems that, after yesterday's excitement, everything else sort of died down and we've been granted an off-day. I wanted to go over yesterdays lapses, but in the end, that seemed fruitless without Marcus to oversee it. I don't know. So it ended up being a quiet enough day; I only had to fry Grimstone a bit on both sides for continually bad-mouthing the Tactician without even the remotest clue as to what Kath's achieved. Besides, his own "martial prowess" isn't much to look up to, as it contains about as much finesse as an Ettin. If the Asura ever found a mind-reading device, you'd probably find the words "Rel smash" sitting along in an empty void in there.  
  
Anyway. I got Kraxxi's scavenging permit, which means I'll leg up a detachment one of these days to scour the city. Came with some stipulations, but nothing that I wasn't going to do anyway, so suits me fine, really.  
That's the essence of it, though, aside some of the usual camp banter. We had a pretty solid circle, truthfully, like we were out in Sparklfy again. We're getting a little tattered around the edges, I think, but it's nice to unwind a little now and again.

# 45th of Zephyr

Another day in the ruins of Rata Novus, though we made some good strides forwards today. I took Kraxxi out on that expedition I had planned; we managed to get halfway before the city's automated defenses shut down, and then reset. We got ambushed by the city's weapon systems, and would've died, if we didn't have our guardians on a hair trigger with defensive spells. One of those laser-grid systems caught me badly in the shoulder and gave me a nasty wound. It'll take a while before that heals cleanly, but I'll manage to fight through it for now. Good thing is, I have a running theory about why the city defenses shut on and off. Lyralii said the Chak eat ley-line energy, and since the defenses here run on them, I have a feeling the big bug is causing the disruptions. It helps, knowing the shut-down coincided with a tremor. Anyway, we managed to struggle through with some issue, thanks mostly to the guardians and quick thinking. We ended up back in camp with only minor injuries. We went out again when the defenses reset again, and went all the way up to the lab, smack-dab into a punch of spooks. We had to watch our step, but got what we wanted. Kraxxi is working on getting that golem back online at this very moment. We'll see what that manages to do.  
  
We also got some intelligence from the spooks; I asked if they were the ones that set up the jury-rigged cannons south of here; turns out they're not. Actual Pact troops erected those, for whatever purpose. It likely was part of a past advance; so we'll be looking in the same general direction. Soon, though, I get a feeling command won't sit on their hands for this one. If we're lucky, we'll know where to go and what to do soon.  
  
My arm smarts, though.

# 46th of Zephyr

Still at Rata Novus, in a more or less quiet day. I suspect we'll be sending out the scouts soon, though, given our last few days have allowed us to get our bearings, and at least confirm we're on the right path. More or less. All we need to figure out is the way forwards. I try not to think too much about what happens when we actually find the dragon. I just hope the amassed Pact forces that are supposed to wait ahead of us have something or other planned. If they don't, we'll have marched into the jungle a long, long way only to die. If it's as bad as I fear it is, we'll have to besiege the damn thing until who- or whatever is in charge back home finds the resources to send the heavy weaponry out this far. Won't be by airship either. I just hope no bright mind decides he wants to roll a Charr armoured detachment our way from Trinity. We'd be long dead of attrition before they'd reach us.  
I suppose that if push does come to shove, we might just storm it the old way, like Arah, but minus the fliers. I sincerely hope it doesn't come to that. It'd become a bloodbath.  
  
Regardless, thinking ahead. Today, I mustered Blade squad and had a classic old "yell at the problem until it is fixed" session. Been a while since that was needed, but I hope it did them some good. It'll have to be repeated, much as I'd prefer it wasn't needed, but there you go. I just hope people can keep thinking of me as a friend and comerade in arms; drill instructors have a nasty tendency to become the focal point of a lot of ire and anger. I hope they understand that there are times when my new rank comes before everything else, and I must see them as soldiers, rather than as allies. If not, well...  
We'll see. A mild pity some of the more deserving elements seemed to have absented themselves during the exercise. Nevermind that, I'll be sure to entrap them next time. If anything, it never hurts to reinforce one or two things multiple times.  
  
As for the remainder, Kraxxi's damned golem is still rebooting or whatever it's doing. She'll let me know first thing when that changes, but it's not a delay I'm too happy with. Neither is Kraxxi, mind, but she doesn't get to kick down the ladder. Well, maybe to Aramis, but he can handle that.

# 47th of Zephyr

Rata Novus, the city of tomorrow - today! Or so the last few holographic devices littered around the city sometimes claim, blurting into life every handful of hours. It's odd, that, to know they've been doing that for what must have been at least a hundred years. To the few cave bats and other critters that are still around in here, it must just have become part of their habitat, same as the golems and the flickering automated defense systems. It's a testament to Asuran ingenuity that they still stand, nevermind still function, all of this.  
  
Right, so, bad news first; Kraxxi's got the golem to communicate. The "bad" part in there is that the command center is the console hub occupied by the unfriendly spooks, so fat chance of us being able to get in there and trim out the systems in any measure. Annoying, doubly so because two of the scouts got wounded when the defense systems malfunctioned again; only they didn't have a guardian with them to protect them. Thankfully, it only knocked Athy and Layfon out of commission for a couple of days at best; no fatals. We'll have to time our marching orders correctly, and hope the Chak don't interrupt the main energy system mid-march. Or, at least, seed our guardians along the entire column. I'll be sure to appraise the officers of this notion before we set off; no need to make it harder than it is.  
  
That brings me to the good news! The scouts, wounded as they were in the end, found out traces of recent troop activity up ahead, including several Charr tracks and mechanical engineering equipment. Seems that's our path of advance; it's likely we'll be ordered forwards sooner rather than later, which is good. I assembled some of the troops and alerted them on what we can expect when we come through to the Dragon's lair. Virtually none of them were around for when we came up on Zaithan, three years ago. I doubt they're ready for what's waiting for us. I wish I knew what we are walking into, so I could help them prepare. But we're going to walk in blindly. We came this far, just trying to get where we're supposed to, but now we're so close, I doubt we stood still and considered if we can even do what we're out here to do. Bear grant us strength to defeat this foe, and Dolyak give us the force of will to endure what we must.  
I suppose I can, at the very least, give them the illusion of being prepared. I set them to sparring today; I think if I keep them busy now, up until the very end, their minds cannot doubt too much, and they'll be steeled with resolve; even if it's only that they can get away from incessant exercise. If that works, then it works. They can soil their garments and forget the name of their mother, but spirits be my witness, if they'll hold the damn fucking line while we do what-ever needs to be done to kill that overgrown skelk-in-a-pinecone, it's all worth it.  
  
Bah, I don't think I've been this anxious about anything in years.

[continuation of entry]  
  
We also picked up another Sylvari, or that is, the scouts did. A bit peculiar, and we can never be too careful, but her story largely makes sense, even if there are some blanks I have doubts about. Apparently a Warden, separated from the rest of her pack by a Chak ambush, before spending some time hiding around in the ley-line vault. Mostly famished, I doubt she'd have survived out there much longer. We're treating her nicely enough, for now, but we're being weary, as can be expected. At least, I know that the dragon's voice is muted down here, so I sincerely doubt she's one of the Mordrem.

# 48th of Zephyr

Location... somewhere due south-east of Rata Novus, surface. Camped on the rim of a natural depression decorated with half a score of destroyed choppers hanging in the thick overhead foliage. Some hang so precariously that it seems they could snap and fall down at any moment. It's good to be above ground though, if it weren't for the rampant Chak activity. We're not closer to the Dragon, though, as this seems to be a strike against the Chak directly, as opposed to us heading towards the dragon's domain. We're close, probably, but by how much is hard to tell.  
  
We left Rata Novus with little issue, fighting our way through one of the many tunnels from the ley-line confluence. Plenty of Chak along the way, but that seems to be the rule. No sign of the truly giant one, though, for which I'll count us lucky. I doubt that, even with a full Chapter, we'd have been able to dent the creature.  
We moved up topside, but almost immediately ran into the teeth of a minefield laid down by some of the local Pact troops. Turns out it were the remnants of Blade Chapter; not the bad ones either, but folk like Legs, Dahgar and a deaf demolitionist you can only communicate with by shouting. Seems they've been awaiting rescue, and spotting flares. It all seemed somewhat confused. Didn't help that our chose campsite got routinely trampled by Chak. We had to set up on a low cliff and sent out scouting parties to the surrounding area to find us a safe spot. All the while, the Chak attacked us. We managed to repulse them several times, but it wasn't a position we could hold onto for any length of time. Also seems that we dragged a lot of attention with us. I've opened up most of the explosives supply to lay down new minefield tracts to hold the Chak and Mordrem at bay, but I doubt it'll do much good, all in all. I don't fully understand what our purpose here is, though, if it isn't on the way to the Pact troops. I guess we'll figure out soon enough.  
  
As it stands, we managed to move away from the open to a much smaller, but much more sheltered, ledge. The Chak don't seem to stray this far in, so we can finally catch a break and get some rest. Tiring, this.  
I have no doubt we'll see a lot of work in curbing the damned Chak before we get to go anywhere at all.

# 49th of Zephyr

Camped on our small ledge, just otuside where the SCAR remnants are operating. They get under attack every so often, but we seem sheltered enough out here to weather the worst of it. You wouldn't think so, considering there's Chak trampling about outside, and there's a whole host of Mordrem stirring up directly behind us, separated from us only by a rockwall. At least we're making some more sense of things; if not really in any positive light. I also figured that, for a natural depression, the little bowl we're sitting on the edge of has very little plant growth in the open. I assume the soil here is so poor it just sinks straight through. Given the amount of underground lakes I've seen signs of, that makes some sense. Means that the big trees we keep seeing likely have roots that run all the way down to the aquifer. That'd explain why the ground here is able to support all the underground tunnels, too.  
  
Duties today were primarily intended to be engineering work; they wanted us to look at those dangling choppers. I could've told them from the start that wasn't going to be much of an option, really, they're too precarious for us to do much about, unless we find a way to lower them to the ground safely. Which, incidentally, we haven't. We'd need a lot more rope and a counterweight to even think about making some sort of winch. I think the only real way to get anything done is to get an airship in here to airlift the things out, but that's hardly an option. Narrow, for one, nevermind that the already present wrecks would discourage any attempts in the first place. I was sent over to the SCAR camp anyway to pick up some climbing harnesses and such. It wasn't needed in the end, but I was lucky enough to bump into a pair of recruits lugging around supplies for the Ashen. Freshly dropped in with one of the few chopper flights we still see in the region. Home command is a mess, though, they didn't have any papers. Both were green as grass though, no real combat under their belt. They'll have to learn damned quick if they want to survive. It'll be one hell of a trial by fire.  
At least we have some munition restocks and a couple of fuel tanks for the unit's flamer units. We're slowly running out of supplies, though. I saw some green moa around, though. I think I'll set out some foragers when I have a chance, before things get too drastic.  
  
Anyway; I was in the process of alerting the Warmaster about the recruits when Drakemoor sounded a picket alert. With nothing better at hand, we tagged along, and ended up spotting a rather large Mordrem force. Turns out, from the latitude readings, we're fairly far south. Directly north of Rata Sum's territorial border, actually. The Mordrem seemed to have a passage south, directly into central Tyria. I've been tasked by the Warmaster with a demolitions mission, which we'll likely carry out soon. Possibly tomorrow. Best thing I have to blast a vinewall is a drum of airship fuel, though. I had Nirrae and Sel rig up a mortar shell to act as a detonator. They cut the fuse a little short, but we'll have to deal with that as it comes. The issue is more the distance. From what I recall, it's at the top of a cliff, which means solid cover means running the entire length of the gap back down. No can do with that amount of people, we'll have to do it two-stage and hope the detonation team doesn't get cornered. I'll have to climber up to the lookout before I can say safely, though.  
  
But that's tomorrow. The Warmaster also took us down into the caves again, down a side corridor the Chapter encountered while engineering was working. Couple of folks have been rigging up devices on top of raw ley-line sparks, seeping them for power. From what I can tell, they're using engine pistons to creator something akin to a thumper-turret I've seen used by Charr when prospecting. The pistons, the heavy main turbine ones you find on those Orr-generation vessels, hammer down into the dirt with full force. Each cluster has four, and they've built three of those clusters. I accidentally triggered one, which helped me figure out what they were doing. Once it engaged, we could feel an odd tremor. I don't doubt that even causing a single one of those pistons to trigger pissed off the Chak no end. I told the Warmaster we'd do good getting clear, and we still ran into an ambush that knocked out Lyralii, severely injured Sel and winged Calas and one of the recruits superficially. Worst part, turns out the Chapter pulled out several dead Pact troops deeper down that corridor. I'm theorizing that they're the same folks that rigged up the ley-line cannons. They were planning something, maybe to use their thumpers to lure out the big chak, and then blast it with the guns? Whatever they did, I think their thumpers misfired, or a test didn't go down well, and they called an entire hive down on their necks. They're all dead now, only leaving behind their preparations. Not sure yet if they're worth anything to us, though. It might all have been pointless.  
  
We managed to fight out way back to camp eventually, with some work. I had to dump the Quartermaster into my pack to keep my hands free. She'll wake up soon enough with one hell of a headache, I think. The recruit, Loxley, that came with us, did good enough. Considering it was his first day, and he didn't die horribly, he did good. We'll see what comes tomorrow. A whole lot of running, I figure.

# 50th of Zephyr

So, we're still camped on our ledge, somewhat north of Rata Sum. You wouldn't say we are, considering this place doesn't look too much like Metrica. But, I think we're geographically closer to home than we've been in the past... spirits, almost two seasons, by now. It's not as comforting as you'd think, and there is a certain perverse absurdity in knowing we came so far, only to end up right next to the Asuran capital again. If we'd known where the dragon was earlier, we might have landed closer to the bastard's heart. But then, I suppose we wouldn't have found Tarir.  
  
Anyway, we completed that demolitions mission, but not after running foul of the Chak several times. Orders had come through for us to check up on the SCAR troops and surrounding. nearly got swarmed by Chak at their camp. We managed to beat some of them back into their tunnels, though it seemed that only pissed them off more. We came under attack near our campsite from several of the big ones. I only barely had time to pick up the explosive charge. We swiveled right into the demolitions run, which went smoothly enough. Bomb did it's thing, kicked up a pretty gout of fire and dust. Seems the blast took down the wall too, slumped it right down. The Mordrem will have their hands full clearing the rubble, I think, which should buy us some time, at the very least. Had to go in to check, and came out looking like a dust-deamon. Had to polish the armour clean afterwards. The blast seemed to have angered the Chak even more, though. SCAR camp seemed to have abandoned, with no trace of where the troops there went. No bodies, though, so I'm hoping it was just a retreat after they realised their position became untenable. They had a good overlook on the tunnel entrance, and what I think were the *Lagula's* broadside cannons set up to pound whatever came up at them. Wasn't enough, though, I fear. Chak are just too many. We'll now soon enough if they're still around.  
  
Mithra and the Sylvari collapsed, though, right as we were finishing up the demolitions task. Seems Mordremoth didn't like us blowing up the passage to Rata Sum, and made his anger known. Not good, but at least a signal we're still being effective in the field. I'm starting to worry we're not going to find any Pact forces any deeper, though. Seems the Chak swarms and Mordrem troops have the run of the land here pretty much unopposed. Seeing the lasses, again, reel under the Dragon's influence didn't help with me having much more faith in our undertaking. We have to be close, it's feels almost impossible to have come so far and then to fail to find the Elder Dragon on his very doorstep. Spirits. At least Zhaitan chose a place that was easy to find as a lair.

# 51st of Zephyr

On the wind-down now, still on our perch outside the SCAR encampment, in our little bowl of crashed airships. Nothing today, seems yesterday's action knocked the wind out of everyone, so we just kept our heads low, and the scouts on picket duty in case anything got any funny ideas. I'm thankful for Lyralii's cooling crystal, that's for sure, keeping it tucked between the padding keeps me cool. I still sweat mind, but it's no longer like getting boiled alive in my own sweat. That, and the shade helps, of course.  
  
I spoke some time with the General, the annoying Asura that seemed to nag around and make impertinent comments every time someone opens their mouth. They're not as bad as they seem, mind, just your usual Asuran super-superiority complex. I don't know how we got there, but the conversation brought us to what happened to Vanholm, and how the Dragon had robbed him of his legend. The Asura remarked that, for the sake of legend and honouring Vanholm's memory, it might be better to tell the tale of his good deeds, and forget that fall that came. In the end, he was not Vanholm anymore, after all. It's such a simple idea that I just hadn't stopped to consider. I wonder if his memory will forgive that I must, in the end, blemish the tale with an outright lie. But it is better for him to be remembered as the warrior and gentle soul that carved totems, than it is to be remembered as someone who, in the end, failed not only himself, but all of us too.  
  
I've also had idea to carve the Wyvern horn into something mighty. The root is thick where it bugled in the flesh, but rough. I think I can file it away into a skull, or a head, too.

# 52nd of Zephyr

Still at the camp, sitting somewhat idle. Or at least, no orders from command and up. I lead out a patrol myself to check op on the demolitions site, make sure the Mordrem aren't digging it up again. They're not, for one. The explosive we made fractured the ceiling, and the entire tunnel is collapsing in on itself. Whatever they're trying, they're not getting through that without some serious efforts and a team of experienced miners, that's for sure. Not for lack of trying mind, they've been putting some of the heftier Mordrem creatures on it, and we nearly got trampled. Bit of a tough spot, but we couldn't call the retreat because they'd have caught up with us. If I'm going to get trampled by cavalry and huge Saurians, I'd rather do so where I can see them coming, rather than getting pounded into the dirt. I know enough about Seraph and their centaurs to know that a retreat from things that outrun you all too easily turns into a bloody route. Getting speared in the back does that. As it stands, we only had one real injury, and that was Calas. Lost a fair amount of blood, and is air-headed as a result. He'll pull through easily, though. Wynn also got thrown around, but she's already back to fighting strength as we speak.  
  
We also swept past the SCAR camp again, only to find it occupied. Turns out, after our demolitions missions two days ago, they moved out in full force to deal with the agitated Chak that had come swarming out. We very probably just missed eachother in the confusion. At least I'm glad they're not dead, and the SCAR camp remains staffed and armed. Those cannons keep us safe after all.  
  
For the rest, we sit tight, waiting. I had some words with Astrid Drakecarver "Legs", too. Turns out they've been sat here, bereft of supplies and orders for the majority of their stay since they got stranded here. At least we know where we're going, or at least, where we're supposed to be going. Don't know when we'll get there, mind. One battle at a time.

# 53rd of Zephyr

Still on our ledge of doom. Some rain fell yesterday, but the ground din't seem to hold it. Seeped right through. On the stones and cliffs it clung to lichen briefly, before the steady heat evaporated it all. We look over the natural bowl set amidst these winding and dipping canyons, Chak, Mordrem and Pact troops wandering through them, the later hoping he doesn't turn a corner and run into any of the former. I will have to say, I admire the strength we have shown to have come so far. This campaign, this crusader, has lasted for so long, and the end is finally in sight. We stand before one last final challenge to overcome. It feels like those last days leading up to Arah in Orr again, in '25, what seems untold ages ago now. It will be a hard, hard fight ahead of us. I don't think anyone here is really ready, but we march into the jaws of it regardless.  
  
The wound on my shoulder itches, but has healed well. The flesh is moulded into a dark welt, but the burns have faded and it no longer chafes under the pouldron. Calas' wound is also bettering, but not at the rate I'd hope. The beast that stamped on his arm did some damage, and the bleeding is not clotting properly, despite it being bandaged. The sting must have worsened his foul mood, because he was not as amicable as he usually was. Something Rajani had joked about eating humans had irked him, and he lost his temper a little before Athelstan and myself, brought on somewhat by the General's meddling and prodding. Smart as they may be, they have the social graces of a swine escaped from its pen in a steadholder's drinking hall. Seems the entire issue with Claridge apparently acting the imbecile for the sake of it some days back lodged itself into his head. It doesn't bother me overly, truth be told; Rajani seemed contrite enough about the affair, and given my family is the one actually given to such acts, I'd have shrugged it off. Claridge is Clardige, as impenetrable and dense as a Jotun menhir. Still, if it enervates old one-eye that much, we'll have to keep an eye on it. Doubly so because they're both on the cooking staff, and in that capacity, are within my charge.  
  
As for the rest of today, our Sylvari guest, Nirrae, has made her intention of rejoining the Vigil in full clear, and is only waiting to be oathed in, alongside the two new recruits and Seleea, who apparently got lost in the clutter. I ran them through some basic drills, hammer home the essential formalities of lining up before they're even properly inducted. Doesn't hurt to make them feel part of us if she's going to fight alongside us. I reviewed the note she brought in about that staff she keeps totting about; turns out it's actually tipped with a laser emitter, down-sized and running on crystals. It's not a combat tool, though, and I think she put it on there just because she could. I'm not going to encourage her using it, mind. It occurred to me I should probably impound the device, considering the entire Sylvari hum-bu-laa going on with the dragon and all, but I doubt she'll be much of a problem, in all honesty. Sel seems to know who she is, and I get along well enough with the blue-haired Asura to trust her judgement on random Sylvari we pick up along our wanderings through enemy territory.  
I almost wrote that down without laughing out loud.  
I'll keep an eye out.  
  
In good news, the scouts found a passage forwards towards the Pact camp. However, for whatever blasted reason, anything beyond that is "classified". As if that mattes one single iota of anything out here. Classified my big bloody arse, now everyone is worrying unduly and thinking that it's all been shot to the Realm of Torment. "Classified". This sort of asshattery is why we don't like spooks, and it isn't even spooks this time. Shit, it might be spooks, that's probably classified too.  
I might strangle someone with a length of red tape next time someone tells me something is classified.  
  
Anyway, my obvious annoyance at the obtuse level of density once again demonstrated by that wonderous and flowery oxymoron that is military intelligence aside, I've passed around the sentiment to bring to readiness and prepare for a surprise march out towards this classified Pact camp, hopefully not eaten wholesale by the Dragon. After that, well. Then our two seasons of trudging through the mud, grass and even golden tiles of the Magus Falls will finally end, and the *real* war will really begin.  
  
I just hope we're not consigned to a siege. I'd like to go home somewhere before I'm so gray Kristen won't recognise me. Or too dead.

# 54th of Zephyr

Right, position: Pact advance camp, place dubbed "Dragon's Stand" by the local troops, south of Magus Falls. End of the line, the edge of the abyss, and closest position to the Elder Dragon Mordremoth thus far attained by Pact soldiers in the entire campaign, since the ships weighed anchor at Resolve, on the 36th of Colossus, 1328. And, against all odds and expectations, we're in this war, and not even in such a bad way. The fleet may have crashed but, with bear's own strength and will, this hasn't defeated us. We're in the ruins of several large warships, from the wreckage all post-Orr patterns in the *Glory*-style, taken apart and, even in death, turned against the dragon. The wreckage has become our home, with engineers erecting walls out deck plating, and even wiring the main cannons to salvaged engine reactors, and using them to keep the camp's four approaches clear of encroaching Mordrem. South of us, the sprawling jungle stretches, and the tangle is filled with Mordrem troops. You can hear the constant thrum and hiss of the guard batteries as they keep up a defensive barrage that reminds me of Rally camp in Orr. There are plenty of Pact soldiers, and their supplies are organised. Many have been killed on the way here, but those that survived are hardened and determined. The camp itself is, against all expectations, almost soothingly restful. The quiet before the storm, I think. With the Chapter's forces added, we've been swollen to a force mighty enough to strike at the dragon.  
It will be a battle worthy of song.  
  
Until those orders come through, though, we'll do everything we can to make ready. The engineers and the medics will be hard at work, and I can imagine the risks the scouts stand to make in the coming days. Everyone should be steeling themselves, making ready. We're here now, the end is in sight, one more gargantuan effort, and we can all, finally, see our homes again.  
I will make some things in order, before the time comes, of course, and make sure that, even if I die, some news is returned home for me. I hope that you, spirits, will grant us all your blessings as we face down the great foes of our time.

# 55th of Zephyr

First casualty, didn't have to wait very long. Athy's lost a hand during a probe mission out towards the enemy. We were walking next to a reeking bog that stank of rot and things in variable states of decay, heading southwards. The entire region is corrupted beyond a certain point, massive rents in the earth weeping energy, exposed ley lines, the landscape falling away from them like the flesh off a bone. There's those eerie green pods too, probably filled with all manner of repulsive creatures. Mithra was burning one down when a couple of Mordrem rose up and nipped Athy's hand clear off. We had to abort, carry her to safety. She's fine, though, but Mithra is in some shock. I feel asleep in the medical tent, got woken up when a medic passed by to check on Athy, and saw me snoring against a fencepost.  
  
We've sent out three ventures into the dragon's holdfast so far. Blade curved up north-west, first, good hike into the enemy territory, until we saw signs of dilapidated Exalted structures, most of the gilt gone from their surfaces. We found an entire pylon buried under masses of vines and rocks, as if the enemy tried to choke the life out of it. Dead Exalted too, just golden scraps of armour. No trace, though, except empty mirror sockets like we saw out near Tarir. Marcus is hopeful we might be able to bring it back to life, or at least coax the Exalted into giving us a hand in reclaiming the site. The Exalted and their pylons, through whatever magic, are powerful tools to use against the dragon in his armies, so I can't fault his thinking. I feel it's a little stretched, though. Who knows, maybe Freyj'll come down to help, she'd know what to do.  
  
Lance, on the other hand, went south-west, and apparently ran into pieces of Asuran tech, though I'm not sure if they're Rata Novan or just Inquest. The latter were almost certainly there, at one point; probably ransacked the place and then left. There were no defenses or turrets left, so whatever they found has either gone, or wasn't worth defending. I think I heard Sel say it was an old golem assembly. I bet Kraxxi'll be annoyed when she finds out. Doubly so when she hears they decided to blow it all up. Apparently, with some major risks to damaging the ley-lines, considering the facility was feeding off of them. The resulting blast was pretty major. I'm having doubts about whether or not it was justified or even needed.  
  
The third was the aborted probe Lorma and myself were leading out due the west exit. We didn't get that far, given Athy's rather serious injury, so yeah. Mithy's resolve is being tested, that's for certain, though her only way to vent any steam is anger. I'm, honestly, not sure if she's fit to fight in that state; like a sword too hot from the forge isn't really supposed to be wielded. Don't have the heart to tell her, and she might even out before it all boils over anyway. But now? Her anger will make her undisciplined and unfocused, and I'm afraid if anything happens, like the Dragon, or anyone else getting wounded, she might snap under the tension.  
Athy isn't there to cushion the blow, Nirrae is not familiar a face enough, and spirits alone know what's gotten into Cheery's head.  
  
I also set Calas to make a cake from our meagre supplies. There's actual Dolyak around, likely from the supply caravan. Given he apparently likes the animals, and I know he's made cake before, we might as well do so before we go into the deep end. Besides, I think some of us could use a little resolve-bolstering before it all ends.

# 56th of Zephyr

Not much going on. Sitting tight and waiting. Head hurts, so early sleep, I think.  
Everyone sitting tight. Wonder when it's all over.

[continued]  
  
Woke up from the bustle. Turns out, move is tomorrow. I'm tired, but I'll be damned if I fall asleep now. Doubt I could get much sleep anyway today, it's too busy. Everyone's making ready, there's a field briefing on the notice which... promises a long, long fight ahead of us. We'll be pushing ordnance up towards a blighted tree and blast it halfway to the sky, clearing the way for a heavy duty strike force to hammer home on the dragon's lair proper. We'll be sitting the last strike out, something we should be happy for, I think. Pity, I think it would've had some poetic justice for us to go up against the critter itself in the final stretch, but if that's what it's going to be, then we'll do our part, and hope the Pact's best can do without us.  
  
I'll make some preparations, letters to send home and what to do in case we fail. Doubt anyone will see the chance to carry anything back home if we do fail, mind, but it'll settle my nerves a little. Spirits, I am nervous, too, suddenly. The wait up until the call will be excruciating. I'll have hand out Calas' cake in the morning, sturdy breakfast. If we all die, they'll die with a full stomach.  
Oh spirits... I'm actually afraid now. This is like before Arah; so many will die tomorrow, we'll have to line their helmets out along the pyres, and watch the columns of smoke rise into the air. I don't even want to think what happens if we fail. Will we get a second chance? Or will everything just collapse where it stood until there's nothing left of us but the swords that slipped from our hands? Spirits, if ever there was a time when you should grant your blessings to anyone, look to the warriors readying up to take vengeance on the beast kindred to the one that robbed us of our homelands. We will have need of it, before the next sun sets. I suppose I will have to make my own peace too, once more, in case my helmet is the one to fall.  
  
If anyone finds this shoul I have fallen tomorrow;  
Caeyr Mehirskin in Hoelbrak will know of me, and has promised to carve for me a runestone like they did for the Jotun kings of old. Tell him I have died fighting in the west.  
  
To my Freyja, I leave my sword and my shield. Wield them justly, in defense of the innocent, and in retribution to our foes.  
My armour I leave to the living kin of the Ogres Burunk and Unger, as payment for a life-debt owned, but never fulfilled.  
This fieldbook, the Kodan longbow and trophies within my pack I leave to Kristen Dragonsbane, whom I wished I had met earlier, so I could have been with her longer.  
The rings in my hair will pass to Usha Snowbanished, my chosen kin. I hope she will wear them alongside those of her brothers.  
  
If, by chance, you have witnessed my last deeds, or knew me before death claimed me; tell my tale in the Great Lodge of Hoelbrak once, and do so without lie or boast. I hope some will be inspired by the tale, and will join the fight in my stead.

# 57th of Zephyr

It's over. The war's done, we won, and it wasn't easy either, though we expected as much. We mustered up at the usual time, most of the Pact camp as well, forming a full three-pronged strike force with a few hundred or so troops divided between us. Chapter was a good cornerstone for the assault, and we headed one of the stikres directly, taking vanguard on the weapons escort. Bear's strength must've been with us, because that was the hardest fight I've seen. The storm on the promenade of the Gods and the taking Arah were grander in scale, but this was bloody, confined and ugly. They came at us every step of the way, breaking against us as we pushed ahead. We killed everything before us, and left behind fields of wounded, mangled and maimed, the dying and the dead. The enemy unleashed the greatest of his minions on us, enormous husks and twisted images of Sylvari grown to unbelievable size through whatever foul magic it was capable off. Great and twisted Sylvanhearts, corrupted into weeping monsters festooned with dripping thorns and swollen pods impeded us, and breachers dotted the attack approach. Twice, we had to blast through magical shields with heavy ordnance. The dragon's lieutenant, a great monster wielding a great glowing axe that seemed to made of blood, came at us several times, hacking apart our soldiers. In the end, we blasted our way through into the corrupted grove, filled with pods and vines. We had to run like daemons, bouncing between clusters of Mordrem that assailed us from every side. A strike force of Pact troops engaged and put down the champion for once and for all, throwing its smoking corpse down into the smoke-filled depths below.  
We stopped, briefly, hoping the storm on the trees cleared the path forwards for a strike team with the Pact Commander and Laranthir, our own Grand Warmaster, to engage the damned dragon. They did it, too. We saw the corpse, the great serpent coiled around a giant blasted tree that would've filled the heavens with it's crown had it borne leaves, looking over a rip into the earth the size of a lake that pulsed and vibrated with raw magical energy so strong, the rock and stone itself floated in the air as if it was nothing.  
With a great cry of primal anger, the beast died, and this war is over. Mordremoth has perished.  
  
It cost us, though. We left many wounded behind us, and there will be a lot of pyres built in the jungle before we can return home, at last. The Warmaster's rent asunder. Mithra and Prydwén got badly mangled. Calas looked like he was on the verge of death himself, Drakemoor and Alessa weren't much better. No deaths, yet, though any of those might be mangled for life, or just not wake up at all. Many others died in the push, and spirits only knows how many faltered and fell to their death in the battle against the dragon itself. It is a pity we didn't get to raise our sword against the creature itself, though I am happy enough that we didn't weather the worst of it, in the end. All our Sylvari are, despite their wounds, alive, though, thank the spirits. The dragon's death hasn't destroyed their minds as I feared it would. I feel slightly sick knowing we even took that gamble, but there was no other choice. Finally, retribution.  
  
We got pulled out soon after, though, finally, with our choppers unobstructed by the dragon's vines. I hear craft have been doing runs up and down the length of the Magus Falls, looking for signs of any survivors and finally pulling them out, to Resolve, to the Dustbowl, to Tarir, anywhere really. They pulled us back from the front too, with the wounded, back to the Dustbowl. It wasn't home, but it's good to be back, that's for sure. We cracked open the Guild Initiative supplies, probably much to their as-of-yet-undiscovered chagrin, but I think we deserved it. I was too tired for a proper drinking bout, though, so I kept it light. Talk, swim, walk, make sure I was clean and tired enough to fall asleep despite the images and things that will surface in my mind when I close my eyes.  
  
The *Aegis* looks in good shape; from afar anyway. I'll have to look it over eventually, but not now. Maybe tomorrow, if the muscle sores and exertion doesn't catch up. I am secretly hoping the crew and that odd Asura have managed to fix it up back into shape, and it'll carry us home, sooner rather than later. I want to see snow again.  
  
I don't know what we'll find at home. Has the world changed much while we were out here? I doubt it, though it is always possible that whatever happened to the Sylvari was not isolated to just here. I don't know what state the Pact is in either, it could be in tatters for all we know, the last remnants coming home only to find that there is pitifully little left. It'll be some time before we're ready to strike at a dragon again, that much is certain. I hope we have that much time. If not, well... we might be in for a few more desperate fights. For now, though, we will savour the taste of victory, even against the odds, and see what has become of the world. I wonder if we'll get a campaign medal.

# 58th of Zephyr

Second day of rest. We're in the Dustbowl, sitting out the aftermath of the war. More and more survivors pull in, though must don't stay too long. As for us, well, we're talking it easy with the warmaster in medical, and the Knights taking a breather too. No idea where the Tactician is, mind, but I suppose they're just off somewhere out of sight, enjoying the quiet. After a battle like yesterday, can hardly blame any of them. Somehow, I still feel like I'm there, in the battle, sword swinging, and cushioning blows on the shield. I can still feel myself lunging, the punishing force I need to put behind the sword's cross to punch through the iron-like bark of the husks. The frantic scrabbling as a stalker tries to find a gap in my armour, jumping so fast I need to swing on pure instinct. But spirits, when I hit them, they are cleft asunder ringing steel. My arm tingles where the mordrem bolts try to eat their way through the steel of my shield, battering away to find flesh. I see the Dragon's champion striding forwards, hefting his blood-encrusted axe, and I think I will die, then and there, trapped between this monster and the press of soldiers behind me. There is no choice but to go forwards, and you hope you don't trip over the discarded corpses and limbs of friend and foe. And the smell. Like a saltwater bog, but run through with the iron tang of blood that bores into your nose, and makes you gag if you try to breath in too deeply. I'm still there, even as I set here in the half-dark of another jungle's dusk. I can close my eyes, and see myself. I see Burunk and Unger dying, backhanding me out of harm's way in Orr. I see the storm of the promenade, that ghastly assault up the steps of death, where rotten corpses rained down and burst upon the flagstones in splashes of acid and rot. And I see the narrow, funneling lanes of Mordremoth's lair, the dragon's stand, where we fought like lions for every step, leaving a red wake behind us that will not burn away from memory.  
And yet I sit here. I have my old scars, but I live to tell the tale, head on my shoulders, able in body and mind, and spirits, I feel stronger and more invigorated than I have done in ages. All that death has made me aware of just how alive I am.  
  
We'll be going home soon. The ship, the *Aegis*, which we've been working on for so long, has finally taken the first flight of its new hull, under its own power. We did the full check. It's hard not to just leap onboard and order myself home, really. Much as I want to. I wonder where Freyj is, how Usha is doing, what hunts Kristen's been holding while I wasn't there. I'd like to see them all again, to celebrate, to drink, to banish the ghosts that each war leaves behind for a few moments, and to revel in the glory that is ours, which we can drink in and let rush over us. Maybe I should do what I did after Orr, and take another break, until the next dragon comes along. I don't know. There's a few things I do know, though, but we'll see what passes by them eventually.

# 59th of Zephyr

Camp Resolve. After all this time, we're back somewhere we know. It's odd that a place so remote and desolate as Resolve, in the middle of the blasted Silverwastes, can now feel anything like arriving home again. Still, it's good to be back in central Tyria, even the westernmost edge of it all. We're so close to home I can almost feel the snow on my skin, no matter how far east we still have to go.  
  
We flew in, too, on the *Aegis*, rechristened as the *Willhelm's Vigilance*, in honour of a certain warmaster and a certain Chapter that might or might not have contributed greatly to the victory in the west against the dragon. The ship performed well enough, and I'm proud of the repairs we've managed to finally complete. It was a colossal task, but we did it, eventually, weaving this new ship from the remains of the *Aegis* and the *Lagula*. In many ways, it's a symbolic icon of our victory. Broken, burnt and maimed, it was pulled together and restored to it's former glory by diligence, perseverance and a will to carry on. And through that ordeal, it was reborn, and will see more days of service, guided by wiser generals, and stronger warrior. Just like the Pact was all but crumbled, only to pull itself together in the end, and to win a decisive victory despite the odds. It will yet be seen if the Pact will survive the aftermath, of course; the wounds suffered by our glorious intiative are grievous, after all. But, spirits willing, the Marshal and the Commanders will pull this thing together. I know General Soulkeeper would want us to continue fighting, and Laranthir has more than proven himself to be worthy every single honour attributed to him in the campaign.  
There will be remembering to be done, and stories to be told.  
Most of all, we will hear, soon enough, of what happened exactly in the west, when all we could see was ourselves. We will know if Eir Stegalkin has indeed fallen, and if Tarir indeed does house the egg of a dragon, as Freyj has claimed in her letters. More than anything, we will soon enough move onto the next war to be fought.  
  
But now, we rest where we started, almost two seasons ago.  
Odd, though. We seemed to have left some people behind. Didn't see the Tactician anywhere, and Calas outright refused to board the ship. Still, the order was given, and we departed homewards.

# 60th of Zephyr

I'm home. Hoelbrak, the Great Lodge, everything I missed so much. I'm finally back, the crunching snow, the cold winds, the deep laughter of my kin, the singing and shouting, the smell of strong ale, roast meat and dripping fat! The smell of fire and smoke, the blast of the great horns of the north. It's so good to be home, to revel in the simple yet oh-so-familiar pleasures of norn hospitality. We got moved from Resolve to the keep earlier today, boarded one of the many chopper runs that are ferrying troops out of the Magus Falls all over Tyria. Then, ten days of leave, the feeling of the first snows in a long time on the keep's eastern ramparts, and the temporary goodbyes to all our survivors. It felt like I'd never see them again. These days of leave will seem long, but turn up too short as always.  
  
I travelled east on foot, braving Lornar's Pass and passing by the Durmand Priory. Even from afar, it's ramparts stood bravely, and the great fires that light it. Wished that I had returned home with Freyj. I passed south, first, through the pass, before heading east, through the Dredgehaunt cliffs, though I didn't encounter any. I paid homage to the Bear shrine along the way, to thank her for the strength that had been in my arms during the many battles. It was another few hours until Hoelbrak proper, and it was well into the night by the time I arrived. Headed straight to Leopard shrine, and found Kristen there. She hadn't even found my letter, it was a happy meeting of chance, though I suspect the spirits guided our steps. Another thing to thank them for. We took to the boasting hall, and we spoke at length of our deeds. The huntress was out east, in Ascalon, hunting Mordrem! She has the trophies to prove it, too. I showed her my own, and showered her in the spoils of war and conquest. The Vinewrath blossom, the striped stalker pelt, the Wyvern-horn, the Dragon's Band, all trophies that would be heirlooms in themselves for many hunters, but all of them for us, to prove that my boasts were never hollow, and true to the core. I hadn't known how much I had truly missed her until I saw her again. I was afraid, but not long. Our embrace banished those fears away as easily as they have grown. Never has ale tasted so sweet as today, as when shared with a loved one worthy of song. I've said it before, the tale the Skaalds sing of Kristen are in equal measure about her deeds and her beauty. I have see the face of two Elder Dragons, fought some of the deadliest creatures on Tyria with my own hands, and survived things I should not have; and of all those many deeds worthy of legend, of all those songs they will sing, and the toasts that will roar in the Mists when I die, it is earning Kristen's love that I value most of all.  
It is a crown she will share only with Freyja, who will have my eternal love until the day the essence of my soul fades from the trappings of our wold.  
  
I'm drunk. I haven't even drunken much ale, but the exertion and exhaustion both have caught up to me, and have made me light-headed. Kristen is asleep, at long last, in a warm bed, under thick pelts, and I will soon join her. May my snoring herald in the new dawn, as this evening ends, and I celebrate being alive, being me, and being where I am now, for at least another few hours no Elder Dragon in the world can rob from me.

# 61st of Zephyr

I was planning on going to Usha today, but I didn't get to it. We slept in long enough, or at least, didn't get out of bed until well after dawn. It was good to wake up at home. Kristen and I loafed around the noon, until we decided to go to the shrines in Wayfarer, where we took in the fresh air and the forests, paying homage to Leopard's shrine, since that has always been Kristen's patron spirit. Kristen embodies those values more than almost anyone I know, so making sure the old snow cat is watching over her when I'm away is good. I also burnt some of the bone slivers I kept aside from the carving; a gift to Leopard herself, and the other spirits, and a promise of more to come.  
  
We were looking for prey, but I think we got sidetracked, and wandered over to the hot-springs instead. I told Vanholm's tale to Kristen, but the way it was meant to be told. I told her that he fought long and hard against the dragon, until he was overwhelmed. And this is truth. I just omitted to mention that battle was fought inside his own mind. I think it's good that I did. Vanholm's memory deserves some redeeming, and his legend, though ended, can still be told. He was the one who taught me how to carve; it was his friendship which resulted in me carving the runes of Orrian pearl, and resulted in me cutting the Dragon's Band for Kristen: I hope that it might become an heirloom for whatever kin Kristen and I may eventually decide to have. That way, Vanholm's legend may live on through our own; and not as a corrupted and broken wretch, but as the craftsman and warrior that he was before.  
  
I also looked over a rather large splinter I recovered from the Mordrem axe-fiend we destroyed in the final fight. I cut it loose in the aftermath, and put it away in my fieldpack without giving it a second thought. I pulled it out the other day, along with my trophies. It's a good, sturdy length of material, hard as steel, but narrow and sleek. It pulses with a shallow red light, as if alive, which has me worried, though. I already told Kristen that I wanted to pass by Rata Sum to visit Kraxxi and her Krewe, concerning a number of ley-line exposure issues, and the magical manifestations. I think I'll pass by the bone splinter as well, before I try to work it.  
  
Anyway, yes, Kristen and I went to the springs. But we passed by the Rookery first, and did the shaman's run, darting between the sacred animals and the shamans. Turns out that I still have; for her superior grace and agility, I was the one that made it through first. Of course, turns out that Kristen hadn't run it as often as I had in my youth, so we laughed away at it. It did the trick though, as always.  
We slipped into the hot springs after, and remained there for a long while, letting everything just slip away from us and away, into the earth.  
  
We got back to Hoelbrak afterwards, when dusk came, relishing the sharp bite of the cold. I was thinking of eating out on the upper balconies until midnight, but we eventually decided just to have the meal in bed, ~~but I just ended up slathering Kristen in honey and pretending to be a bear.~~  
It was a good meal.

# 62nd of Zephyr

Another good day. We set out earlier to try and see if my sister, Usha, was in her brewery. I sent her letter beforehand, so she had a chance to prepare for me returning home. I know her well enough that she'd crack open a keg and celebrate it grandly enough for everyone to enjoy. As it turns out, she wasn't in her steading, but Freyja was. Lass returned home yesterday, now that the Priory is apparently pulling out a large amount of scholars back from Tarir for some mandatory rest. She seemed a bit annoyed at having been pulled out of her work, though. Confirmed a few number of things, too. The dragon's egg, guarded by the Exalted, the death of Stegalkin and of the Marshal. It was fell news at best, but still. Wonder what'll happen to the Pact without his leadership; I'm not sure if it'll hold as well. I hope the Vigil will continues their work, regardless of the Pact or not. We've proven again and again that we're the sort of army that gets things done.  
  
Anyway, aye, Freyja. I decided that, instead of loafing about Hoelbrak, we might as well travel up out near to Wulfbane's steading, given it's within a day's walk there. Took Freyj and Kristen with me, of course. It was a good walk; Freyj and Kristen are bonding some, which was good to see, and funny to behold. They're both strong women, but Kristen's got age and experience to match Freyj's energetic boasting.  
  
We arrived at the Brusah Clan lodge nearer to the evening, though it seems pretty clear that the Svanir are close-by. Still, Wulfbane has his lodge firmly in hand. We were greeted by the sound of laughter and singing; turns out we arrived in time for the birthing moot of his and Sigrun's children; Sigrid and Sigismund. Two healthy children with strong parents. Sigrun is fine too, though she needs her rest, of course. We were welcomed, with typical hospitality, and drank and feasted with them. Wulfbane's now a true clan chief, and a proper stead-holder. He'll be keeping Dolyak before long! There's plenty of hunters, trackers and tradesfolk that use his steading as a hold over; I'm sure Kristen will see the use of it if she decides to range north again when I'm on duty. Freyj returned to Hoelbrak come the evening, in case Usha or Fuse returns. Kristen and I were extended the hospitality of the stead, which we're making use of. We can return south tomorrow.

# 63rd of Zephyr

Woke up with a mild hangover today; seems spending two seasons on the dry has done ill on my constitution. Barely drank a keg; a year ago, I'd have drunk six times that and would've woken up without even a tremor in my head. The morning was well; we ate with the clan, and spoke for some time with Siggy and Wulfbane. Mire was around too, apparently she helped deliver the babies. Must've been some work, pulling out two norn newborns. I'm glad it all ended well, of course, Siggy's not worse for wear aside the expected stiffness now she's lost that amount of weight.  
Anyway, we passed around thanks for the hospitality and made way back south around noon. It's always pleasant travelling like that, of course.  
  
When we arrived back at the Lodges, I ran past Usha's brewery; Freyj was there, but the hair-ball herself is still out where-ever. I got a letter sent, though, for Darksbane and Ema's wedding, which apparently is tomorrow.  
So, rather than rest idle, we continued east, towards Lion's Arch, where they're holding the ceremony. It was a damned long-trek and we didn't stop much. The Lion's Road was clear enough, though, only had a little trouble with a small scattering of Grawl. We arrived somewhere after Dusk, and found a quiet corner to bed down for the evening where we should be out if the way until the morning. It's warm enough here anyway that we can just sleep on a pelt.  
  
I bumped into Sel right before, too, trawling the local pubs. Turns out her exile was lifted two years ago, and she's now welcome in Rata Sum again. I think we'll stay for the wedding, maybe spend a day in Lion's Arch itself. Could go to Southsun too, it's where Kristen and I met. After that, pass west again, to Rata Sum, see Kraxxi, before I wheel back to the keep before leave's end. Hoping Kristen's fine being towed around half the know world with me. She doesn't complain much, of course, the proud hunter.  
Anyway, we should be there just fine to see the wedding. I wonder who else will come along?

# 64th of Zephyr

Lion's Arch, outside Marriner's walls, overlooking the guns and bastions of the eastern battlements. More than two seasons past, I had the engineers rig up log bridges and improvised earthworks as an exercise. Not that long after, it is here we burned Rotarn's remains after his fall.  
Before that, longer ago, it is here where the Orrian risen tried to land before they were thrown back into the sea by the Vigil troops, mere days before the Pact would be formed. And even before that, when Marriner itself was just another circle of stones left to be what it was in the pirate's freehold, you could trade fresh catches from the bay for a mere handful of coppers. If you go further back, to before I was born, in the time of Hrun Iron-Eyes and Asgeir Dragonrender himself, this beach was not a beach at all, but would has lain on the flank of a shallow hill, watching as the waters washed over it when Orr rose again.  
Today, I am here with Kristen, in the setting sun over the old city, bathing the lime-washed stones of once-proud Krytan capital that has lost and recovered so much of it's dignity over the many years.  
Sometimes I wish I had mastery over time; I would make these moments last forever, and perhaps venture to see the glories of the past. I think that the people would be filled with joy knowing how far we can come in just a short period.  
  
We went to the wedding, which was a very human affair, all told. A lot of ceremony, speaking and embroidered dresses. It was good to see it through; Ema and Ross looked regal, and they make a fine pair. I'm sure they'll do fine, though I don't wish on them the life of a noble. Or at least, I hope they know better than to fall for it's many pitfalls, and they true to being good people first and foremost. Their kin should be safe, though, armed with kindness and gentleness on their mother's side, and the martial history of his father. Who knows, perhaps I will see chance to instruct a young Darksbane in his swordwork in a decade and some.  
  
There were plenty of the Chapter's folk in attendance, all better dressed than either Kristen and me, who just showed up as we are; me in armour, and she in her tracking garb. Drawback of running the distance through the long roads, I think. It mattered little, the collected finery of the noble attendees was ample enough to cover for us regardless. Kraxxi was there, Mire, Zara, Layfon, Alessa, Nirra, Raj, Sinclair, and a host of people I don't know. Best of all was the reception afterwards in the Crow's Nest. Kristen and I set to drinking kegs, and throwing the empty ones down into the city. Kristen didn't like all the talking much; I think she expected something a bit more brawny, like in the Peaks. I suspect if we'll ever collect witnesses to unify our legends before the spirits, we'll have to open it with a brawl (which I'll have to lose, I suspect).  
  
On that notion, Kristen caught the flowers, which I take is a good omen for us, as it suggests we are to wed next. Kristen's reluctant to settle down, of course, and I can't blame her. There isn't much to settle down for, considering I'll be out on the dragon fronts with the war, leaving Kristen to be alone for the majority of the time. She takes her time hunting and wandering, then, which I understand fully. It doesn't mean we don't leave eachother though, and I'd like nothing better than to spend as much time as I can with her. Spirits, if we didn't both realise how vital it is that we keep fighting, I think we'd have found something more permanent before now. I've made Kristen a promise to build her a dragon's lode before we decide to bind ourselves to any stretch of land; nothing less for us. We feat-bonded over a dragon hunt, we'll settle for nothing less, I wager.  
It fills me with a desire to go out and track one down, right now, so I can drag it back here, and we can become one in the stories and the tales.  
  
We'll see where we go tomorrow. I want to head to Rata Sum, where I've arranged to meet with Intergen Krewe, of whom Kraxxi is a part. I think we'll take the long way again, pass though Metrica on foot. There's something alluring about the wilderness anyway, and it pays to travel with a companion as keen-eyed as she is sharp-witted. That way, both the journey and the destination are their own reward. Besides, perhaps we'll find a stray dragon, and we'll raise that lodge anyway.

# 65th of Zephyr

Travelling west; towards Rata Sum. Largest leg of the journey done, but spirits, it's a long trek. We're now out Brisban way, in a place called Nemeton Grove. I think we passed through here on the march west to Resolve, right before the embarkation. The journey was quiet, only ran into a handful of hurdles. Some centaurs along the way, of course. I was looking forwards to breaking a few of the charges when a small raid pack decided to hold us over on the road. Kristen picked off three of them before they were even within a spear's throw, though. Rest of them decided it wasn't worth the effort after that, and broke off. Rest of Gendarran and Kessex was mostly clear running. One big spider the size of a Dolyak causing some problems with some Seraph nearer to the west. Group of three of them was darting in and out, trying not to get stung. We saw them down the road and rushed to help; it was put down easily enough after we battered it's head into mush. I think the Seraph were unlucky enough to disturb the nest, given they like to camp up in the caves around the area to police the marauding ponies a bit. Still, aside from some wounded, they'll live and learn.  
  
Brisban itself wasn't worth nothing, everything is calm. Well, I suppose there could've been a rampaging pack of minotaurs trampling around, I'd still have taught it was calm, compared to the Falls. Dead tired though, the distance packed a punch. Traversed half of Kryta in a dawn-to-dusk walk. They don't even make them that punishing in the Vigil, hah! Still, with Kristen, it's never much of an effort to keep walking. Keeps cajoling and teasing me to pick up the pace whenever I fall behind, though, which is enough for me to keep up with the woman. I'd damn her leopard-graced light gait if I didn't love her for it.  
Tomorrow, we'll continue through to Metrica and then south to Rata Sum. It's about half the distance of what we covered today, so we should be in Rata Sum soon enough. I do think we'll have to dip into our pockets for the trip back and use the gates, if I want to make the Vigil Keep in time.

# 66th of Zephyr

We arrived in Rata Sum around noon; last leg took us through Metrica and the Asuran outlands. Curious enough as it goes, dotting the area with labs and curious structures. Nothing for Kristen though, says that all the buildings ruins the wilderness and drive off the game. Can't disagree with her; we hardly saw anything that seemed native. We did get jumped by a rather big air elemental that just materialised in front of us. Lyralii and Kraxxi later mentioned it was probably a by product from some facility or other. We also ran across a malfunctioning golem that was rampaging around it's lab. Still, considering a trek through Metrica, we didn't run into too much trouble. Considering the Asuran propensity for hazardous research, only two bumps in the road is quite light, as travels go.  
  
We got to Rata Sum easily enough, and spent some time in Kraxxi's lab. As mentioned, Lyralii was also present, which resulted in particularly enjoyable chatter, as usual. Kristen enjoyed the verbal sport, though I think the location failed to charm her much. Her goads and prods made that obvious enough, though I made sure we settled in comfortably enough in the Vigil post with a keg to drink. The Peacemakers seemed tolerant enough, didn't once stop us. We managed to have a pleasant enough drink at one of the Asuran bars, trying their ooze-booze. It's an acquired taste, though not as bad as you'd expect, considering where it's from. Felt a bit like Ettin in a Canthan porcelain shop though. The actual counter didn't came up to my knees, and we were the only non-Asuran patrons. Also found out Lyralii has progeny; apparently I should have known that. Guess it slipped my mind.  
  
The actual tests were alright, they had me stand in my briefs under some sort of device. Almost felt as if they were going to zap me some more, much to the amusement of Kristen, of course. They found some recent damage in my lungs, in addition to the tissue scarring from when I got hit by that cannonball. The new ones are recent though, even though I don't think I took any chest injuries. The Asuran think it might be because of funal spores, though they assured me if it was overly malign I'd be dead already. Still, they loaded the data onto a crystal, which I'll hand over to Marcus when we get back to duty. He should be able to have a look at it. I seem healthy enough, for the most part, though, which is what I was concerned with primarily.  
They also put the Mordrem splinter under the loop; there's almost certainly something going on with the way it occasionally pulses, but they're sure enough it's not dangerous. I cut off a shard for them to keep and study, just in case something pops up. Until then, though, I think I'll start working it out into a shape. Maybe a blade, or a lance-tip. It'd be a mighty trophy, that, to go along with the others.  
  
Anyway, it was another long day, but a pleasant one. I'm glad I'm travelling with Kristen too, it's always pleasant, even when we're not out north. I do hope we'll deploy close to home after leave. Having an occasional visit from the huntress would go a long way to make up the two seasons we missed, beyond just these ten days.

# 67th of Zephyr

We left Rata Sum early enough, took the gate back to Lion's Arch after the evening meal. Still several days out before leave's end, so we weren't so sure how to spend the last three days. We thought about heading over east into Lornar's pass and maybe hunt the last few days away without straying too far. But then the lass had the bright idea to pass into Southsun for a day; it's where we met, after all, and after we destroyed that Karka hive, it's been somewhat quieter.  
  
Cost us a fair amount of coin, but it's not something we do everyday. It was oddly good to see Pearl Islet again; the white beeches and blue waters. We passed down the shore, and walked along the seaside for a wall; it was good to be there, with her. Of course, it wouldn't be Southsun, and we wouldn't be norn if there wasn't a hunt involved. We stumbled upon a rather large and colourful reef drake crested in blue scales. Easily the size of a Dolyak. We coaxed it into charging us, before slaying it. Kristen took a a handful of the most beautiful scales from the crest as trophies; I think they'll do her nicely. We found the creature's nest too, though we left that in peace. There were several healthy juvenile drakes that will grow, and perhaps provide a passing hunter with another worthy prey in a few seasons. One, the youngest of the litter, took to following Kristen around, for whatever reason. A rare gift from the spirit of Drake, I assume. I told her, Kristen Draketamer wouldn't have been a bad feat-name, if she did not already have such a strong one to her name.  
The critter is still around; I doubt Kristen will get rid of it, though. Maybe it'll take off back to it's nest overnight, though, you never know. If it's still here on the morrow, we should name it.  
  
Anyway, we continued along the beaches into the shallows, and cornered a couple of smaller Karka. Kristen's eye was good, as always, and we managed to kill a handful for the sport of it. One was a medium-sized female, probably a loner without a hive. We took the shells; they'll go a good way to paying for the trip, I figure, if Kristen finds some time to sell them on after I return to duty.  
  
We turned back to Pearl Islet after that, and soaked in the water for some time, laughing and swimming. It's an entirely different feeling from when we last were here, when the mind was never too far from the fighting. Now, everything was left loose. Ended with getting drunk on the sweet passion fruit drinks they serve here, and sleeping out on the beachside.

# 68th of Zephyr

Calm day. Not much to remark, so I'll keep it brief.  
We're in Lion's Arch; we only paid for a single day and night trip in Southsun, so we went back around noon, through the gate. Slept heavenly, still, on one of those little tents suspended over the water. You could hear the tide come in, and smell the salt of the seawater. Some lingering headache from the drink yesterday, and I had sand in places I don't even know existed, but a morning swim took care of that. Kristen's adopted reef drake is still following us, and Kristen's decided to call if Daufi and keep it as a pet. Gifts like that aren't scorned; besides, it's an exotic and impressive enough critter as they go. It'll grow fast too, if drakes are anything to go by. Kristen'll make good on keeping it fed on fish and meat, I'm sure.  
  
She gave me one of the blue scales, so we each have one to remind us of our time here.  
We spent the rest of the day lazying about Lion's Arch, visiting the markets and breathing in the atmosphere of the city. Kristen traded away the shells, and we roasted fish fresh from the catch over a fire between the rocks past the memorial gardens. I'm not sure what we'll do on the morrow, but I have to return to the keep the day after already. It all depends what Kristen feels like doing, I think. Perhaps pass by the Priory, see if they have anything of note on reef drakes for Kristen to take home.  
If not, we can make an early road to the keep.

# 69th of Zephyr

Last day of leave, before we're all back into the thick of it. Started early enough as it was, but that's not problematic. We passed by the Grove through the gates after noon, paying for the transit costs in order to visit Athy and Mithra with the menders. They're both doing well, though they're both getting antsy about being idle, as you can expect. At least it seems they'll be making a full recovery; Mithy'll be back in about fourteen days, Athy will be out about forty; so probably twenty days into next season before we'll see her using a bow again.  
Mithra's also decided to pass over to a more armoured style of fighting, given she got injured after fighting on the frontlines last time. Armour will help with that too. I'm more worried letting her get into the thick of the fighting might not be entirely helpful with her anger issues. We'll see how it plays out, though. If anything, she'll have to work on her swordwork.  
  
Regardless, we had a pleasant enough time; the Grove is quiet and verdant as always, lit by the odd luminescence they all seem to have in common, and the lasses are in good hands. Still, trawling through the Magus Falls for two seasons certainly means I'm not exceptionally inclined to hang around the place. I'm hoping we'll be sent out into the Shiverpeaks for duty the coming days, rather than any place either sandy of overgrown. We had one run in with a rather awkward Sylvari looking for someone; he got chased off by the Wardens halfway through, mind, which spells nothing good.  
  
Traveled back to the Keep in early evening, through the gate at Lion's Arch and then the familiar walk through Applenook and the fields of Gendarran. They're almost like home now, mind, but it's always a stretch that I loath walking with Kristen, because I know she's likely to walk back the same road on her own while I'm left at the keep with my duties, until the next time we have leave. For one last evening, though, she's staying at the keep, until tomorrow at the very least, when we're supposed to muster back to duty.  
  
Wasn't the only one back at the keep; Aghi and Sjöfn were loafing about. Surprised to see most of us at the keep were norn, I'll have to say. Both are doing well, as far as things go. Nirrae is also back, working on a pet-project about the Chak. She's apparently been working on one of the samples Marcus got back, researching the way they harness magic. She's set up a workbench over at the forge for her experiments. From what I understand, it's mostly safe as far as magical research go, though it clearly betrays her past in the Priory. I suppose I should technically reprimand her for talking a free run with her own pet-project, but I doubt it'll matter overly. If anything, it might provide valuable results even the Priory had missed, who knows.  
  
Also spoke to Marcus briefly; we're getting a number of recruits tomorrow, and the cooks are being merged with the supplies. Fine by me. We're also shifting head chef away from me to Raj and Alessa, given I'll be dealing with the engineering corps more thoroughly this time around. If we get some room for training, I'll be sure to go over the basic duties of Vigil engineering, and at least qualify every member as a formal Pact Ballistician before we end up in a desperate warzone again.  
  
There's also this one recruit who managed to make a tremendous ass out of himself by attempting to hug Knight Marcus. The sort of soldier who thinks he knows it all, but ends up short of the damned mark, too. Nothing left but to exhaust him and drive home that these aren't the Charr Legions. This is the Vigil.  
Bah. Well, we'll see what tomorrow brings. Now I'm going to hug Kristen until I fall asleep.

# 70th of Zephyr

First day of duties again, with the typical amount of head-worries already surfacing. We'll see how it all turns out, of course, but the first signs of trouble are already brewing. But, I'll get to that in a bit.  
  
Kristen left early in the morning, after a heartfelt goodbye. I've promised to write her in Hoelbrak once I know where we're going, so she can see if it's worth stalking us along the way or not. If it turns out we're hunting out for another dragon, I'm sure she wouldn't be able to resist. I know there's still some of the plaguing some areas of Tyria. Who knows, if I'm lucky, I can raise that dragon-lodge we keep half-joking about, and find myself a new home on one of the war-fronts.  
  
Anyway, as it stands, we don't know yet. We got introduced back into service, and a boat-load of recruits arrived to fill in the gaps. Promotions too; Grimstone, Seleea and Wynn made the cut, though I'm unsure if the former has what it takes. He's been with us, sure, but he's not nearly disciplined enough to truly make the Crusader grade. Saint Clair also got First Crusader for Lance, which... well. He's got the spine and fortitude, but I don't know if he has the sensibility or the heart. I remember Kath having to slap him about for being too single-minded. Ah well. I suppose we'll see what they make of it. Rather a lot of First Crusaders now, mind.  
  
Got a new knight for Lance too, a norn woman called Maeva. Lion's Arch norn mind, so less connected to the wild as some, I figure. Seemed alright enough, though she didn't speak too much. Handled her business alright, though, I suppose.  
The new recruits are a more troubled tangle. We had a chance to meet some of them over a heart meal Raj and Alessa conjured up; not bad for their first stint as cooks without me looking over their shoulders. I think they'll do just fine. The recruits; Force is back, though he hardly qualifies. Good to see him again, though. He brought his kin, a Charr lad called Scar Blackshield. There's a human girl, Rosalie Chen, I think it was, and then Seleaa and Nirrae got oathed in properly. Sel, of course, becoming a ranked Crusader *before* being actually oathed in proper. Only with Asura.  
  
The Charr though... We'll need Dolyak's own endurance to bear with them. Both Force's kin, Scar, and that Geran hothead are already feuding over Raj's tail, what with Grim no longer in the picture. Pretty badly too, to the point that I feel Raj needs to claw it out of their heads. Damned Charr; they come from the Legions, and they have about as much discipline as an Asuran progeny with a toy-golem. We'll have our hands full with it.  
That, and Daghar and Rel got into sparring, which ended up with the former breaker the latter's jaw. So much for the rule about not going for headshots.  
To sum it up, day one; two Charr recruits are already brawling over mating rights with our field chef, and a third Charr had his face busted inwards with a mace.  
As a result, all spars have been suspended, unless as an exercise.  
  
I also handed Marcus the crystal I got from Kraxxi and Lyralii, in case he finds something worth noting.  
  
Aside from that... well... I suppose it's good to be back.  
Another couple of days of leave wouldn't have hurt though, my bunk feels painfully empty already.

# 71st of Zephyr

Training day, unarmed combat. Went out to slug out some punches with Aghi, but a nasty cough stopped me from being able to hit up the rate I wanted. Just got this itch in my breaths, and a some tightness in the chest. I hope it's just the old cannon wound acting up, rather something worse. I'll admit, that crystal Kraxxi made has me worried, I hope Marcus finds the time to look it over for me. The spar went poorly, of course, as a result, because I had to pause every few strikes to cough up the itch. Not as bad as some of the others, mind, apparently Geran managed to forget himself while fighting Lorma and went down into some sort of rage. Reminds me a little too much of the hot-head Rel, but worse. We escorted him to medical, though I have a feeling that if he doesn't shape up, he's not going to do very well with us.  
  
Aside from that, we apparently had another group of recruits show up; one Asura I didn't get a chance to speak with, a norn lass called Kalla Stonefist, from the Lions, and Rioleth, the Sylvari that accompanied Dhianni to the Silverwastes almost... two seasons ago. His experiences in the jungle has lead him our way, which I think is a good and noble decision to make.  
  
Asides from that, most the day passed ordinarily enough, without too much of the Charr making fools of themselves, aside from Geran. Rel's up and around, though he can't say anything with his jaw all set. It's a bit like when I got smacked by that abomination in Orr. It'll be a couple of odd days, that's for sure. Nothing we can't deal with, though. Maybe he can learn some sign language from Daghar.  
  
Looking to see what happens tomorrow; I might take the engineers out for a small exercise otherwise, see how they do. That Kalla I mentioned asked to sign on with the engineers; never built a bridge, though. Surprising, Lion's Arch used to be filled with old rickety bridges that collapsed half the time. Ah well, maybe we'll get them to build a bridge on the morrow, then.

# 72nd of Zephyr

Another day at the keep, relatively quiet. Took the engineers out for lumber duty; if we're to cover the basics, best start at the very bottom. Now, at least, they're able to provide lumber from a forest without too much of a hassle. Given most of Tyria sports some form of tree, that's a handy skill to have. Probably take it a step further, and make them perform actual constructions of some sort. Once that's done, we can move over to demolitions and ballistics. The last might come early, though, as we've been apparently issued field gun on a carriage. Same sort of short-barrel squat gun they use on airship broadside decks. Propels a nice and fat cannon ball on a conventional powder charge. Not horribly accurate at long range, but something that packs a wallop to punch through fortifications and the like. Now we have it, it stands to reason we ensure we've got the people to operate it.  
  
For the rest, it was a quiet day. Geran was making a racket, as per bloody usual.  
Apparently there's something planned tomorrow with the new knight; time to see what sort of wood she's carved from.

# 73rd of Zephyr

In medical. Turns out the itch in my longs was some sort of infection that knocked me about. Had me up in a cough all night, and I all-but collapsed during the patrol earlier. One of Kraxxi's golems had to support me on the way back. We'd come through some tunnels with Dredge, and some trolls, then I just felt my knees burn, and my strength drain. Had to sit down constantly. Marcus said something about something in my blood being low. He took a blood sample and was going to do some tests. I'm worried, though I feel marginally better after some vials from Marcus.  
  
Someone also collapsed half the keep earlier, when I was asleep. I heard the rumble, thought a ship was crashing into us. Turns out someone dislodged a support on the heavy construction works, undid... tremendous amounts of work from the Vigil builders.  
I'd have a look at the damage myself, but I'm not getting up very easily. Think I'll sleep. Hopefully, some rest will do good.

# 74th of Zephyr

Felt better after a night's sleep; or at least good enough to stand on my feet, wear my armour, and report for today. Didn't feel like getting left behind at the keep anyway, so that might have sped up the healing too. Either way, the vials helped, and my itch is much less pronounced. It's still there, but I only need to cough if I take really deep breaths, or have to run. Thankfully, not a combat assignment just yet; we're moving into the cities for a recruitment drive.  
  
Also turns out that the collapse yesterday was pretty major, Force and Geran broke a support spar on the keep's construction works and dropped a good chunk of the scaffolding down, along with plenty of masonry. Nothing that can't be fixed, thankfully, but still. They're likely in for a fair amount of punishment for negligence during sparring. I've offered to attach them to the engineers and finding the nearest quarry; make them dig up rocks, while I teach the actual gear-heads how to dig through stone. Pity we're going all the way to Ebonhawke, the quarries there would be perfect; hand them both off to an Ascalonian taskmaster with a grudge against Charr that'll work them to the bone.  
  
Anyway, we're in Hoelbrak now, a chance encounter to be back home for a day. The cold air does good on my lungs too, crisp enough to burn away the itch, and clear my nose too. We listed up near the Vigil billet, right up next to the Great Lodge, where we remained visible, showing the best of us. At least, when Geran doesn't feel the need to yell and howl like some sort of animal. That Charr is so... base, I'm not surprised he was lobbed out of the Legions. Even the Blood Legion has standards.  
Aside from him making the rest of us look like idiots by beating his chest, it was a good day. We went down to the boasting hall, and joined the ongoing moot. Or at least, that's what I did with Kalla and Aghi. We told some good tales; I had them commemorate Marthe's last moments, which drew a heartfelt toast to her enduring memory. I would've told many tales, but we were ushered out by the new knight soon enough. Also not allowed to drink, which hardly impressed the locals, I can tell tell you that.  
  
I ran into a gatherer, whom I met out in Black Haven, with the Chapter there on the road west, almost two seasons ago. I remember being willing to negotiate with her for some vegetables in my role as cook, but we got marched off before I had time to make good on the transaction. Apparently, she waited for me, and was slighted when I didn't return, which wouldn't stand. I repaid her by offering her ale as truce, which I allowed myself to break regulation for briefly, as well as introducing her to Athel, so she could potentially still make a good sale to the Chapter supplies. It turned out well, too, Athel managed to negotiate her into a long-term supply deal to our stocks, with a good percentage to boot. Now the lass has a steady costumer that buys in bulk, and we have a good supply from someone who knows what they're doing. And, I got to whet my throat, in my own city, while on duty. Can't ask for more.  
  
Well I could, but unfortunately Kristen wasn't there, neither was Freyja or Usha. Unfortunate, but not uncommon. I suspect Kristen is out hunting. Freyj, I know was around with Grace, but they're probably doing their own thing, or even went back to the Priory. Usha is still away, along with Fuse. It's been a long time since I've seen my sister, now, and I miss her. I did bump into Hrist, who was in good spirits and still goes around the lodges, both literally and figuratively. Still cuts a good shape too, that woman, I have to admit. Kristen's more buxom, though with the endless grace of Leopard's stride. Ah, you norn women of strong spirit, wide hips and cozy bosoms, the true heroes of the north.  
Turns out that Hrist's kin, Hildr has been missing out the fronts, though. Was with the Vigil, which means I was the right person to ask. I've passed it to the Warmaster; hopefully we'll at least know if she lives, died or is missing. As soon as I know, I will let Hrist know. She'd do the same for me, after all.  
  
For the rest, we attracted some attention. The mercenaries and hunters at the moot welcomed us, and we ran into some troops from a punishment unit of some sorts. Apparently here under guidance, looking to see the warmaster, whom they knew from before. Long-time soldier, one called Darkbow. Saw plenty of fights, even was in the same campaigns as I was at times. Orr '25, and Orr '28, as well a Maguuma. Apparently did something bad that landed him with the disciplinary corps, which is now shipping him all over the hot-zones. The warmaster later spoke with him at length, if not as old friends, then certainly with respect.  
  
Afterwards, the officers and I, alongside with Athelstan, had a nice and long talk, discussing all manner of things informally, and speaking our minds. It was good. And I mean not just on a career-level, but it was good to speak to these people with whom I work, and I might cautiously consider to be friends, doubly so to be able to do it here, of all places. Both the Chapter and Hoelbrak have long been home, now. It was good to finally unify those two. Besides, it was a chance to speak with the new knight a bit. I realise I haven't seen her without the helmet yet, which spikes my curiosity. I might have to ask her, next time I see the chance.  
  
I've headed off to Leopard's lodge, with permission, to bed down here. Maybe Kristen comes back by chance, and I'll wake up to a pleasant surprise. If not, we'll be heading to the Grove tomorrow, which means I'll get a chance to visit the flowers again. Probably drag several of the Chapter along when doing so, pay them a surprise visit which I hope will brighten their day.  
  
Oh, I almost forgot, with everything going on. Kraxxi decided to take a break. Blade Chapter, with whom she served in the past, is getting detained en masse for the destruction caused by the rogue elements. That's why Dhagar was at the keep that first day. Kraxxi's decided to focus all her energy towards clearing their name, which I can only wholeheartedly encourage. Such loyalty is honourable and noble, and I hope she succeeds.  
Until the time she returns, I have been given use of the golem, Dave. I'm not entirely sure if she left it behind so I could make use of it, or it's actually here to make sure we - or I- don't do anything too stupid. Either way, I'll miss the Golemancer. Let's hope it's not permanent.

# 75th of Zephyr

My cough is back, making me tired. We've been running up and down the Grove's many levels all day, trying to bring the Sylvari to join the cause, but it's been mostly wasted breath, I think. They're a good lot, but if the Wyld Hunt has not called them to us already, I doubt us trampling around the place will incite them towards joining us. The Grove is a place of beauty, but I could never quite shake the sense of strangeness that comes from having everything grown around you. It's hard to think of it as the one single creature it is. No doubt the Pale Tree guides them all; but it is too easy to forget she -or it- isn't just a glowing Sylvari, but the entire growth around us. It's easy to see how they all call her 'mother'; they all walk along the walls of her womb, where they're kept safe. I think that for Sylvari 'leaving' home might be much more literal than any of us could imagine; it is to literally leave their mother's embrace, and willingly expose themselves to the terrors outside.  
  
I took some time to visit the flowers, again. They're bettering quickly, and I guess it was a nice surprise to see me. They also had a visit from another Sylvari called Aoife, whom I think we saw out in Sparkfly, way back. Athy's old warden captain, if I recall correctly. The name didn't click until the second time it was said; it's this one that the strange Sylvari was asking about, last time I was there with Kristen. The one that got chased off by the Wardens before I could ask his name. Turns out, he might have been a Nightmare Courtier, or something. Chilling though; makes me wish I had Kristen shoot him as he ran past; the lass could've popped an arrow into his noggin, even at a dead run, I'm sure. Seems an odd confluence of circumstances, if anything, but I'm rather on my guard.  
I'm sort of happy the flowers weren't on their feet to see the Chapter, though...  
  
We had to arrest two of the Charr, which isn't damn surprising. Geran, of course, and Rajani, which is surprising. The damned hot-blood also attempted to suborn me in front of the troop; as if that was going to fly, idiot. He's doing a good job of burning bridges with virtually everyone of any importance with his continued obstinate and moronic antics, not least among them both knights. Regardless, we found Rajani and Geran brawling like a pair of savages, after the former got herself half-way to the Citadel and back on whiskey. Geran, rather than alerting us immediately, tried to take away Raj's drink, which resulted in a brawl. Thankfully, Rioleth came and ran to get us soon enough, so Maeva and I were able to set it straight. They're both in lock-up for now, though I had to separate them again, after they once more failed to keep their distance.  
I swear, I'd geld the idiot, so he could finally understand that this isn't a place to look for a damned mate, this is the Vigil. Bah.  
I'm more concerned about Rajani; as far as I can tell, Raj is usually one of the more even-tempered Charr. I wonder why she took to heavy drinking at all, especially knowing that drinking on duty is heavily frowned upon, doubly while on recruitment duty, when we're supposed to be at our best.  
This isn't our best. Not by a long shot.  
  
Ah well. I did manage to ask the Knight if she could take off her helm; but she's decided to be coy about it, and 'reserve it for a special occasion'. My bet's on fire red, though. I suppose making it a betting pool can't be too bad of an idea, give us something to laugh about, too. Besides, nothing like a good soldier's bet to put a new officer through the paces!  
We're on the move again tomorrow; I hope it's just the pollen in the air causing my cough again, and it'll pass either overnight, or when we shift camp. If it doesn't, I'm going to pass by Marcus again, see if he can't give me some more medicine to abate it. I'd like to at least function somewhat; no use if walking around for half a day makes me too tired to stand.  
I'll try and catch some sleep, that always helps.

# 76th of Zephyr

Marched off to the Citadel. Cough didn't get better, but Marcus gave me some more medicine, keep it suppressed. He's waiting on some sort of apparatus before he can have a look at my blood. For now, it's a persistent sense of tiredness and the feeling something is itching at the back of my throat.  
  
The recruitment tour went... alright. The Charr are a belligerent and hostile race that should take a page out of the norn book about hospitality. If I wasn't under orders, I'd have beaten one or two jaws in for being a bunch of furry simpletons. You'd expect that, with the Legions backing the Pact, they'd be a little less territorial about things. As it stands, I've got a warband that I'd like to use for target practice in my off time. Luckily, though, it seems even the troublemakers were looked down on by the other Charr, and the rest was comparatively smooth. Even had one or two interested ones.  
  
The Citadel itself is about as strange and alien as the Grove is to me. Here, everything is made of metal; everything. The road under your feet, the walls, every inch is a odd jumble of welded metal plate and juts of steel, all slapped together with no sense of beauty or uniformity. It is, without a doubt, the ugliest place I've ever been, but, in it's extreme, it is beautiful. It's a dedication, a monument to the brutality and ugly race that they are; something which they have embraced. The big 'citadel' itself, the orb, was not as impressive as I had imagined. It looks like an overly hard throw of a keg will send it rolling away. The sprawl around is impressive, though. They keep trophies, like the great Storm Caller horn they took from the ruins of the city that stood here before, Rin. It looks like something my kin would've made, great and ornate. Pity it was broken, I would have loved to empty my lungs through it. Perhaps, if I ever find a beast big enough, I'll make my own.  
They also have a great road, flanked by the formed darksteel statues of their heroes. Not triumphant like Stegalkin's work, but menacing and threatening, looming over the road like titans. The great foundry, too, is a sight, because the sheer scale of it is breathtaking. They are melting down untold thousands of tonnes worth of steel, and refashioning it for their war machine, boiling away the impurities. It is staggering. Now, I don't find it as hard to believe when the Charr say that every third weapon on a weapon rack anywhere in Tyria was forged in the foundries of a reclaimed Ascalon.  
And yet, I now hope that they never rule anything but their own land; it is a violation of nature. They'd spoil the Shiverpeaks, and turns the snow black with ash and soot. While I am impressed by the might of their species, I am also shocked by how ill they must be. It is no wonder a society like this produces creatures like Geran, and I can only agree with Usha when she says the Charr would have been a far more noble race, if they had followed the ways of my kin.  
  
Touching upon Geran, he only go threatened once today, and by some mangy Charr from some warband. We had to roll out a small field-gun to warn away the stupid and overzealous. I'm surprised, considering, it didn't end up with at least one fight or brawl. Can't wait to move on, though. Not a place I will return to anytime soon, either.

# 77th of Zephyr

Moved over to Rata Sum. Quick tour, not much to remark.  
Seems Calder rejoined us again, which I think is odd at best. Wonder where he went, and why he suddenly appeared with us again. Ah well.  
  
Apprently the golem, Dave, ran into some weird programming hitch. It spotted some Inquest, another golem came rumbling out, exchanged some data, and then Dave took off. The other golem followed around for some time, getting people worried. Turns out it's another one of Kraxxi's, on some sort of guard routine. Figure Dave picked up the Inquest, went into an alert state, and dashed off to report that, with the other one being activated and tasked to guard us. Knight Maeva sent it back to Kraxxi's Intergen krewe, out six hours in Metrica. Guess she wasn't comfortable with an unknown golem, even one of Kraxxi's, hanging around us.  
  
That's about it, though, as far as incidents have been going. I got given some sort of drink that's made me feel ill. I think Marcus' medicine is fading off again, because I'm nauseous and tired again, with a constant headache. He'd have results from the blood today, he said, so I hope we can get rid of it once and for all now.  
I'll see where we end up tomorrow. Probably the Reach, followed by Lion's Arch.

# 78th of Zephyr

In the Reach, another recruiting tour. It's been going steadily, working our way through the cities, attracting people's attention. They don't seem to respond too well, though, which is a little disappointing. People seem to forget we're the Vigil, not just some army. It's depressing to see how people think we're there to occupy or threaten them when we're not. Spirits, we're here to find people willing to join us, so they can help us save the bloody world from the Elder Dragons.  
  
Anyway, we're staying here tomorrow as well, try to see if we can't attract any more recruits. The way it's going, though we've been doing well. We might be back to our full fighting strength, like before Southsun. I don't doubt that plenty won't make the cut, however, but still. Hopefully the Pact pulls together, and we can keep going forwards, rebuild, and strike out against the next dragon.  
  
For the rest, it's been almost like a leave day. Wandering the Reach, going for pub to pub and talking to the locals, convincing them to leave behind whatever they're doing, and sign on with the Vigil.  
  
I still feel horrible. It's like having a weight press down on my chest, and I keep coughing up slime. I want to know what Marcus found out, and if we can't do anything about it. I doubt I can go into the field with shot lungs.

# 79th of Zephyr

I am badly ill. I keep coughing up slime that smells and tastes of sickness. I don't think it's been this bad since I had stomach-fevers as a child. I don't know what it is, but I'm getting seriously worried, and I'm not alone. The others see me cough, and they're worried that I'm dying, or something. I think I might have caught something, somewhere. I'm still waiting for Marcus to finish testing my blood, so he can tell me what is going wrong. But for now, I feel like I'm breathing sandpaper; it hurts my lungs, and I can feel it in my chest, too.  
  
We're, thankfully, still at the Reach, signing on more people every day. It's a pity I don't feel as well as I do, or I would have given them a grander welcome. I took the engineers our for mining work out the Divinity Dam quarry, but ended up regretting it. It didn't help my breath much, the stone dust just made me want to cough more.  
  
I'm too tired to keep writing much more. My chest hurts, and my head feels like there's Jotun stomping around in it.

# 80th of Zephyr

Hm, long day passed, and I'm tired. Still not better, but at least, it doesn't feel like it's getting worse. I'm coughing up slime, and even walking extended distances tires me out. Thankfully, we're still not deploying, and moved to Marriner in Lion's Arch. It'll be another couple of days at the very least before we decided to march onward, which is excellent. Gives me a chance to recover.  
  
Anyway, for the day's account;  
We started off badly enough, first thing I hear from Rioleth and Geran is that the latter got into some sort of discussion with another Charr called Arangar or something, who is apparently Rajani's mate. Rioleth was smart enough to watch the lad, and make sure to cool him down, which might actually have saved Geran's career as a soldier. Or at least made sure the ship didn't sink yet. Matters got worse when I dragged them both to the billet and this Arangar was making his complaints to the warmaster. Thankfully, he's learning, albeit slowly, and largely shut his trap while the warmaster dealt with it. I don't think I've even wanted to punch both sides of an argument this much since... well, I can't recall, too tired. We had Arangar escorted out to make a point about closing ranks, and Geran got another stern reprimand. Apparently the entire thing happened because Geran and Arrangar are familiar with eachother; with Raj in the mix, it only got more volatile.  
  
To make matters worse, Rioleth, Geran and Rajani all missed muster call and showed up late. We had to send Lorma and Layfon to fetch them; this is not acceptable and must be remedied. I'm doubly disappointed in Rajani who should have known better as a Crusader. At least in recruits you can blame it on them being recruits, and not paying as much attention as they should be. For a Crusader... well, it smacks of a lack of motivation and dedication. Two things you really, really need to keep going in the Vigil, or you might as well go home. The recruits; well, they'll live and learn. I have high hopes for Rioleth, he's a valiant, and more importantly, good man at heart. If anything, I'm worried he might be too good for the Vigil, rather than the other way around.  
  
Anyway, yes, we're at Marriner station, which is familiar enough. We did our usual patrol rounds for recruits, and ended up with several on our hands. We've got the two folks, the Darkbows, from the penal regiment we met in Hoelbrak. They're arranged to sign over to us, which is a damn sight better than slaving away in a punishment battalion. Rui Bossa and Maxson, two humans from the Reach, who seem decent enough in their boots, and a Sylvari sapling called Ystynn that seems to have latched to Mithra.  
Oh, right, I forgot to mention yesterday, Mithra's rejoined us, looking well. It's odd to think she's now a senior Crusader, considering the large amount of recruits that have been flooding in, but that's the way it is. As it stands, I'm fine with letting her handle the sapling, never hurts. They were oathed in group again, which I always think is a good thing. Galvanises the experience and gives it some more meaning; I just hope they remember their oaths, it's an important part of their new duties.  
  
As for my illness, I've talked to the warmaster about my concerns about being unfit for duty if it doesn't let up. We'll see what Marcus says, though, if I'm lucky it'll blow over before long and I'll be fit as a fiddle. If not, well, I don't know. I suppose I could always stay in Lion's Arch and then travel up to the last known posting when I'm better. Oh, that reminds me, I should write a letter to Kristen that I'm in Lion's Arch. Who knows, maybe she can visit before we move on. Might be worth it if I really come down with the illness; she'll want to see me then, I think.  
Also asked about Hrist's kin, Hildr, though there's no response back from Resolve on that yet.  
  
The evening was great, though, I had some ration ale in the Vigil bar with Kalla, who I've been starting to call Lionhead for the account of her messy blonde hair and her prior affiliation to the Lionguard. Good enough talk, though she likes her joking too much. I'm keeping it clear though that it's just social talk with kin, and nothing else. Can't have the wrong ideas surfacing. I'll tell you that, Maeva and Kalla do well to surround me with impressive norn woman that don't mind making the right jokes, but Kristen's got my heart securely tangled in her hair. If you're reading this on a suspicious evening, sweet, don't worry your sweet red-striped arse, and put away the bow! I love ye, lass.  
  
I'm planning on doing an exercise with the engineers and some volunteers tomorrow, get them to work on the beach again. But, to prevent such nonesense as previous from happening, I've made sure Kalla greases the right palms beforehand. If we've got someone who knows how to make sure the whole of Lion's Arch goes deaf and blind to our work for an evening, might as well put them to use. I'm secretly also hoping to draw some of the recruits to the engineers; I could use the workforce.  
  
That wasn't all, though. We were later joined in the pub by Maeva and Athel, which had us a good laugh. We upped the bet about the knight's hair to five silver and a bottle of wine, red and blonde for me, raven and brown fro Kalla. Maeva, Athel and I started talking about seafood, and decided, since we're still on recruitment, to go out to that one cave-bar, and have ourselves a fried octopus with lemon, and a good drink of rum alongsides it. Grand idea, that, it was great fun, and we had a lot of good talk. Learned a fair bit about both, too.  
And, perhaps odd, ended up netting another recruit at the midnight dinner table! Some human of Elonian descent called Valhidi, totting about with a Hyena. He seemed cordial enough, older fellow with experience, though he smells of idleness and exaggerated wealth. We'll see if he does well in the field, where his status means little, and he's the same rank as Geran.  
I do pity the recruits that.  
  
Actually, I lie. Geran, for all his numerous flaws, is still one of us, and I am duty-bound to try and make him into a better soldier. He's not well-liked, but he's a Vigil soldier, if we want it or not, and until he gives up or shapes up, we will fight alongside him. After all, the dragons doesn't care if we like each other. If I'm feeling better, I'll ask to have the lad sent over as my trainee. Roeland shaped up to be a better soldier than many would give him credit for, let alone than what they expected when they still called him Roeland the Coward. I'm if we do our best, and the lad doesn't decide to quit or plays away his last chance, we can mold him into something useful.  
  
Bah, I'm dead tired, but I want to write this letter to Kristen. And to Kraxxi! She wrote me, after heading off to help Blade Chapter. It's lengthy enough, describing how high tensions are. The Pact has been impounding parts of her research and funding too, which doesn't help much. I can only imagine how frustrating that is for an Asura. Well, I do sincerely hope she succeeds in her task.  
But I will be penning letters now, before my candle runs out!

# 81st of Zephyr

Still don't feel well.  
  
Engineers did exercise, went well enough. One new engineer signee, that Trevor Maxson. Had them build a bridge, helped by some volunteers. Sel had field team lead, which she did well enough. The bridge didn't hold nearly well enough to qualify as decent engineering, but it survived long enough for me and Force to cross, but then collapsed under Maxson. Which, if course, has only lead to us all agreeing Maxson weighs heavier than Force's giant steel-plated behind.  
  
The evening went well enough; it's best spent with kin, as always. Lionhead and the Knight, making the usual jokes and cracking on about various things. Makes me think of how it was when Sana and I used to mope about the field kitchen when I signed on. Missing Kristen, of course. Somehow the sudden influx of norn faces only helps to reinforce how much I miss her being around. But, I sent her that letter. Maybe she'll show up, who knows.  
  
I'm feeling worse for wear. The coughs are getting worse, and I get tired so easily from doing even the slightest effort. Like I'm five again, and barely able to list Old Haakon's axe. I got winded from lifting a box earlier. A box.  
There's also pains in my chest with every breath, but I don't want to worry anyone overly. They're already fuzzy enough about the whole thing; I'm starting to think that this might actually kill me, or put me under for a rather unpleasant amount of days. Marcus... well, I still haven't seen him.  
  
I hope he's not evading me because it's fatal.  
Spirits, I hope it's not fatal. Or, if it is, that Kristen really did get my letter.

# 82nd of Zephyr

Another day, another cough. It's getting rough with the illness, having difficulty sleeping, and I'm pretty sure I have a fever. Marcus finally came back with my blood results, though, turns out I have something low in my white blood, and that it's causing an infection to go rampant in my lungs, potentially because of something I ate or drank. I don't know. Apparently it's why I'm getting sick now, rather than just walking it off.  
He did something with a big needle, which he jabbed in my back to extract some blood. Stung like a motherfucker. The Rioleth did something strange with his magic, apparently to jolt my bad blood better. Then they injected it back in. I din't feel any better yet, and now I have a pain in my back where they jabbed that needle. But, apparently my white blood will be back to normal in a couple of days, which is good, I think. They'll have to monitor me, because they apparently don't really know if it'll work. Until I'm better, I'm also pulled from field duty, though I'm allowed to walk around. I don't know how long I'll be out, truth be told, but apparently I might well die if it doesn't work.  
I guess it's good not to dwell on that too much. I've sent Kristen a letter, I hope she visits, just in case.  
  
On a more cheerful note, the restriction on sparring was lifted, so I took some of the recruits out on the beach for some exercise. Most of them did fairly well, all in all, and there's a lot of good potential in them. Most of them are probably itching for a real fight by now, but what can you do. I hope that their first deployment will be suitably gentle, so they can get used to fighting under our colours. Who knows, maybe command will find us a suitably heroic but not overly arduous task, and we can turn some of these recruits into Crusaders before long. Some of them will certainly make the grade if they keep up their enthousiasm. Others, I don't.  
  
Geran, who is becoming an annoyingly persistent present in my fieldbook and the disciplinary notes both, did another goof. Decided to pick up Ystynn, and shake her around in some sort of Charr initiation ritual from the Legions. Despite repeated warnings not to do so. Again. And again. I brought the matter before the Warmaster, who decided to gloss over the repeated infractions and issue him a warning. It'll have to do; I wish I could keep up my willingness to turn him into a good soldier, but spirits alive, he doesn't listen very well. You'd think that having four ears would help, but it doesn't. Bah!  
  
But yeah, the operation and the entire thing around it meant I spent the day in medical, and the evening sitting down, trying not to move too much. I had a surprising good talk with Mithra, who has befriended Ystynn, another Sylvari sapling. Rioleth joined us two, which was about the closest you can get to being surrounded by a sentient garden, I suspect. It was good, though, they managed to find me a norn-sized mug of mead, and Rioleth made tea. I swear, that man isn't a death mage, he's a tea mage. He could make a crafter's legend in Hoelbrak with those brews, I tell you. I might need to get Usha to talk him into making a herbal mix for a good strong drink; those two could rival Bear's Brown, if they tried, I reckon!  
  
The rest of the Chapter went out on some domestic hunt, I hear it, looking for smugglers. In a city like Lion's Arch, seems a bit of a fool's errand. I'd say like a needle in a haystack, but it's more like a needle in a needle-stack, considering half the city probably smuggles something or other. They picked a few prisoners up, and I think I heard something about a Lionguard passing by.  
I'm sort of happy I wasn't up for that, sectioning off the city and sending out patrol pairs to comb through the city alley by alley isn't exactly fun or exciting. The amount of ground to cover is always a pain.  
Wonder why the Lionguard didn't go after them; I think it's something about Pact wreckage or other.  
  
Either way, I'm ill, out for the count for a couple of days in the very least. I wonder what Marcus' treatment will do.

# 83rd of Zephyr

Sick. Slept most of the day.  
Don't know what Marcus did, but I don't feel well.  
  
Fever. I'm going to sleep more.

[There is a rough line drawn under the number '84', but it contains nothing legible.]

# 86th

Missed a day.  
Still sick, though a little better. Fever still.  
  
Had some people visit. It was nice talking. Tiring, though, mind. Still, easier to track time if they can tell me what day it is.

# 89th of Zephyr

Feeling considerably better now, though I'm still sick. I keep coughing up slime, but at least there's no more blood in it, and I can breath without feeling like someone is trying to stab me. Clearer head too, though it still feels like I'm too slow, and everyone else is going just a fraction too fast for me to follow.  
  
I heard there's some manner of memorial service tomorrow. I'll try and see if I can't convince Marcus to give me a crutch to lean on, so I can hobble along. A bit of exercise won't hurt either I think, my legs feel weak from lying in bed too long.

# 90th of Zephyr

Spirits, where to even begin...  
I got out of medical today, because I felt better. Well, it doesn't feel like better anymore, I might have overworked myself out of enthousiasm. I'm in bet now, my lungs burning with every breath, and every muscle in my body is aching with exhaustion. What a long, long day.  
  
I first got up to join the memorial thing they had announced: apparently the remembrance for Scarlet's attack, three years ago. I'm happy I missed that; I was at sea, then, with everyone. Or at least, I was trying to come back from the disaster that turned out to be for all of us. It was nice enough; some Asura read some sort of poetry that would make any self-respecting Skaald stand up and walk away in disgust. Marcus did a better job at that, giving a brief but powerful speech about loss and sticking together.  
  
We moved on, from there, to Snowden Drifts, all the way to Scholar's Cleft. It was a long enough trek, took most of the day. It's good to be in the Shiverpeaks again too, the air helps. For a good part of the evening, it felt like the illness had just dropped away. Might just be because breathing in the cold air numbs the lungs well enough that I didn't feel the burn until I overdid myself.  
Plenty of work, too. We're lumbering for firewood, and lugging around cannons. A group that looked like some sort of cult hung around the building for a little bit; some of them were nice enough, but others were just weird. We had to run them off, eventually, because they were getting ideas and posturing. Two of their goons even tried to intimidate me, despite not even coming up to my belt. It was ridiculous.  
  
So, we're on high-alert; we dragged the carronade gun up on the walls, and impounded a mortar battery they left behind when they pulled out. All heavy lifting. Thankfully, Sel will oversee the lumbering detail come morning, and I can sleep in. Might need it, to be honest. It's good to be home, but I'm still ill.

# 1st of Phoenix

Quiet day, missed the action out, but I heard they killed off some Svanir and some Centaurs.  
No signs about that cult from yesterday, but apprently we're under threat; or that's what Marcus thinks. Figures that's why we brought the big gun out on the battlements. Safeguard. Either way, not too much of a worry, we're fortified and we outnumber them.  
  
For the remainder, all is well. The snow does good, and I think I'm slowly getting better. Another couple of days, and I should be back to regular duties without too much of a fuzz. Marcus set aside something to help me sleep; saves me from coughing myself awake at night.  
  
I should also write Kristen sometimes, that 'm not dying, and that we're out in the 'peaks.

# 2nd of Phoenix

Quiet day. Still cold, still sick. Apparently the Chapter went in towards the centaurs with some effect, and pushed them back a bit. I've kept to myself mostly. Slept well and long with Marcus' concotion. Hopefully should be on the upper hand soon enough.  
  
See what tomorrow brings.

# 3rd of Phoenix

Full on blizzard going on, by now, around Scholar's Cleft. It's not too bad, we're sheltered and we dragged in firewoord beforehand to make sure we were warm and cozy, right up along with our pelts and blankets. Even a ration ale around the fire tastes good, evenings like this.  
  
Before the blizzard, though, we went out on a patrol; first action I've seen since coming down with the illness. It's been getting better, though, I think Marcus will let me get back to the really hard work soon enough, once he's looked at a couple of more recent blood-samples. Make sure my white blood is normal again, or something.  
Patrol went well enough, they had Wynn take charge. Another went out under Alessa. Since we didn't bring back any wounded, I assumed that went well. Looked up a Svanir steading crawling with icebrood and bad ice, all spikes and corruption. Handful of Svanir still lingering about; we butted in and trashed a shaman of theirs trying to erect a Dragon totem. It was mostly scavengers, though. I don't doubt the steading will be put to use, first thing when we march off again. Anyway, Wynn did well enough, and we at least put the local Svanir on notice again for some time.  
  
As for the remainder; I spoke with Rioleth some more; good damn man, though he has his own ghosts, it seems. The jagged metal sword he carries, apparently forged by a kinsman of his, who passed away. A masterpiece, in a way, the life's work of an exceptionally gifted smith. A pity, the craftman's death lessens their people. I think the questions Rioleth keeps asking about whether or not Sylvari have souls, or if they head into the Mists may be related to him. It certainly seemed a sensitive topic that moved him to melancholy. Maybe I'll find out.  
  
Got a letter from Kraxxi, about loading Dave up with a data crystal. Not sure what to think, but it does explain why the golem went into seize-up mid-way through Rata Sum when we were there. Apprently Kraxxi has her devices hardwired to shut down on the Inquest. It's a little garbled and tech-y for my senses, but I'll do as she asks. Might as well; it seems important. Plus, it's something to do if the blizzard hasn't passed come morning.

# 4th of Phoenix

Blizzard is still raging; thankfully, it's quite warm inside, and we're all huddled around the fires, which we keep stoked and roaring. Makes one lazy. It's good, though, all in pelts and blankets while the wind howls outside like the greatest of Wolf's children. It's the music of the mountains and the wind. It reminds me of those lines I wrote for San and Kath, some time ago.  
Pity those two have gone, though they'd long become strangers when they did. The jungle changed all of us, in that respect.  
  
I've been carving the piece of mordrem-bone into a sabre. It's light, and looks pretty menacing, a perfect trophy to hang over the fire at home. Hah, a sword made out of the flesh and blood of my enemies. I'm sure Hejja Dark-Eater would be proud that I've mastered the flesh of my enemies.  
It's not anywhere done, though, mind, but it's getting a nice shape.  
  
Thinking of all the people that passed, and the stories left to tell while I work. I catch the bone splinters and shards on the bear pelt Kristen gave me. Spirits, wish she was around. Probably go out and brave the blizzard for the sport of it, come back with a skin beaten to leather by the hard wind, and her hair covered in ice, snow, and the scattered blossoms of the snow cherries outside. Poor hunting while the winds roar, you'd think, but I can tell you, somehow, she'd catch the lightning out of the sky, and the snow out of the wind.  
  
I'd kill for some ale right now, or better, some mead, to lazy away near the fire and get drunk enough to fall into a deep sleep filled with pleasant dreams. But then again, I can fall asleep to fire's crackle and the songs the wind sings for me.

# 5th of Phoenix

Another day in the blizzard, all but snowed in. It's been going on for a while now, and will likely die out soon. Or at least, that's what I hope before I'm getting worried. Any more than this and we're going to be stuck in the snow here for a good while. Maeva and I went around the outside of the walls earlier, and made sure there isn't any damage or someone tried to sneak up on us. Nothing of note except snow heaping up on the outside of the wall. Once the blizzard dies down, we'll have our work cut out digging this clear. If we're not just moving on, that is, and letting the Priory maintain their own outpost. Maeva took a dive in the snow by accident, but thankfully didn't lose sight of her.  
  
The remainder of the day passed pleasantly enough; we sat around the fire, shared tales, and Marcus even dug up some mead from the officer's rations, and shared it. Worth the sip, that. I'm also steadily feeling less and less ill, so I think I'm fine just returning to my full duties soon as the blizzard howls over and we can continue our usual work.

# 6th of Phoenix

The blizzard finally died, and the weather returned to normal. Figure we'll be on the move sooner or later. Not much happening asides from that; I took a work gang out to clear the snow from the approach, so we have a clear march out. The Seraph are out as well, keeping the road clear; the Lionguard will be doing the same along the Lion Road, if it was even affected by the storm.  
  
For the rest, all was quiet. Rioleth is tapping some sap from the snow cherries, see if he can't use the taste for some sort of brew. Maeva's still down with the moon's cramps, as she was yesterday. I've dealth with enough grumpy norn women to know not to poke the bear too much, so that's all calm.  
  
So, aye. Enjoying the weather, clear lungs again, and a cozy enough encampment, far away from anything too hostile. It almost feels like an extension of leave. But that might because I slept through the larger engagements in the area, in the first days of the season.  
  
Oh, blast, I need to write Kraxxi and Kristen. Might as well do that now.

# 7th of Phoenix

Writing this the morning of the 8th, because yesterday was such a long day, and then I ended up running into Kristen. We fell asleep near the fire before I had time to dig out the old fieldbook. Still, it *was* a long and eventful day, so I'll make some notes about what passed.  
  
First of all, two new folks showed up with recruitment papers around noon; recruits Carmine and Ravenwest. They'd been sent here with a supply caravan carrying food. The catch? They're both former members of that weird cultist group that showed up some days ago. Apparently, they got held as slaves against their will in some sort of really worrying blood-worship or something. Sounded a bit like a noble family going insane, and turning itself into the worst kind of religious zealots. The woman, Ravenwest, got married off against her will, and things like such. We're slightly reluctant in having them around, but they seem, ultimately, alright, and the intensity of their hatred proves their story. At least, in my eyes, after what happened later that day. But I'll get to that.  
Apparently, the rest of the gang is also camped out east, in one of the Lionguard havens. That's... interesting, considering we're apparently going to march on that today.  
  
Anyway, aside from that being a little odd, and their tales being quite unsettling, it was just a normal day. We got drawn up and split into squads to take care of some reports. Blade got sent out to apparently deal with a cave that was drawing in children from the surrounding steadings, who then were never seen again. I didn't see it myself, but Marcus said they found a norn hag, a follower of raven, who they killed. But the way he describes it, it sounded more like some sort of witch, or at least a very, very powerful mage. I was on guard near the cave's entry, so I didn't get a chance to cast my own eye about. We got spotted by e centaur scout eventually, so we just pulled back, rather than risk getting bottled in by the ponies. So, aye, a cave with, apparently, a chid-eating norn witch. Chilling.  
  
Wish I could end there, but I can't. Lance got sent out towards some Grawl and Dredge and one of us, a charr soldier called Mirka, got wounded. We brought her in quick enough, just some frost-wounds. Around this time, though, Lorma calls out about an intruder, and we all rush to arms. Turns out one of the Sicarius folks tried to attack us, on his own. Heavily armed, too, rifle, knives, grenades, the like. We tried to capture him, but he kept asking for a trial by combat, which we obviously wouldn't give him. When we tried bringing him in for questioning, he killed himself. Not even prettily, he bit off his own tongue and slashed his throat with a sharpened fingernail. Marcus and I tried to stop him from bleeding out, but... well.  
It was worrying. Ironically, I had talked to Marcus just before about the willpower of fanatics, and how they can die for a cause without a second thought.  
I do have to say, the new recruit, Carmine's, ferocity and anger at the man makes me think his hatred is genuine. You don't harbour so much hate towards someone unless you have a reason. I doubt if would like to know why, though. Something tells me that if I did know, I might have let "Eduard Sicarius" die a whole lot faster. Damn slavers.  
  
I was allowed to hand out a round of strong drink in the aftermath, just as a bracing. Good few people appreciated that, I think, give them something to toughen them up. Except Ystynn, who apparently got drunk of a single glass, and ended up doing all sort of stupid stuff, like attempting to eat snow slurry. Eventually, we were able to guide her into bed without too much of a hassle, though. I don't know if Sylvari have headaches, but if they do, she'll be feeling that tomorrow.  
  
As for the Sicarius, Maeva tried to mount a volunteer squad to counterattack them, not too long after their... what I can only call failed one-man army, got himself killed. However, it was too late, and most of us were too tired to mount an effective attack operation. Instead, the Knight and I went on wandering to the Haven ourselves, do some aggressive recon. And... found it empty. Figure they've already legged it, or saw us coming and laid low. Either way, tomorrow will be an interesting day.  
  
In better news, on the way back, I ran into Kristen, who's been out hunting from Isenfall lake. Apparently Olena, smart bird, saw me earlier, too, and then lead Kristen onto my tracks. Spirits, after a long day like that, seeing Kristen again was just what I needed to keep me going for a little more. We didn't even get to doing anything, by the time we were settled down next to the fire, both of us were so tired we just fell asleep.  
I can understand, though, why some people just stay at home, instead of going through... this.

# 8th of Phoenix

Spirits. Another one of those days that lasted forever.  
  
We're currently camped out at Mennerheim; the steading right outside Molengrad. I've passed it before several times; the hunters are boastful and rowdy, and ask you to prove your strength to their face before giving you any respect. I remember coming here when I was younger, when Freyj was about thirteen moons, and hearing tales of how they fight Dredge barehanded, and hunt Arctodus. Not anymore, though. Place's been sacked and burnt, the population slaughtered. Our medics have been trying to save who they can, but... well. The pyres are burning, and we're trying to do what we can, protect the survivors. I don't doubt we'll be striking out against the Dredge in retaliation sooner or later. Perhaps give Molengrad a thorough cleanse, end to end.  
It's pitiful; so many kinsfolk slain. Children, too. I saw one, a girl of no more than four, being put on the pyre.  
Damn them. I spent so long fighting out the warfronts against the Dragons, I thought this would be an easy tour. It isn't. It's been like the Realm of Torment swallowed us up and showed us all the worst today.  
  
But I'm running ahead in the day's passage.  
Another group of cultists appeared around noon or so, when I was talking to Ystynn and Ravenwest about a spar. Seemed they were trying to see when we were moving out, or perhaps determine the fate of the soldier they sent in the day before. Unpleasant people. I had Ravenwest point them out for me; one 'true' Sicarius, and a couple of lackeys. We ran them off soon enough, but then they sent a death-threat against Ravenwest directly, because of her previous involvement with them. Their mistake; signed their own funeral with that missive. Directed threat against a Vigil recruit meant the officers dialed them all the way up on the same level as Inquest and Svanir; we got kill-orders for the entire group.  
  
I heard Ravenwest out about what exactly they're supposed to be afterwards; it's a pretty chilling story. Essentially, it seems they worship the family blood line, and are divided into several sects. They have a load of odd rank grades based on how well indoctrinated their slaves are. Ravenwest got the worst of it, and was married off to one of them called Mars Sicarius, who squirted a baby into her womb. She lost is, after getting hit pretty badly in the field; also mangled her arm. It's the sort of wound that'll require expensive Asuran work to fix fully, I'm afraid. Regardless, Ravenwest killed off a couple of them before Carmine and her managed to escape. Good riddance, if you ask me. If it's all true, they're both extraordinarily tough people. I'm glad to have them in the Vigil, in that case.  
  
Of course, I also can't shake the nagging feeling that Carmine and her are just playing us for fools, and this is a long-con. I've had them both placed in protective custody, just to make sure the cultists don't get to them... and to make sure they don't get up to anything nefarious without anyone watching them. I'd prefer not getting stabbed in the back, or worse, blown up.  
We won't know until we know, however.  
  
I got around to update Dave, finally, from the data crystal. Went without too much a hitch, and Dave looks unmolested by the data transfer. I need to remember to send Kraxxi the crystal back before long, it might be important. With everyone going on, though, might take some time.  
  
Back on track; after the cultists issuing their challenge, we had one of the most guarded marches to the haven I've seen in a while. Scouts up ahead, engineers ready for mine-clearing, and guardians spaces out to shield against rifle fire. We even took a detour off the most obvious path, to make sure we didn't have to cross the bridge spanning the Lion Road, just in case. Turned out to be a good call, because the bridge was blown sky high not long after we arrived. Recruit Vatorn saw some signs of foul play, but only mentioned it after the fact. Hadn't realised what it meant until it blew, the poor lad. Still, none of us were on it, and there don't seem to be any casualties, thank the spirits. I suspect it's the Sicarius people, but I've hear stories the Svanir try to do so regularly too. Given it does slow down the trade through the region when the bridge is out of order, making the caravans easy prey, that might not be too unlikely. Lionguard will set to repairs relatively quickly, though, there was already an engineer of theirs on site when I went over to check for wounded.  
  
About the same time that the scouts found Mennerheim destroyed, and sent for help. We dispatched a couple of troops at first, but it wasn't enough. Eventually decided to move the entire Chapter over, and temporarily rebase so we can provide direct aid. Besides, a Vigil encampment will stop any looters, Svanir or Dredge from killing off the few battered survivors. We can protect them; it's what we do.  
Worrying, though, many of the survivors seem sick, or ill. Much as I want to help them, I hope to the spirits they're not sick with anything contagious. A whole Chapter coming down with some sort of flu would paralyze our fighting strength severely. I just got through my own period of illness, and I don't relish having to be bed bound with high fevers again, so soon after.  
  
We went back to gather our supplies from the Haven, and pull as much as we could down to Mennerheim. Upon entry, a rather short but brutish looking human with a glaive of some sort tried to deny us entry. Hilariously, he thought he could stop the Vigil from entering the Haven they were based out, which lead to a rather uncomfortable confrontation. For him. We quickly had him surrounded, when he claimed he was Sicarius. He tried to back-out quickly as soon as he realised what he was in for, considering our kill-order issued mere hours earlier. We should've painted the snow red with his blood, right then and there. Unfortunately, Maeva called us off, and we simply let him simmer with impotent rage. Problematic, though. Seems the Sicarius lay claim to the Haven; they just didn't realize how little credit they had left. If the Lionguard would become aware of what was going on... well, odds are they wouldn't risk getting themselves or their fort shelled by a Vigil Chapter, no matter how much coin they're getting paid by the crazy cultists trying to hide behind their walls.  
  
The bad news about that is that we are still looking out to clear out the scum from the Haven, probably soon. I've been tasked to bring the engineers up to speed on handling the artillery we have, because they're not discounting us actually shelling the bastards. Troubling prospect, but I'll get the engineers ready. Thankfully, the Mennerheimers keep their ballistae range in good order, meaning I have the perfect tools to teach the recruits the essentials of ballistics, just around the corner. That will be tomorrow, or at least, not long from now. After that, well... We might be in for the most pointless siege in existence.  
  
Oh, I also had a mild panic attack when I realised they were at the Haven, and that's where Kristen was supposed to be heading. Spirits, after what Ravenwest told me, the idea of those twisted bastards getting their grubby human hands on my woman made me so angry I outright requested permission to run over to Isenfall and tell her not to go. And that's exactly what I did. I don't doubt Kristen could've slaughtered the lot of them from afar before any of them realised what was going on, but still. I guess that, in hindsight, I was overly worried, because I love her. Still, at least I can rest easy, knowing she's not going to wander into a haven I may be ordered to fire upon tomorrow. I don't know if I could.  
  
And finally... something that hasn't fully sunk in yet. Rotarn isn't dead. He didn't jump from Phoenix Roost, and got crushed to death by the fall. I know this, because a Sylvari called Rotarn, showed up in the Haven before we left it, working with the Order of Whispers.  
I don't know how. I don't know why.  
Spirits, I don't even know if I'm happy that he's alive, or if I'm angry that he lied to all us, and betrayed our trust.  
There's too much else going on, and I'm too tired to think about it. The smell of burning corpses, all the madness... spirits. It's like that moment when we first set foot in the Brink, and saw all the ships burning. Something you'd only expect to see in nightmares.

# 9th of Phoenix

Still on Vigil at the Mennerheim steading, or at least what's left of it. We've been taking care of the wounded, hunting for food and lumbering a supply of firewood for the survivors, as well as routine pickets around the camp borders. The many wounded and sick are mending, but slowly. I hope some of the warriors will be up on their feet soon, and take over the defense of their steading for themselves. Figure we'll try and find out by whom and why they were attacked with such force, too, and then return the favour. If it's the damned Molengrad Dredge, we'll torch the place, or at least maul it well enough that they'll think twice about giving Mennerheim anything more than a crooked glance. Damn mole-people.  
  
So, today was mostly that sort of work. I took the engineers out for a ballistics exercise, as I mentioned yesterday. Seems less urgent now, though, because the scouts say the cultists ran off, tail between their legs. Guess they're not as stupid as we took them for, and they realised fighting off a Vigil Chapter was not something they'd win. A pity, in the sense that I would rather have seen the leaders of that band of degenerates hang, but I am also relieved I won't be ordered to shell a busy Lionguard haven to make a point. Something about that just... well. Anyway, I had the engineers exercise their knowledge of basic ballistics with the ballistae, before giving them a couple of dry training exercises on "Little Zara", our field-carronade. They'll function as a team, know how to handle the gun and it's munitions, and I bet they'll be able to fire it, too. They won't be good at it; not yet, that takes practice, but they'll manage to get some shots off, which is something.  
  
I'm tired, though. The past few days have taken their toll; I can't even enjoy the brisk Shiverpeak snows and wind. The others suffer through it, though, huddled around the fire. I'll feel truly sorry for them if we head north, towards the Gorge, though.

# 10th of Phoenix

Fell asleep before I could write my entry, but it was a quiet day regardless.  
It's now morning on the 11th, but I'll jot the notes down regardless.  
  
Spent most of the day comforting the wounded and the sick, recording the tales of the fallen. Plenty of good hunts and stories to tell around the fire. One of the fallen claims to have slain a venerable one that was preying on the steading's dolyaks with his bare hands, stalking the creature to it's lair in the middle of a blizzard, and choking the beast out. There's other tales, of course, but they deserve to be retold in Hoelbrak, rather than merely written down. Thankfully, some of them will live, and they can keep the legends of their fallen friends alive themselves.  
  
I'm still wearing my air-filter, just in case, though, which made the work all that more... strange. Like we're expecting the sick to die. The medics keep their work up, but the others treat them with a sort of mild neglect. At least we're keeping them fed and safe.  
  
I managed to finish my work on the new air-filter improvements, too. It's all just drawings based on old work we've apparently still had around since the first Orrian campaign; most of what I've done is look at other equipment and gear we've been working with, and try to improve where I could. I'm more worried about the cost, though, having a prototype crafted for testing will be expensive; I don't know if the Chapter or the Pact in general can set aside that sort of coin in the middle of rebuilding after the Magus Falls war. We'll see. If not, well, then I've only lost my own time anyway.  
  
About engineering, Sel picked up a Dredge sonic rifle from the wreckage when we arrived here, and took it out for some field-testing. She's trying to document some more on the principles that allow their sonic weaponry to function. I think the Priory have some idea, but we don't, at current. Considering we're likely to clash with the mole-people before long, it doesn't hurt to know how their weapons work. Sel managed to destroy it in testing, but she's apparently gained at least a couple of insights.  
  
Asides from that, we've all just been doing our usual camp work.

# 11th of Phoenix

Another quiet day at the encampment. Mostly camp chatter around the fire, tending to the wounded and keeping camp safe. Not too much progress on the wounded yet, though, but that's not unexpected.  
There was some minor altercation between Vatorn and Alessa, something about the former touching the latter's hair as part of some sort of joke, and that not being appreciated. Minor, all in all.  
Seems the hectic days following that cult engagement have passed by, and we're now just rebuilding. Hopefully, the wounded here will be recovered within a couple of days, and we can move on. Maybe leave the Dredge a farewell gift before we go, too.

# 12th of Phoenix

Still at Mennerheim, though it seems we're not going to stay here for too much longer. The orders finally came down to destroy the Dredge mine. If we succeed in doing that, the villagers of Mennerheim will be able to rest easy for some time; at least until they dig themselves out, if anything. Lorma's scout have picked up a couple of helpful facts that allowed me to seize up the situation a little; apparently the mine's been collapsed before, which means there's plenty of hasty repair work and load-bearing support beams we can scuttle to collapse large parts of the structure with little effort. I've sectioned off ten satchel charges packed with high-explosive mix; those things blow holes in tanks, so they'll chew through any support beams the Dredge might have put up. Lorma seemed certain they were wooden anyway.  
  
Somewhere, I'm hoping we're doing this for the right reasons. Well, I know we're doing it partly as retaliation for the village, but also as a pragmatic solution to protect the survivors. But the Mennerheimers used to have a reputation for their boastful behaviour, and several tales I know are about besting Dredge in combat; Lorma thinks it might not be unreasonable to think that the locals brought upon their own destruction by poking the mole, so to speak.  
It's a pity the Dredge treat my kin with such hostility. They fight us over tattered Dwarven scraps, raiding homesteads and slaughtering Dolyak herds for little else than they feel the Shiverpeaks are theirs. We are content to let them sit in their mountains under the ground, but it is when they surface, often with their weapons drawn, that we clash. I've killed plenty of Dredge, and never have I been remorseful about, because I've never been given cause to slay them in their own homes. That might change now, on a blurry line. On one hand, the Mennerheim hunters tempted fate by building their village right on the lip of a Molengrad; a provocation, if anything. On the other, the Dredge slaughtered young ones whose only crime was to be born where they were born.  
  
I suppose that, in the end, it doesn't matter too much. We're not given a choice; and I cannot feel sympathy for the Dredge. They used to be slaves, aye; two-hundred years ago. Now they are free to live in harmony with the world, or draw their sword against it. And as much of the known world knows, if you pick a fight with the norn, the norn will win. It is merely up to them how much blood we must spill on the mountain flanks before they learn that they will have to share.  
  
It's not the only news either, Lorma the scouts have been diligent. Drakemoor spotted a group of Kodan out north-east. But Lorma saw a Claw fly overhead, shedding ice crystals. Odds are that's why we're out here. If it is, though, I have to tell Kristen. The woman will foam at the mouth when she realises there's another dragon champion worth hunting out there, and I'm more than happy to bring her along for it. Perhaps, if we kill it somewhere nice, that Dragon lodge may come sooner than we both expected.  
I suppose the tour just became interesting.  
  
On a different note, a badly wounded and delirious charr wandered into the camp during the evening watch, her head badly gashed and infected. She was so far gone, nothing she said made much sense, but we suspect she came over from Lion's Arch. Might have gotten into a bar brawl of some sort. Either way, we've given her first care, and will keep her medicated. An infection that bad might kill her if she isn't damned careful.  
Worst case, we'll leave her with the survivors here in the village if she's not on her feet yet by the time we depart. Who knows.  
  
Think that about covers all of today's happenings.  
Meanwhile, I'm enjoying the snow and the frost. I missed it out west, I really did. There's something mighty about the 'peaks, knowing the spirits watch over you, and that kinsmen stalk the snow-drifts in long-hunts. All in all, it's good to be home. Besides, the thought of felling one of Jormag's spawn with Kristen excites me. We do that, we'll be double-bonded over two dragon kills! They'd sing songs of us in the halls.  
Lass might even decide to marry me, and all.

# 13th of Phoenix

Figure this is our last day here in Mennerheim, since we're about to move onwards to attack the Dredge, as I detailed yesterday. Looks like it's going to be quite an operation; considering we'll be bringing down a good chunk of the mountain if we succeed, it might case quite a rumble. I took a patrol out along the foot of the mountain on a long, long walk to at least make sure everyone nearby is aware we're going to set off some explosives that might case some shifting ice, or rockslides. Hopefully they'll all have the good sense to stay inside and away from the peak's flanks. Especially that mining lot, out Lornar's side of the peak.  
It was a long bloody walk, though, took most of the day into the evening to loop all the way around. March discipline was horrendous, too, with people falling out of line and talking in the middle of potentially hostile territory. Bad form. Included veterans, like Drakemoor and Force too, which has me disappointed. Most of it was that Blood Legion idiot, Geran again, though. I had to do my damned best to keep them in line at all. It was like taking out a batch of green recruits. It shouldn't have.  
  
For the rest, the camp keeps somewhat quiet. The Mennerheim folks seem to be doing better, but I'm not so sure they'll make it if we leave now. Perhaps it'd be smarter to move them all to the Haven until they're recovered. At least, that should keep them a good deal safer than they are now, especially once we decide to move on.  
That one Charr with her head-wound hasn't been up and about either, which makes me think we'll end up keeping them with the Mennerheimer folks; she'll be able to find her own way home once she gets better, after all.

# 14th of Phoenix

We're still at Mennerheim, despite being a day off the predictions. Mission accomplished, though, we went in and collapsed half the mountain flank, buried the Dredge in their mines for at least another good while. It'll take them plenty of time to dig themselves out.  
Engineers did fine, too. Kalla, Tinker, Nirrae, Maxson, all operated quickly and efficiently, followed their orders, and didn't falter. Planted their charges, and we were out and clear. Caused quite an avalanche, though, came rolling down the entire mountainside and filled the valley below. I'm happy Mennerheim is built up-slope, or we'd have buried our own camp in snow. Thankfully, we moved the survivors over to Pogada first, so they're all safe. The Dredge knew we were coming; which might explain why resistance was so light. They must've felt the thunder coming, and burrowed away. I hope so, at least, that they were smart enough to get their pups out, and find some shelter. I might not like Dredge, but I'm not a murderer.  
I did eat some of the warrior's fingers, though, this morning. To avenge the dead norn. If Hejja is watching from the Mists, I'm sure she'd approve. Sometimes I think if it isn't wiser to let the legacy of that crazy old witch go.  
But then, if she indeed *was* a crazy old witch, I'd rather not spurn her memory. Some of that old magic is better to keep on your side, after all.  
  
So we're sitting opposite to the collapsed mountain, smoking cigars, laughing and telling tales. I lit one up after, just like Ironside would have done, and enjoyed the view, and the sound. Like a settling glacier. Perhaps a featname such as Mountainbreaker isn't a bad idea, eh? But then, I'd always have to live with the knowledge I only really planted some explosives; the Dredge's idea to use wooden support beams is what did them in. Ijust dropped their sky on top of their heads by kicking over their sticks.  
  
Ah well. Not everyone was celebrating. A recruit, Vatorn, apparently ran afoul of the Knight, who called him worthless. Harsh, I feel, and some of the other recruits felt uncomfortable at the display. I spoke with the lad, though; it's just adjustment. Learning to live with military discipline, and doing things you might not really enjoy because it's expected of you. I'm surprised to find out he wasn't fitting in well; I suspect he's too used to being able to do his own thing, and let his powers roam free. Elementalists, and all. Well, he seemed to have gathered some courage, and I think I managed to bolster his resolve a little. We'll see how it turns out.  
  
Spoke some more with Rioleth too, who seems to be getting more and more anxious to find something about the spirits of Sylvari; whether they go into the Underworld or not, and such. He said he was trying to find a havroun, but I doubt he'll be so lucky to as to stumble upon one. A shaman might help him, but still, his questions are peculair. Then I remembered Miremel's lover, whom we met in Orr, almost a year back. Rosalie or something. She's a spirit-speaker, if I recall, she'll be able to help, so I promised to write Miremel once we get back to the Haven. At least help him find some answers, and quieten his mind. It's something about this oddly-crafted sword he wields, and the person that made it. Probably someone close to him.  
  
Asides from that, I long for a cup of mead, and would have wished Kristen'd stalked us over into Mennerheim, just for the company. It's strange to be in my homelands, and see so little norn around me. Only the Knight really stands out, but then she's always going to be artificially distant because of the rank gap. Little to do about that, I'm afraid.  
I wonder if Kristen and Freyja would have gotten along, if the latter had been alive. That's Sorundsdottir, nor Tzahrsdottir. It's strange to think, but Freyj'd been my age, instead of the young girl that's been dead for all these years. Ah well. The living Freyja gets along well enough with Kristen, which is about all I can ask for.  
We're not too far from the Priory either. I wonder if we'll pass by Lornar's Pass; a surprise visit wouldn't hurt.  
  
I'm rambling on paper. That's how tired I am.

# 15th of Phoenix

Currently encamped at the Haven, the guests of the Lionguard, and all. Back on track, it seems, and surrounded by the cold stone walls of the Lionguard. You'd think they'd know better, and build more covered buildings, or at least have a nice mead hall or something to shelter in, but no. Most of us are camped out the yard, next to the Dolyak pens and Lionguard tents. At least they keep several fires burning at all times, or they'd freeze. I don't mind, though, the weather is bracing, and I enjoy the snow upon my skin.  
  
We marched here from Mennerheim earlier, and went out on patrol. We ended up terrorizing the local Grawl tribes a bit; turns out they've been raiding, and turning to worshiping dragon totems; odds are the Svanir had a hand in that. Either way, we killed some of their berserkers and trappers and spooked the rest of the tribals back well enough to leave an impression. Doubt they'll do much more.  
  
Lance ran into more trouble; they brought in a badly wounded Asura that took medical quite some time to patch back together. I think they were supposed to meet up with Dauntless Chapter, but the dredge apparently got to Dauntless in some force before we did. Figures they've butchered their way through a Vigil section, the day after we leveled one of their mines. At this rate, I'll be collapsing another mine before long. I'd have asked Maeva for more information, but she seemed especially irritated today. Figure we keep that one as a friend, so  
I didn't press.  
  
The wounded charr I mentioned several times before, Gragrith or something, has decided to follow us, and intends to sign up with the Vigil. The bonk on her hear must've done her in badly, though, she seemed very unclear and garbled. If they heal, though, I don't see a reason why we don't allow them a chance.  
Talking about Charr, we're slowly becoming a warband out here, with all the horns and tails sprouting up. They've sent over another Charr recruit; the umpteenth one. I hope to the spirits we don't end up having to deal with all of the nonesense that brings, but you never know. The Chapter has an odd history about getting very, very strange Charr. Hopefully most of them aren't arse-on-head retarded. Saying that, a couple of the new ones seem to in order. I've got little to remark on Stridepaw, Nightshot and Bloodletter.  
  
Also spoke, quite lengthy, with Rioleth, and figured out why he's so anxious to ask questions about the after-life. Turns out the weaponsmith who forged his weapon was also his twin, whom fell to nightmare, and was slain by Rioleth merely a season ago. Interesting, if a sad story. We spoke about Vanholm, and tales, and how he has the power to shape the memory of his kin in his hands. Perhaps he should, as I counseled him, consider that the nightmare killed his brother long before he did. He was merely putting to death the beast that lurked inside. He seemed conflicted on the notion, though. I suppose it's his story to tell now, and he can tell it as he sees fit.  
  
I told him about long-dead Freyja, too, and how we keep the memories alive by telling tales. Rotarn's sudden... reappearance has me worried that some people I thought were dead, might not be. Or that I have too quickly accepted the death of some whom might have otherwises lived. It's a painful thing to consider; what if we left Bridigt and Marthe to die slowly at the hands of our enemies when they went missing, instead of trying to save them?  
Poisonous thoughts, those.

# 16th of Phoenix

No venturing out today from the Snowdrift Haven. Rather, Maeva drilled the troops for two hours straight, on basics, discipline and so on. It was needed, though, considering the abyssal discipline shown in the field in the last few days. We screwed up the salute at the end, though, so she had us running on the top of the Haven walls for a good time afterwards, which did well enough to warm us up.  
  
I finally had that talk about the gas-mask prototype with Lyralii, and she's not entirely convinced. The cost is a major hurdle, doubly so because there's no guarantee that it'll function, which cause a giant hole in the Chapter's financial resources. Lyralii suggests we have the warmaster shoot it up directly to Pact command, and see if they're willing to do the prototype work. Nirrae also knows some people in Pact weapons development, so we might pitch it to those people as well, see if any of it sticks.  
We had a pleasant enough talk afterwards, too, but that was mostly social matters.  
  
I took a 'watch' out the side door, past the salient port to watch the icefields a little, over on the runnels of Lake Isenfall. It's beautiful to watch, to see the water almost freeze, and the snowflakes drift off slowly into the surface, before they melt. I hear everyone complain about the cold, and the frost, and not look at the beauty of the 'peaks. And they are beautiful. Norn belong in the north, and I feel so much at home here.  
  
We actually sat on the wall, for quite some time, talking and telling tales. Kristen even showed up, beautiful woman, as I expected she would. It was a good talk, and I'm happy she tracked us down to the Haven. I'll sleep well tonight, that's for sure.  
Also spoke of Hejja's tale again, how she might have been a shaman of some sorts, or a witch. Rioleth seems interested in the tale; I figure he'd like to know more about why she was such a powerful mage. I wish Freyja was here, she'd talk his ears off him, and he's probably enjoy it too.  
  
But, enough dallying. Kristen was tired and slipped off early. Think I might join her. .

# 17th of Phoenix

Relatively quiet day out in the haven today; mostly sitting around the fire, keeping warm, and trying to figure out what we're out here to do. I've been learning the folks tricks to stay warm and such too, like putting a hot pebble wrapped in cloth under your armpit, where it'll stay warm for a good long while.  
  
Also did a spar with Nightshot, see what the charr could do. Damned Ash-head bit me in the shoulder, drew a serious amount of blood doing so. I still won the spar, in the end, by sheer mass advantage, but I'm not sparring any charr anymore without my cuirass. Carmine cleaned the bite and bandaged it, but it still stings like the realm of torment.  
  
We've got another Sicarius escapee join us, bearing a letter from that Cleartide again. That woman is apparently doing a good job of getting all their escaped slaves to take up arms and sending them to the Ashen. It's a nice enough girl, this time, seems a tad shy. That brings us up to a whole damn lot of recruits. Wonder how many of them will manage to persist through to Crusader rank. There's a couple of promising ones, certainly, but most of them will have to work really hard to make the grade, unless they want to be recruits forever. A couple more drill sessions like yesterday probably won't hurt either.  
  
Drakemoor got a chance to lead a patrol up north to the steading at Isenfall lake. We had to stomp through the Grawl village again, much to my annoyance. Feels pointless having to put them to the sword when we could've just gone around, instead of trampling into their land. No wonder they're hostile if we keep marching patrols roughshod over their territory. Ah well. The steading was fine, too, nothing to report. We shot a bear on the way, which I traded for two big sheepskins with a local hunter who realized that a good bear skin is worth double what he'd get for the sheepskins. I gave one of them to Rioleth, and used to other to keep that wounded Asuran lass from Dauntless warm. She didn't look too good, to be honest, but at least she isn't dead. Doubt she'll ever fight again, though.  
  
What else?  
Oh, Rioleth is doing some sort of magical experiment. He gives you a crystal which makes you feel a little woozy, but that's it. Apparently he uses it to take some readings of life energy or something or other. I don't mind, but it knocked Mackie straight out into sleep when he tried it on him.  
  
Kristen is still around, she's been hunting out most of the day, as she's want to. Good to have her close.

# 18th of Phoenix

Another day in the cold of Snowdrift Haven, though an eventful one, this time around. Where do I start?  
First of all, Geran got discharged, which was inevitable considering the the way things were going. I've never seen a more problematic Charr, and truth be told, it's a relief he's finally fluked out, rather than having to wait for him to screw up again. It's not that he didn't have the heart for it, he just wasn't able. Somehow, everything he did grated, and it was impossible for us to work with him after a certain point. The final drop was when Scar and him got into *yet another* fight. So, the officers drew him up and discharged him, sent him home with a letter of dismissal. Maybe he can find some work as a mercenary, but his days in the Vigil are over.  
  
I also sparred Damon. The annoying little bastard, kept running circles around me and jumping underneath my punches. Maeva broke us up, though I didn't think i'd actually connected. Turns out I back-slammed him and broke his nose by accident, though it doesn't seem to be too major an injury. The medics set it, and he's already back on his feet looking like something bad punched him in the nose. I got out with a good number of bruises and some of yesterday's wounds that re-opened. A little blood doesn't hurt though, and Kristen's fuzzy enough to give them a look over before she slinks off to hunt again. At least the wounds stay clean.  
I think I'm done sparring recruits without sword and shield for the foreseeable future, though. Had my fill of them running circles around me, or biting.  
  
Oh, also, it seems that yesterday, after I'd went to rest, that bang was Mackie's weapon going off. The Knight, in a rather overzealous pursuit of her duties, destroyed the offending weapon, putting Mackie into some state of distress. Turns out that he needs his old iron to hunt if he ever goes home, so I had the Quartermaster compensate him with a Vigil long-gun that he can keep. However, considering the man apparently got spooked by "fairies", I quickly deduced some of the more idiotic scouts had been playing pranks on the lad, which only really left me with Drakemoor, Belmont and Rotarn as suspects. It put the squeeze on Drakemoor, who was stupid enough to incriminate herself early, and she eventually spat out it was some sort of training thing, where Belmont had her try and nick an empty vial from medical to see how well her stealthing skills had developed. So, of course, Drakemoor tripped, and set off Boyd, who then thought he was getting attacked by invisible fairies.  
Or that's the version Drakemoor is trying to spin us, after we threatened to fine her the replacement costs of one of the rifles. And even then, she tried to cover her fuck-up rather clumsily, instead of just owning up. Additionally, Rotarn is in medical, claiming to have fallen off some stairs. The only thing I've know that Tricky bastard to fall off is a lighthouse, and that turned out to be some poor bastard called Akern.  
Rioleth, who had been looking into the matter on Boyd'd behalf, also mentioned that apparently Boyd had heard whispers.  
  
So, Drakemoor is lying, or at least not telling the whole truth; something I am not looking kindly upon. Their damned antics could have gotten someone killed, first of all, and resulted in the unsafe discharge of a weapon, the destruction of a fellow recruit's means of lively-hood, and the cost of one Vigil rifle to replace it. I'll be making sure to thoroughly drive home that this sort of behaviour is patently unacceptable. Nevermind that I take grave personal issue with being lied to, doubly so by someone whom I expected better of.  
I hope she understands that there's more at stake than evading some token punishment.  
  
Bah.  
  
Anyway. Pryde's back in our ranks, too. Turned up out of the blue, with a magnificent mane that would poke your eyes out. Turns out he's been spending his time fighting in the Bane to be allowed to join a new warband, and then got shipped off west into the jungle for a brief stint. Survive the fleet crash, and then finally decided to come back to the Vigil. Not many familiar faces for him left, of course, but that's the way it goes. He looked well enough, which is the main thing, and it's good to have the fellow back.  
  
I think Kristen's returned from her hunts; as usual, the moon is already high up in the sky, and she'll be tired. Good, because I'm tired to; could use a couple of hours of shut-eye before she'll wake up way too early again and set off. Figures that even when she's camping in the same spot I am, I only get to see her dress and undress.  
Not that I'm complaining.

# 19th of Phoenix

Another day in the Haven, though things are picking up a little again. I had the recruits go over basic drill again, before Sinclair tired them out a little. Recruit Vatorn seems to have replaced Geran as the new lowest mark of the unit, but it's still a momentous improvement. Most of them seem to be on-point, know what they're doing, and understand the base concepts of the Vigil. I rehearsed the classic three-pillars of the oath question, making it clear once more that there really isn't one single part of that oath that is more important than the other. It's all about realizing it all comes together; we fight the dragons, to protect the innocent, and to uphold the order. One cannot exist without the others, in the sense that we strive to be an honourable army of light to stand against the darkness. A candle to guide the wayward, and to ward off evil.  
I like instructing the recruits, and hope they do listen intently. Being here, and fighting is well enough, but if they understand the commitment required and the sacrifice that is expected of them, they cannot go wrong.  
  
It was a good enough day, I think. I'll take the engineers out through some exercise tomorrow, go over some more engineering basics, and then have them do some more training runs with the artillery. Might as well ensure we're ready to employ what we have, when the times comes. Doubly so with that Claw of Jormag circling ahead. The scouts came back and reported that the way ahead is flooded with Icebrood and Jotun, apparently fighting alongsides one-another. Not good news. Icebrood are bad enough to fight, especially the big ones, and Jotun are dangerous at the best of times, so that'll be interesting. Leftpaw mentioned that he tought it could be Jormag pushing south, now that the Pact is weakened. I hope not; if he is, we're ill prepared to repulse another full-scale incursion. Our numbers might be above our usual punching weight, but we're not equipped to fight an elder dragon head-on. Spirits, the Claw alone will be enough of a challenge.  
We'll see how that turns out soon enough, I wager.  
  
What else?  
Oh, Rioleth made that tea from snow cherry syrup and spices; it's exceptionally sweet, like drinking warm mead, but it tastes like home. It's like sipping liquid memories that take me back all through my youth; both the good and the sad parts. I hope he refines it, and keeps some aside for me; having a little bit of home to carry around with me would be good. You never know, when I end up away from the snow for seasons on end again, I might need it.  
  
As for the remainder...  
Well, the snow falls, the peaks rest and the world turns on.

# 20th of Phoenix

Last day in the Haven, as the order to move forwards has been given. Looks like we're heading into the thick of it, straight into the icebrood. I know that, because I've been told to issue explosive kits to each engineer, as we're expected to blow our way through some of the ice crystals that the Claws seem so fond of dropping in top of us. With that in mind, I gave the engineers a speed-lesson on handling explosive materials and how to properly employ them. Hopefully, this way, they don't end up blowing themselves up because they can't set their explosives correctly. So far, the engineers did excellent work; they caught on quick, and several of them seemed to at least understand the immediate use of things like thermite and the detonation cord.  
So I'm not worried. We need more time with the cannon, though, but that's something that will have to wait.  
  
Asides from that, Sinclair had the troops go through another exercise drill, apparently taught them how to deal with Jotun and the like. Also had them running their lungs out again, which will make more than a few of them disgruntled. Not much fun having to sweat like a pig, and then slowly feel it freeze in your skin. Especially some of the problem recruits had it difficult, and I made an effort to ensure everyone was somewhat warm, at least. No point in getting a cold in the middle of all this.  
  
Asides from that, it's been quiet again. People huddle around the fire and exchange tales; some good, some bad, and sometimes it stalls and we sit there grunting in silence for half an hour, while I feel the snow melt in my whiskers. They're good people. Even the problematic ones, like Vatorn, are good folks. Just need to get into the groove of things.  
  
Kristen's been out hunting most of the day again; spirits, she's not back yet at the time of writing, but I'm not concerned. Wonder what she'll do when I tell her we're moving off towards the icebrood. Figure she'll hang back a little, maybe enjoy a night's sleep without me snoring her awake.

[The last page of the book is filled with a list]  
  
1. Freyja Sorundsdottir, childbirth. May the snow cherries shade your sleep.  
2. Eirik Roar-Caster, mauled.  
3. Old Hakon Urrersson, old age.  
4. Alla Grayfiend, old age.  
5. Blast Speedcycle, explosion.  
6. Speed Blastcycle, explosion.  
7. Eamyllen, fell.  
8. Haemillen Ullasson, drowned.  
9. George Farfield, mauled.  
10. Loika Bylssdottir, slain in battle.  
11. Lilly the Young, sickness. Passed before her time.  
12. Murmer Snowbanished, mauled.  
13. Elby Lodge-Born, slain in battle.  
14. Constantine Aenimalf, old age.  
15. Xi Yee, sickness. Human.  
16. Timur Snowbanished, fell.  
17. Fjolda Kurnsdottir, slain in battle atop a mound of foes.  
18. Grox Pawcrank, misfire.  
19. Anger Furystrike, slain in battle.  
20. Bjorn Piersson, fell.  
21. Echo Ashcrawler, missing, presumed dead.  
22. Vaiwhyll, burned.  
23. Siegfridr Huijsson, slain in battle.  
24. Mathild Cleartide, shot.  
25. Tuuma the Destroyer, infection.  
26. Ulx, presumed slain in battle. Only crater was left.  
27. Tusk Facegore, slain in battle.  
28. Carnanon, missing, presumed dead.  
29. Ulrika Siegfridrsdottir, sought death. Felled many before she fell.  
30. Runt Redmauler, left behind, presumed dead.  
31. Ogglun Grawl-Slayer, infection.  
32. Black Spinesnapper, slain in battle.  
33. Toghalla-Strides-Swamps, fell.  
34. Helmi Sivassdottir, loose gas mask.  
35. Brick Greatmauler, slain in battle with his warband. They could not find Runt.  
36. Six Foemauler, slain in battle.  
37. Almar Fyrsson, burned.  
38. Crush Jawmauler, slain in battle.  
39. Pound Mousemauler, slain in battle.  
40. Blast Shipcrank, sickness.  
41. Ripper Guttmauler, infection.  
42. Fae Cliff-Brave, slain in battle. Body not recovered.  
43. Ikitik War-Skritt, slain in battle. He was the greatest among giants.  
44. Verril the Steelrider, slain in battle, leading the charge.  
45. Burunk, slain in battle. Saved my life.  
46. Unger, slain in battle.  
47. Bjorn Hakonsson, slain in battle.  
48. Elfyr Kurnsdottir, missing, presumed dead.  
49. Fury Hardmauler, slain in battle.  
50. Turic, sickness.  
51. Lander Dragonslayer, infection,  
52. Crush Rangecrank, missing, presumed dead.  
53. Sigurd Sigrasson, slain in battle.  
54. Tiloomoo, slain in battle.  
55. Li Jo Han, drowned.  
56. Anna-Victoria Vineyard, sickness.  
57. Akxxi, drowned.  
58. Muller Reavers, drowned.  
59. Arbaea, drowned.  
60. Satsuki, missing, presumed dead.  
61. Xherili, missing, presumed dead.  
62. Vanholm Snowshield, deported.  
63. Isabeth Nixon, slain in battle.  
64. Gutt Cindertail, slain in battle.  
65. ~~Rotarn 'Tricky', fell.~~ Akern, fell with another's name.  
66. Karon, slain by Modremoth.  
67. Anthaos, fell to corruption.  
68. Garrick, died of his wounds.  
69. Elia, killed while trying escape captivity.  
70. Ataam, shot by Mordrem.  
71. Cota, fell.  
72. Marthe Dargosdottir, missing.  
73. Bridgit Forgewood, missing, presumed dead.  
74. Vox, fell.

[The preface is a block-printed text made in low-quality ink. It identifies the owner of the field book as "First Crusader Tzahr Davidsson", a member of the Ashen Chapter. It also specifies some medical data, and next of kin.]  
  
It is the early morning of the 21st of Phoenix, in the year 1329 after the exodus of the human gods.  
This is my third fieldbook, detailing the progress of the Great War against the dragons, waged by the Pact since 1325. As it stands it is the fourth year since we've started pushing them back and making gains, even though Tyria has been at war against the dragons for more than two hundred years.  
  
I am Tzahr, son of David the Oddwalker and Hejja Dark-Eater, First Crusader of the Vigil. I am also dragonsbane, Skaaldson, leadbelcher, mountain-splitter and I hope I may claim to be a good and honourable man.  
My daughter if Freyja Tzahrsdottir, who strides upon this world with all the bountiful fury of her youth, and whose mind is as sharp as her sword, even though she favours the latter.  
My sister is Usha Snowbanished, though not related by blood, our kinship cannot be broken.  
My woman is Kristen Dragonsbane, of whom they tell in equal measure about her beauty and her prowess, and whose arrows could pierce the stars themselves.  
  
In the solace of these words will I find shelter when I suffer loss, and in the same words will I revel my triumph. They will carry the tears of my mourning, and the laughter of my mirth. And when I die, it will prove to those I leave behind that I loved them dearly, and that I did out of love from them what every father, brother or husbandsman would; I fought, so that they could be free.

# 21st of Phoenix

We've advanced, up to Torstvedt steading, though the place is deserted. There's only old Bjalfi here and his son; the rest have fled away long since, and left the lodge to sit out here in the snows, with barely enough hands to tend to it. There's no fire roaring, no smell of roast meat or good ale. It feels strange for a steading to be so empty; it's not right. It should echo with laughter and good tales.  
The damned icebroods have driven them off.  
Ah well, the engineers have gone over and done some much needed repairs on the steading. Sel was up on the roof and fell clean through earlier, which says how badly it was needed. We boarded up the hole, though. It's not elegant, but it'll hold.  
  
We can see the ice crystals from over here, down the road and to the north of us. Looks like we'll be blowing those off the face of the earth tomorrow. Marcus suggested we employ the cannon on the one on the road, because we've got a good elevation for it. It's a sound enough idea, but I'm not so sure about the angle. It'll be good target practice though, and a cannonball will smash through ice cleanly, even corrupted ice. I hope the engineers remembered their cannon exercises; don't want to end up fumbling that in the field proper. I guess we'll see if they want us to roll it out or not tomorrow. We're supposed to move camp again once we cleared the way; or that's what the Warmaster's notice told us.

[continuation of entry]  
  
I first met Freyja Sorundsdottir in the foothills, after she'd come wandering down from her father's stead further north to visit the shrines and lodges in Hoelbrak. I remember running into her in the Borealis forests, when we'd decided to go see if we could't catch fish with our bare hands from the stream; she tagged along, and spent the afternoon diving into the freezing mountain water, until she'd dragged the biggest spikefin we'd ever seen out of the water, much to everyone's delight and dismay. She stayed afterwards, deciding Hoelbrak would be home.  
  
I knew I loved her before the second day had passed; I couldn't stop myself from telling loud and boastful tales to impress her; I still had the name Skaaldson, then. Usha knew what was going on quick, and being who she was, got all the satisfaction of pointing it out to Freyja that she'd made a mighty fine impression on me.  
Of course, much to my delight, the lass had a fine ear for stories, and it wasn't long before I'd filled her ears with the Shaman's tales, and we moved on to the much more magical and impossible Elonian ones. She was enchanted, and I was in love.  
  
We both knew what we wanted soon after. A couple of days passed, until we found eachother again out in the Shaman's Rookery, there to run the speed trials and impress. We ran the trials right quickly, hot on each other's tails, leaping between the stone pillars and inching past the sacred animals. We didn't stop running until we were both over at the hot springs, where we embraced what youth had given us.  
  
For three seasons, all we knew was each other, and the child that had grown between us. It's strange to think now that we only knew eachother so briefly. Our daughter, Freyja Tzahrsdottir, is now older than her mother ever was.  
I'm happy, though, for what happened, though I wish that she was alive to witness what her daughter had become. She would've been proud.

# 22nd of Phoenix

Most of the day's been offensive action against the icebrood, ranging north and south and kicking their teeth in where possible. Mostly actions to destroyed corrupted ice structures close to settlements and roads; blew up a handful with the explosive charges we made two days ago, and then we brought out the carronade to direct fire upon the big one near the road. Took us three cannonballs, and then it was smashed to bits. The crew did well; no hitches, fluent loading and quick responses. I don't know if that'll hold up when we're under threat, but they know how to work an artillery piece in a live scenario.  
Apparently, we left a big icebrood colossus standing, despite our bombardment, and the warmaster taking through a clean-up patrol. Briefly considered firing on it with the cannon, but it's a small and moving target, we'd expend too much of our munitions. Considering the Claw made a couple of passes overhead during the military actions, the Warmaster and I thought it was wiser not to expend our resources on a single colossus, and rather keep what we have, should we need it. The flipside of that is that there's a giant ice monster rampaging down the road. We've put up a sign, but if it decides to come closer, there'll be trouble.  
  
  
  
I wrote yesterday about how I met Freyja, a brief portrait into the life of someone who was once very dear me. She was the first one that I lost and mourned. Eirik, the weaponsmith, who everyone called Roar-Caster because of the way he roared everytime he swung his hammer onto the steel, was the second.  
  
As a boy, about fourteen, it was Eirik who had decided it was time for me to have my own weapon, so that I could hunt, defend myself, and start actively building my own legend. So he gave me a sword, and every morning, while the forge was heating, he taught me how to use it. He'd laugh if I made a mistake, and tell me in what grisly way I'd been killed because of it.  
  
I lost the weapon, of course, a couple of years after, when I had outgrown the children's sword, and gave it away to a traveller and his son, who admired the craftsmanship. I lamented it's loss almost immediately. Not long after, Eirik, well into his grey-years, stopped tending his forge and decided to wander north, to see what his steel was actually worth against the dragon.  
  
They brought word that he'd passed into legend not long after we burned Freyja, killing the grawl that had attacked him, but mortally wounded and unable to get to safety before the Arctodus smelled his blood. The hunters that found him told that even then, before Raven had come to guide his spirit into the Mists, he'd put a long and worthy fight.  
  
Over the years, when I took to living in Hoelbrak with my little Freyja on my knee, I all but forgot all his worthy lessons; until the Vigil reminded me of what it means to hold a sword. I like to think that every swing of my sword honours his memory.

# 23rd of Phoenix

Now encamped at Snowhawk, around a detour bend off the Lion Road. It's a neat enough encampment, basic but functional. The Lionguard aren't afraid to put the manpower to action either, both approaches along the road are heavily guarded by numerous armed pickets, and there's patrolling guards in the valley below here. They have to, because across from us, where the main road runs, is an old Haven blasted apart by corrupted ice, attracting icebrood from all over the area and generally doing it's best to hinder trade and free movement across the region. It's distant enough, but the valley is a mire of lumbering icebrood beasts and half-mad Svanir with more ice than flesh left in their heads. It's a grim sight, even though the shimmering spires of ice have a certain twisted beauty about them. They catch the glints of the sun, when the snowstorms abate a little, a jagged chunk of evil that seeks to mirror the more restful and majestic peaks that surround it.  
  
No wonder, then, that we're almost certainly going to be tasked with assaulting it, and smashing it to pieces. The Warmaster maid as much clear by ordering us to arrange all our artillery towards, up to the point of ranging in with mortar shells to put the corrupted icicles on notice that they're not just dealing with fancy-dressed pirates anymore, but with the one army specifically formed to destroy them. It was satisfying seeing the mortar grenades whistle overhead and pulp a few of the wandering beasts, probably turning them into colourful smears on the snow. I'm awaiting the orders to start the full preliminary bombardment; we'll likely expend a good deal of our muntions stock warming up the place before the troops get sent in. No matter. It's what they're created for, after all. I'll release some of our more specialist arms stocks tomorrow, and see if I can't find someone to cook me up some improvised fire-bombs for the mortar.  
  
Asides from that, all was calm in camp besides an altercation between Vatorn and Mirka; I don't know what about or why, but it almost turned ugly, and I had to shout both recruits down. They were doing about as bad a job as possible, shouting at each other while on watch; pretty much the polar opposite of keeping a watchful eye if you ask me. What annoys me though is that Mirka allowed herself to get angry at all. Figures she's got something niggling in the back of her head she doesn't want to talk about, but if Vatorn manages to rub that in the wrong way... Well, she's not a fresh recruit like him, she should know better. This is not acceptable.  
On Vatorn's side; this is another infraction on his name. I hope he realizes that if he keeps this up, he is going to run out of credit from the officers as fast as Geran did. Not a positive comparison.  
  
Talking about someone running out of credit, Drakemoor's still lying. I don't know why or what about, exactly, but she's lying about the entire "steal an empty vial out of medical while under a shadow spell". First of all, she claims she tripped. Except Boyd didn't see her or hear her trip, and I'm pretty damn sure Drakemoor is not *that* good at shadowmagic yet that she could've shadowstepped away. By her own admission, she isn't.  
Next to that, Boyd's claimed he heard multiple voices whispering things in his ear, of which only one was female. So, that's Belmont hanging as well, as far as I'm concerned, and Drakemoor doubly so if it turns out she indeed has been covering for him.  
Wish they'd stop digging their own graves by trying to be slick. I've dealt with a Sylvari called "Tricky", by Bear, I'll be able to handle a couple of lying humans.  
  
About bears, Rioleth asked me today if ever donned my spirit form. I told him yes; because I've done it once or twice in the past, after extensive preparation and communing with the spirits. They don't favour me exceptionally well, though, despite many people thinking I'm a bear of dolyak acolyte. I suppose I embrace lessons from their tales as much as any other, and favour bear perhaps as a manifestation of physical strength, but last I tried shifting into the beast's skin was... more than a year ago, and it left me feeling ill for hours afterwards. I'm not sure if even want to try it again; I feel more strong and powerful with my own two hands anyway. Ah well. Perhaps it is not such a bad idea; if only to remember how it feels. Later, though, when it's safe to do so. Perhaps if we pass by Hoelbrak.  
  
  
Right, as for tales... today, I remember Old Hakon Urrersson, who was old enough to have know Asgeir, and who saw parts of Hoelbrak when the glacier still threatened to swallow it. He was one of the last remaining norn that could still tell tale of how Far Shiverpeaks, and claimed to have seen it with his own eyes. And his wise old eyes were always kind. He used to say that, in his long, long life, he had seen grief and joy in equal measure, but had decided only to let happiness fill his heart.  
  
Old Hakon was always there, along with Alla, and their tales were always welcomed, even when he grew too old to speak for more than a couple of minutes without growing tired. His passing was mourned by all of Hoelbrak, and many came to spread some of his tales once the news had passed through the Shiverpeaks that he had died. It is one of the few times that the seven-hundred and thirty kegs that are told are to be drunk during the retelling of a hero's legend were actually drunk before the same tale was heard twice. The mourning feast lasted for three days.  
  
Alla Greyfiend, his wife, called so because her hair had turned the colour of ash and snow because of a wraith's curse, passed after him, following close behind to accompany him into the Mists. They left behind sons and daughters too many to count; many of which also elders with their own worthy legends and offspring.  
  
Their passing diminished our people.

# 24th of Phoenix

An extraordinary calm day today, with everything being quiet, except for the occasional shriek when the Lion, pickets spot another Icebrood encroaching. None of them seem to have done too much damage, the Lionguard are heavily armed, and apparently quite experienced at keeping them in check. I've seen some scratches and bruises, but nothing beyond that.  
  
Asides from that, I've been trimming down the elevation and doing some calibrations on the artillery batteries, looking at potential points where we can direct our attacks to. It's pretty clear we'll be shelling them before long, and I'd rather get everything we can get from every piece of ordnance we lob at them.  
  
It's been keeping me busy. Rioleth's asked me to teach him how to carve, some days ago, but I haven't yet found the time to sit down with him and get to work. Not sure if I can show him much, most of it just comes from your own hands and whatever you want to fashion. On that note, the bone spur I've been honing into an edge is almost complete. It looks like some sort of scimitar now, the blade throbbing dully where I've polished it smooth, as if it was alive and breathing. It's mesmerisingly beautiful, and it will make a fine trophy. Surprisingly sharp, too, for being bone.  
  
Next to all of that, I've been enjoying the familiar surroundings. I've only passed through here a couple of times, but the Shiverpeaks are the Shiverpeaks, and it never feels far away from home. Doubly so when you can hear the distant echo of Hoelbrak's great horns sounds every now and again, echoing between the mountains. It's a beautiful sound to hear.  
  
  
For today's tale we have the notorious brothers, Blast Speedcycle and Speed Blastcycle, sent to the foothills by the Iron Legion to devise a way to quickly traverse deep snows with their armoured vehicles. And what two Charr did the Legions send...  
  
The two principle members of the Cycle warband, as they were, had a propensity to drink themselves into an almighty stupor at the daily moots found throughout Hoelbrak, where their carousing skills were legend. They brought with them a spectacularly vile drink called Rotgut; an oily and stinking spirit that also doubled as emergency fuel for the Charr's war-machines.  
Drinking with them was always a pleasure; they were rich on tales about the wars in Ascalon, and both had great respect for the norn's ability to hold the mountain passes against the Charr, years and years before.  
If you listened carefully, you would learn a thing or two about Charr ingenuity, stupidity and dumb luck.  
  
Invariably, their alcohol-addled minds would come up with not-quite-genius but certainly very dangerous ideas, upon which they always acted; often with explosive and not entirely successful results. It was as such that they died, when the ignition on their vehicle failed after rigging a sled with a crude rocket, and the entire thing turned into a blazing fireball. Thankfully, they were both probably too drunk to have noticed their own death before it was too late, and when word was sent back to the Legions, it was that they had died happily, in the pursuit of what they loved best.

# 25th of Phoenix

Another day or preparations and making ready, overlooking the oddly beautiful jagged shape of the ice-blasted haven across the haven. I must have checked the mortar sightings at least half a dozen time since we set them up; I'd almost think I was nervous, if I didn't know any better.  
I had Seleea rig up the incendiary explosives form the shell stocks, which went about as well as I expected her to do. She found one faulty shell though, and put it aside while packing the others. I was about to fetch it to see what was wrong with it when a rabbit or a hare or such leaped on top of it and set the damned thing off, much to the immediate regret of the critter, I assume. Thankfully, Sel and I had had the foresight to move the muntions some distance away from the encampment, and it didn't cause any harm except giving Sel a serious fright. Sel's lucky she removed the shrapnel charge beforehand, or it would probably have done a good deal more than just caused the demise of a single rabbit.  
  
So, in that respect, our war stocks are ready and I'm standing by to deliver the shelling of a lifetime to the Svanir, including nine shells loaded to the brim with napalm and high-explosive dispersal charges. Hopefully, the preliminary bombardment the engineers will be delivering make drastically short work of most of the opposition, before the troops actual move in to clean-up. It'll be a first for the engineers under my lead to conduct that sort of bombardment, too, so I hope everyone's ready.  
On the topic of engineering, Vatorn, of all people, has asked if he can't tag along with the engineers to see if he enjoys it, even though he has no actual experience in the matter. I've said yes, but I'm probably not going to allow him anyway near actual explosive stocks until he's picked up a thing or two on the job. Until then, he's more than welcome to assist in the physical labour aspect.  
  
Also turns out that both Maeva and Vatorn make carvings; something I didn't expect. Seems I'm not the only one who takes to whittling wood and bone with a sharp knife. The Knight also apparently still practices her smithing. We had a good enough talk around the fire; sorry to hear that the Knight's kin all perished during the Briar attacks. She remembers Lion's Arch well enough, though. We played the old boasting game again, though with little boasting and more melancholy. She apparently also knew I was a baker, which surprised me. Not too many people seem to know that; always leaves them surprised. Ah well.  
  
In other news, we interrogated Belmont today about the entire problem with Boyd and his gun. He claims he told Drakemoor to steal a vial well enough, but then ambled off to do something else, apparently entirely ignoring the weapons discharge, and denying even knowing what it caused, despite the fact that that's preposterous. Drakemoor is lying, that we know for amost for certain. Belmont is either lying through his nose, or so damn negligent he's chin-deep in trouble anyway. Maeva is not amused either; she's of the opinion they both lied, and made it clear this might cost them their entire career in the Vigil, outright stating they'd get discharged if it was found out there were lying.  
What's worse, I deeply suspect Belmont and Drakemoor *are* covering for people. At least Rotarn is involved, probably as one of the people that spooked Belmont. His injury is suspect enough as it is.  
Maeva will make a verdict on the case tomorrow; I hope for their sake they come clean before that.  
  
Anyway;  
  
Today, I remember the sapling Eamyllen, who had come from the Grove to visit the snow-covered shiverpeaks. She spent several days running amok throughout the tiered levels of Hoelbrak's great lodge, reveling in the delights of the snow and the cold winds, eating and drinking happily, before listening to many tales every norn hunter would be willing to tell her.  
  
It was like this she wandered under the stairs of the great lodge, and found me in the morning, baking pastries while Freyja, only six winters old, was playing just outside. Freyj was instantly enraptured by the flowery creature, and while I wasn't looking, decided to take the sylvari for a tour through the lodges on her own. I panicked, of course, when I found out Freyj'd run off, but I found them happily sliding around Lake Mourn's frozen surface, giggling as if they'd know eachother for many years.  
Eamyllen lingered around Hoelbrak for about two seasons, venturing into the foothills to the east and the cliffs to the south, but spending enough time in Hoelbrak to have become one of Freyj's first friends. They would often build snowmen where the snow packed, or play norn hunting games in between the lodges while I was hard at work.  
  
Unfortunately, she died in a clumsy accident, slipping over a frost-covered step and falling away from such a height even the thick snows could not cushion her. I did not have the heart to ever tell Freyja her dear friend had died so suddenly; by the time she was old enough to understand, Eamyllen was nothing but an old memory.  
  
But I won't forget, lass, your kindness, and the friendship you showed to my kin. For that, you will be remembered.

# 26th of Phoenix

Another day in Snowhawk, waiting for the orders to come to push through. They didn't yet, but I took a patrol out north, make sure some of the more vulnerable steadings around the area aren't being attacked. Most of them looked pretty good; we later discovered the Lions had put up a picket with an arrow-cart to ward off the encroaching icebrood. Good foresight on their part; I can only admire their diligence in keeping both the road and the steadings somewhat safe. Only one of the northern steadings seemed vulnerable, and we had to deal with some lesser icebrood creatures stalking around there, before heading back south. There's also Kodan warrior lumbering about on the north-side of the corrupted haven, fighting the corruption themselves. I wish we had been in a position to assist them, but not yet. They're too distant, trapped between the mountain the corrupted haven. We'll clean out that corrupted cancer soon enough, though, and then the entire region should become a goo deal more safe. Well, that's a lie, it won't be safe until we destroyed that damned Claw of Jormag circling about. Seems more and more like that's what we're going to end up fighting it. Kristen'll do her best to follows us into the heat of things, if that's the case. I might straight-up ask the officers to accommodate her. I'd rather have her with us, safe, than stalking slightly behind out in the wilderness in between the icebrood.  
  
On another note, Maeva finished dealing with the entire issue surrounding Drakemoor and Layfon. Apparently they smartened up in the end, and confessed, right before the hammer fell down. As expected, Rotarn was a culprit as well, and they indeed had been lying to cover for eachother. They've been suspended from scouting duties, and Knight had something to discuss with the Warmaster; I am guessing they are likely to lose their ranks for it. Idiots. I have no sympathy at all. At least they weren't discharged, then, which I will admit is a relief. Much as they screwed up on the capital scale on this one, they're good enough people at heart, and it would be a pity losing them from the Vigil entire. At least now, they can work to regain some honour, and perhaps learn that lying to dodge responsibility is not acceptable. Doubly so when we *know* they're lying about something. My gut tells me Maeva would have discharged them if they hadn't spoken up.  
Either case, it's deeply disappointing, coming from two of our more veteran Crusaders.  
  
  
Today, I remember the norn Haemillen Ullasson, who was a rascal and my friend. Like so many of the youths, I grew up alongside him and Usha; he was maybe a year or so younger than I was, with a temper like a roiling storm, but a kind enough of heart to always regret it when he'd let it get to him. He was there when I met Freyja, and when she died, and he remained in the foothills when I became a baker.  
  
Haemillen was a fisher. But not just any fisher, that was not adventurous enough for him; rather, he would cut a deep, round hole in the frozen lakes, and dive through, spearing ice fish and gathering clams and cockles deep below the frozen surface, before swimming back up. He could, or so he claimed, hold his breath for more than an hour, and said that any water that did not have pieces of ice drifting in it was too warm for him.  
He always passed by my home first, when he came back from fishing, and I traded many of his catches for bread or coin, or better, when he'd found an especially nice catch, and we'd batter it and fry it in deep oil. To die for, that.  
  
Alas, Haemillen Ullasson, my friend, one day disappeared below the frozen lake, and never did surface again.

# 27th of Phoenix

Long day of work; the orders came down to finally attack the haven, so we're preparing for that on the morrow. Some planning needed, and we're weary of the Claw swooping in and coming to say hello halfway through the assault. Much as it is within our desires to destroy it, we might not have the means to destroy it. Even if we lure it into the range of the batteries, it might shrug it off and simply not care. So, we'll have to be quick. We're going to pincer the haven from the north-side, hopefully with support from the Kodan hammers we encountered there. Meanwhile, we'll shell the south-side with the entirety of our munitions stock, dropping mortar shells to tear the icebrood into goop and using the carronade to punch holes into the structure of the corruption. Then we'll storm south-side with blasting charges, exploit the rents the barrage has punched before we flatten the entire thing.  
  
It's a load of work to ready up the charges, as we're wiring up all of our remaining war-stock, and setting up time-wire fuses. Hopefully, it'll do the trick. We'll have to make sure we get clear, though, it's going to go up with some force.  
  
  
Today, I remember the human, George Farfield, so called because he always claimed to be "far-afield from home". Soldiering against the Charr had brought him to the Shiverpeaks, though the peace and good temper of our people kept him when his discharge was given. He was an older man, by then, with bad eyes, a worse leg, but plenty of good tales. Hated Charr, of course, if they were the Legion type, which Usha often managed to get the old man riled up over.  
  
Farfield spent his last years in quiet contemplation and aversion of war, which has cost him 'more than enough' to keep him from ever thinking about returning home. He preferred to walk alone, and go into the foothills and the 'peaks for many days, overcoming his wounds and old age, buying him the quiet respect of many norn. Not quite an elder, but near to one as anyone not of our kin could become.  
  
He found rest in his walks, eventually.

# 28th of Phoenix

Right, today's account:  
We started the artillery barrage in the early afternoon, and kept up shelling them for some time, putting cracks into it with the carronade, while the mortars fell like rain. It was impressive, to say the least, the repeated bangs echoing across the valley and rebounding between the mountains. Little pearls of fire bloomed into brief existence amid puffs of smoke and steam, throwing up ice and shredded icebrood as if they were nothing. By the time we got there, most of them were reduced to mere stains, or mangled and burned beyond any recognition. The carronade did it's work too, caused fractures and partial collapses in the structure we could employ to rig up with the sapping charges. But I'm running ahead of the recount.  
We continued shelling, until Ebony, up in the mortar pit, suffered a misfire with a jammed shell getting stuck in a mortar tube. We stopped the barrage, meaning Blade squad, on the far side of the Haven, was commencing their attack. I had to tell Ebony to chuck away the tube, and dive clear behind a ridge. It worked, but the detonation destroyed our mortars and a good deal of their servicing equipment. We had to rush and get ready for the assault soon after, though that was easy enough. The shelling meant we only ran into token resistance, most of which was easily dispatched by the attack force. While we were sapping the area with enough explosives to crater a mountain, Athy shows up out of no-where. Right at the same time, the Claw decides to say hello and swoops overhead, dropping a number of ice shards the size of a house on top of us, shards of which hit several of us. Marcus is out for the count, and so is Mithy and Maxson, along with some others. It created quite some chaos, and we had to call a sudden retreat while the fuses were ticking. Thankfully, the Claw lost interest soon after, and circled away back north. Something tells me we'll be seeing him again soon.  
  
We got clear, though, and Bear give me strength, what a detonation. The shockwave blew across camp and caused secondary avalanches we could see spill down from the distance, while debris must've been flung hundreds of meters up into the air. The Haven is, patently, gone, as ordered. We cut it close on the fuse though, the confusion meant that if I had the fuse reduced by even a minute, some of us might have been caught in the blast. You can still see the pall of hanging mists and vapour, lingering after the detonation.  
Kristen will have heard that. Bear's arse, everyone as far as Hoelbrak and the Gorge will have heard that. At this rate, I'll have destroyed more of Snowden Drifts than the Elder Dragons. I'm sure the Priory and their need to preserve would find that grossly ironic.  
  
After that, with the wounded safe and the rubble somewhat cleaned off, we had an old-fashioned camp celebration where the Quartermaster went around with the drinks crate, and I had another of those stubby Black Citadel cigars, just like always. Lionhead, myself and Rioleth sang songs, and I arm-wrestled Rio, though I let him win. He's now claimed the feat-name of Ironhand, just for the joke of it, which I think he might as well keep. The lad's got a good deal of norn inside of him, funnily enough.  
  
Work's not done yet, though, we're going to press home the advantage and sweep out the remaining icebrood for now. That'll be bloody enough work, but we shouldn't run into too much trouble. After all, it's what we do, eh.  
  
  
Today, I remember Loika Bylssdottir, the Pinewood skull-crusher and a great hunter.  
Loika was one of those many hunters that started to seek their legend young; when others went home for the heat of the hearth, Loika was out in the blizzard, braving the storm. It made her fierce, headstrong and desirable, of course. We had been friends, when we were younger, but she left Hoelbrak more and more often for longer and more dangerous hunts. After Freyja was born, she remained a welcome, if rare, guest, though the times we spoke more than a heartfelt greeting in passing after that time can be counted on both hands.  
Her legend grew, though, and tales were spread about her feats against the Svanir and the icebrood north, as well as the Grawl and the Jotun.  
  
Her greatest legend was how she had been caught unawares by a group of Grawl raiders, who, while she had been washing her hair in a stream, had made off with her weapons, forcing Loika to fight them with her bare hands. The tales says she ripped a young pine tree out of the ground entire, and used it with all her strength like a makeshift great club, breaking the heads of three of the Grawl before the others turned and fled. She kept the tree lug, and had it carved down into a more elegant if not any less brutal weapon.  
  
She died ranging north, in battle with Jotun when she came to the aid of some caravans on the Lion Road. Only a few of the traders survived, but they brought back Loika's body with them. She was burned on a pyre as befitting a hero, and her tales were told by the skaalds for several seasons in her memory.

# 29th of Phoenix

Second day of operations against the icebrood, now striking out at Svanir steadings in the surrounding area. Not much to note, we split up into our squads, stormed our respective areas, and left a good number of Svanir that the dragon won't be able to turn into icebrood, that's for sure. We struck out and killed a shaman that apparently had been the reason why the Grawl and Jotun had been worshiping the Dragon as well. Didn't even put up much of a fight; or rather, we didn't let him. He was promptly surrounded and struck down. Lorma's been leading Blade, with Marcus badly wounded, but that didn't really stop us much. Only pity is that we're virtually out of supplies. We only managed to damage the corrupted steading, rather than destroy it as we intended. Still, Ebony lit it on fire, but only to marginal effect.  
  
So, with that in mind, Lionhead and Ravenwest were tasked with taking our portable munitions, like grenades, hand-held mortar shells and such, and reducing them to their high-explosive components, which we've wired up into improvised satchel charges. They'll do the trick for another handful of missions, but they won't last much longer, especially with another day of action coming. There's a couple of places where we could get re-stocked, but none of them are close. Worse, the nearest and quickest solution is to try and raid a dredge facility for their mining explosives; something which is inherently dangerous even to contemplate.  
I have to talk to the Quartermaster, see if we can't get a resupply detachment planned regardless. There's a mining operation out in Nentor Valley. Even better, the Lion Road runs east all the way to the Citadel, where our munitions are manufactured. Except that's a long, long trip. Odds are they'll be sent out tomorrow.  
  
In other news, as predicted, Drakemoor and Belmont have been demoted to the rank of recruit for their trouble; a regrettable if necessary action taken. Normally I would feel some measure of sympathy, but in this case, I don't. They had our trust until they broke it, now let the re-earn it the hard way. Besides, all the best soldiers apparently get demoted at one point! In all honesty, they'll be fine. It's a ceremonial matter and an acute enough punishment that will make them realise how stupid they've been for something so silly.  
  
Onto another silly thing, Vatorn got into a fight again a newer but very old looking Charr recruit, over Charr cultural principles as to the punishment of their soldiers. An interesting enough topic, even though it has little bearing on what the Vigil does; as I keep repeating, these aren't the Legions. Anyway, they both got angry, and I had to tell them to pipe down. Vatorn, to his credit, did so, but the old bastard Charr didn't catch the hint and continued making off-hand comments. I saddled him with shoveling snow along the road for his trouble. Vatorn also dropped one of Ironhand's tea-cups, which apparently shook him a little. I'd offer to repair it with some iron, but he seemed to want to it himself.  
Bah, always Charr and Charr and Charr. For being ideal soldiers, according to themselves, they like straining on the leash.  
  
I got a letter from Mire, who's apparently going to try and take her lover, the spirit-speaker, with her here sometimes soon. I wrote her back to be careful and watch the roads, given our work the recent days was weel-needed. Also wrote Kristen, who's been doing a good job of hanging back, both to my relief and to my faint annoyance, on both sides. I'm glad she's safe, but then I'd rather see her with my own eyes every evening just to be sure. Ah well. She'll be wondering what that explosion from yesterday was, I figure.  
  
  
Today, I remember Lilly Gersdottir, whom we called the Young, for she was Ger Fleet-Foot and Fyla's third child, born twelve and eight years after her kin. Lilly was aptly named, for she was a flower in the hearts of those she met, and the joy of youth will forever be hers.  
  
She grew sick and frail in her third year, and perished before the world ever heard her tale. Her father and her mother wept; I never wish their anguish upon anyone in this world.

# 30th of Phoenix

Another long day out in the Snowden, though that'll change tomorrow, most likely. More clean-up work, though most of the icebrood and Svanir seem like they're about to be run off, or at least are still reeling from the hammerblows we gave them. Went out to Owl's Abattoir, with the old Owl lodge. It's in a sad state, run down and overrun by cave bats, now that few people follow her wisdoms anymore. Still, we picked through the bones, though most of it was quiet. Some traces of recent fighting on account of an icebrood troll that we later found and burned. Most curiously, we saw, however briefly, a number of owl spirits, sheltering in the broken lodge, unsure on where they are supposed to go. They were only there for a second before they faded again. Calder thinks they're anchored to that place, and is diseased. I'm not a mage, but to me it felt more like a sanctuary. Like an old crumbling ruin in the middle of the desert, sheltering a few brave and wandering souls. A little like the Dustbowl was to us, in Maguuma. We left it in the care of the old shaman.  
  
Lorma took us back to the norn steading we only damaged yesterday, and I used to last of my stock to blow it even more to pieces. At least the Svanir won't have as easy a time as they did repairing them. If anything, I came back to finish the job, rather than doing it half-and-half.  
  
Lance went over to some Kodan, and got us a good amount of food and other things. One of which was a battered and damaged Dredge mortar along with a handful of shells for the thing. It'll require repairing and extensive refitting if we want to use it, but I've tasked Ravenwest and Sel to do so. Worst case, it'll be a nice pet-project for them until they concludes it's beyond use, best case it'll replace the mortar tubes we lost. Doesn't matter too much anyway, we're out of anything remotely explosive, as we've expended all our improvised charges already. The Quartermaster and the Warmaster had a talk with me, and we've decided to send out a resupply mission to the Citadel, probably leaving tomorrow. Lorma sped off with our requisition order and munitions list, said they could send it forwards to us to the Haven guarding Diessa. That'll be where we'll go and pick it up then, I wager. I've gotten a few volunteers for the supply run, Ravenwest, Carmine, Lionhead and Grimstone; they'll do us fine enough in case we run into any small surprises, too.  
But that's tomorrow.  
  
Other news, Mackie decided to smack Belmont straight-up in the face, probably related to the entire "prank" incident I've mentioned a couple of times. Maeva yelled at them a little until Mackie settled, but, again, it's the sort of reaction and tension we don't really need. Probably figure Belmont tried to offer his apologies or something, and Mackie just lashed out at him. Can't blame him, but it's not his job to mete out punishments for things like that anymore. Ah well. I don't think anyone filed an actual disciplinary notice, though.  
  
Anyway, that's it for today, probably going to speed off tomorrow. Hope Kristen doesn't decide to pick that specific day to show up in camp to say hello, or I might need to take her with me.  
  
  
For today, I remember Murmur Snowbanished, of whom I have already written before, when I was in the Magus Falls. His memory is honoured, as he was my sister's kin, and my dear friend. It was the Charr Usha, Timur and Murmer, along with such likes as Hrist that were always closest to my heart as friends were. Murmur was born weak, brittle of bone but with a good heart and cunning Raven himself must have envied.  
  
He fell and died, breaking a leg somewhere he could not escape, before the creatures of the wilderness found him. He was the first true friend I had lost since Freyja had died, and it was blow that staggered us all. Timur and Usha, who had been closer to him than I, were never the same, and we kept a carving of his in our house when we still had one, so that he always had a home, should he one day grow bored and decided he could also outwit the Mists.

# 31st of Phoenix

Long day passed; currently enjoying the legendary hospitality of Cragstead, right on the cuffs of Diessa, next to Dolyak Pass. It's been a long trek from Snowhawk Landing all the way here; most of the day was us marching up along the Lion Road. I'm here with the resupply detail, Lionhead, Grimstone, Ravenwest and Carmine, who seem in good enough humours. We stopped for a brief time at Crossroad Haven when we entered the foothills. Seems Lionhead never came this far east; strange enough for a norn, the foothills are our heartland. I showed her Jora's old statue, which she appreciated.  
It was well onto dusk by the time we got to Cragstead, though it was worth the extra trip. The Havens are comfortable enough, but the Lionguard are rather austere, and the stone walls do little for warmth and warm hearth. The people over in Cragstead were more than happy to allow us a place to rest for a day; a good meal and some of their excellent Cragstead Red stout, which was more than enough to restore our spirits.  
Also watched Lionhead and Grimstone wrestle over in the Wolf shrine here, to get rid of their last shreds of energy. Not unevenly matched, either, so it was well enough worth to watch. Ravenwest and Carmine just clocked out next to the fire.  
  
Tomorrow, we're supposed to link up with the supply caravan over in Charrgate, just down the pass. I doubt it'll arrive come morning, but it should be there around noon or such, so we're not in much of a hurry. Once it arrives, we can check the load, and then make our way back west towards Crossroad or even Highpass, depending on how late the convoy out of the Citadel manages to be.  
  
I should come out to Cragstead with Kristen, it's a beautiful place, and the people are very kind. Perhaps next time was need to pass north, we can rest here overnight, maybe even do some trading. Some of those kegs of stout to take along on the hunts. She'd like it her, at least for a while.  
  
  
Today, I remember Elby Lodge-Born, so called because he was born in the Great Lodge of Hoelbrak, the one day his mother left the steading her mate had made for her, only to be surprised by Elby's desire to see the world, even though he was several days too early. He was the son on Lify and Elhard.  
  
Elby was a handful of years younger than I was, but he had grown to become a good man, strong but kind, and a follower of bear to the bone, who boasted often that he would be the one to break Jormag's fang. He is one of those few for whom bear's form came easy, and I have seen him lift slabs of stone twice his size, shifting them around with a giant's strength.  
  
I honour him now, in memory, because of the good deeds he did in his life; his gift of strength was dedicated to others, and many could tell tales where Elby had appeared charging over the snow-covered mountain flanks, or through the dense pine forests in a moment of need, to rout raiding Grawl, or to fend off Jotun from taking what they wanted through brute force. He hunted for glory, but only if that glory was in service to others.  
Alas, he could never have won all his battles, and one day the odds turned against him. He stood bravely, and died.

# 32nd of Phoenix

Once more in Cragstead, following a hectic day into Diessa. We left here around noon, when everyone was somewhat fresh and marched down the pass to Charrgate. The Lionguard lieutenant there was quick to inform us that there wasn't a Pact weapons shipment in yet. There were some Priory scholars there, looking into the old Ascalonian ruins, but not a Marmox packed with explosives and munitions. So, I had the folks march down to Butcher's Block, since it was on the road from the Citadel anyway, we'd have seen them pass through. Procured a crate of whiskey for Lyralii, as requested, and some light provisions to add to our food stocks. Some prime jerky and a couple of pickled wurm eggs that'll really do the trick to add to the usual carry rations.  
I talked a bit to the town guard, who informed me they had seen a Pact weapons shipment pass through earlier in the morning.  
See, turns out the entire region is riddled with Dredge, renegades and separatist partisans hitting up the supply lines. I called back the detachment, and headed back to the Haven. On the way, we spotted a handful of Dredge raiders picking apart a norn trading caravan; we routed them quick enough, but it seemed pretty obvious that if our weapon supplies passed through Butcher's Block, but never got to Charrgate, the damned Dregde must've intercepted the damn things.  
  
I call for volunteers to try and root out the Dredge, and try and either retrieve or destroy the supplies. I'd rather not want them to have their grubby hands on a campaign-stock of Pact munitions. Everyone volunteered, of course, despite the notion it could be very, very dangerous to undertake such a thing with so few.  
We headed north, into the rougher terrain where the Dredge usually like to build their surface mines. We spotted some Dredge-like structures soon enough, they've dotted the place with small watch-towers and the like. Pretty sizeable too, so we settled for a hit-and-run raid. We stormed through one of the entrances, killed a handful of Dredge and punctured clean through the mine interior before they knew what happened. No signs of anything, though, but several of their vehicles, with the large sonic-burrowers at the top. Looked much like they used those to strike out against the caravans in the region. We were on our way out when we found a very large vehicle, stored away in a side-hangar of some sorts. On a hunch, I had Kalla smack it open, and sure enough, it was filled with a large number of crates tools. Figure it was a transport they were going to send under the mountains towards one of their larger cities. We quickly took the crates we could see were stamped with the Pact logo, and hightailed it out without looking back too much before the Dredge defenders figured out we were still inside. It was close. Reinforcement troops were on our heels on the way out, and we had to dodge cannon fire from one of their turrets for a while.  
But we got away clean, and with a good deal of our materials back with us. No sign of the caravan guards or the pack-marmox, though, I can only hope the Dredge killed them quick and got rid of their bodies, rather than consider they might have been put on a prisoner transport. Not that Dredge enjoy takings prisoners, but it's not unheard of, and the prospect is usually grim.  
From the initial counts, we've got most of the dynamite and the mortar and grenade munitions. The actual mortar tube is missing, and none of our carronade go out, though those are not hard to manufacture. We returned to the Haven soon enough, and I informed the Lionguard and the local Legion folks about the Dredge lurking out in the mountains, and the ongoing raids.  
  
We ourselves carried the supplies back to Cragstead with some difficulty. We'll be redistributing the weight tomorrow, and we'll each have to carry a good deal of the heavy supplies on our person. Unless, of course, I can convince the Cragsteaders here to lend us a Dolyak and a trading harness until such a time we can return it. I'll have to ask the tomorrow.  
For now, we celebrate having survived a suicide raid on the Dredge with some ale, while the Skaald is telling tales of how the Cragsteaders fought the Molten Alliance. It's a passionate tale. I kept it light on the drinking, because I know I'll have to wake them all up much earlier tomorrow, if we're heading back west again. We might make it to Highpass easily enough with the caravan, though depending on how far behind the Chapter is, we might head over to Highhaven and hold there. Spirits, perhaps we can sit it out, and I can take the trade detachment south a bit until the Chapter arrives in full. I'll see.  
I'll also prepare a written report to send back down the road in case any of the scouts head our way. You never know. But that's tomorrow work.  
  
  
Today, I remember the human noble Constantine, of house Aenimalf, who lived with us in the north and sought to capture the spirit of my people in the strokes of a brush, and the flowing lyrical verses of poetry. He did so with a passion and a zeal borne forth from a love for our people. He would often sit and sigh in his old age, how sad it was that he had been born a man, and not a norn.  
  
In his youth, Constantine, who was a lordling to the Krytan crown, had wrestled with the vices and duties that befall all who are born in too comfortable a position; idle hands lead to an idle mind, and an idle mind wanders in dark places. He lived, as he would tell it, like a swine amid a sea of pearls.  
  
It was later, when it became such to do as fashion, that he went on a grand tour of Tyria, meant to enrich his shallow life with other wisdoms and views of the world. He passed through many places, but remained in the Shiverpeaks, where he fell in love. Not with a woman or man, but with the beauty of the virgin snow and the ways of the people that disturbed it first, on the hunts for legend.  
He lest his land to one of his many sons, and dedicated the remainder of his life to attempt to express why exactly he had done so. He left us many landscapes and beautiful verse; but he spoke most passionate of it when he had his share of drink, and his voice attained that strange sense of wonder that only the truly passionate can attain.  
  
He died in his sleep, and was buried beneath a cairn. Far away, and yet so close to home.

# 33rd of Phoenix

At Crossroad Haven today, following the brief trek west from Cragstead. I considered going all the way to Highpass, by we're loaded to the brim with the explosives, and it's slow and tiresome going. Nevermind that we'd be in for a spot of bother if we'd be ambushed again anywhere along the road. With the Svanir up and about, beating their chests now that this Claw is circling overhead, that's more than likely. So, I've decided to stick to the original plan, and camp it out at Crossroad Haven until the Chapter proper heads over. The places seemed like it had been attacked just before we arrived too, so i think we made the right call in not going any further. If they're bold enough to storm a Lionguard Haven, they wouldn't blink to try and tackle a weighted down Vigil patrol.  
Don't know when the Chpater will arrive, but it can't be more than a handful of days.  
  
  
Today I remember the Canthan, Xi Yee, whom our hunters found sick and dying out in the snows, his fingers and toes cracked with frostbite. A traveler caught unawares by the might spirits of the mountains and the ice, but unable to meet and overcome them. He was fed and warmed, but the cold had gone into his lungs. We kept him in the care of the shamans and the kind, but there was little we could do but watch him slowly perish through the nights.  
In the end, we knew he came from Divinity's Reach, searching knowledge and balance. We knew his name, and his last hours. We knew that no-one would remember him if we didn't; and so it is that we honour his memory, because no-one deserves to be forgotten utterly.

# 34th of Phoenix

No signs of the Chapter yet, so we remain waiting here at Crossroad. I considered leaving the supplies at the Haven with a guard, and heading south for a day, but the Svanir are riled up, and they've been swarming over the hills. The Chapter will be here soon enough, but I'd rather not risk it, just in case.  
A few raiders tried to attack the Haven directly, which tells volumes about how bold they've become. The Lionguard are used to the raids, but even they say they're being aggressive. That says something.  
Pity, I'd enjoy staying out here a good deal more if I wasn't worried about the place getting attacked by Svanir and Icebrood at the blink of an eye. Svanir's Dome, north, stands out as even more of a big, blue eyesore of corrupted ice than it usually does. Lionhead has the right idea when she says we should bring in an airship and flatten it. Ah well. Chapter should arrive here on the morrow, if all goes well.  
  
  
Today, I remember Timur Snowbanished, who was my friend, and almost my kin. He was one of Usha's self-proclaimed Snowbanished-clan, consisting of herself, Timur and Murmur, whose story I've already told. All three of them grew up as Charr amidst norn, living in the sanctuary of Knut Whitebear's hospitality until they were able to prove their own strengths. Between the three of them, they exemplified cunning, boldness and daring. They were always my friends in youth, and later in the early years of my adult life, worthy of story and to be remembered until my death, and by my daughter after that.  
  
Timur was, most of the three Snowbanished, like his kin in the Citadel. Brash, stubborn and not afraid to break bones to back up the notion he didn't like you. Surprisingly, in that, he also resembled his adopted kinfolk well enough. Murmur did the thinking, Usha the talking, and Timur the breaking. I myself did, often bemused, the watching, and I have many fond memories of our follies. Timur and I shared our own battlefields; strewn with broken barstools, bruised knuckles and spilled mugs of ale, though thankfully never more than that.  
  
As we grew older, Murmur passed away, Usha became a brewer, and I devoted many years to my daughter's care, Timur too grew a little more distant. He sought his revels in the moots, travelling as a brawler to the contests and the great trials. Many times did he participate in the Great Alemoot, or the fighting tournaments of Kyesjard. When he passed by back through Hoelbrak, he was our honoured guest. He'd tell Freyja all the tales I'd rather he never mentioned, and joke that he'd take her with him to one of his many fights once she was old enough.  
  
It was not so long ago, only a handful of years, when news came that Timur had perished. We hadn't seen him for several seasons, though had not felt the need to worry. Miners working for the Priory found him, buried beneath some ice down a steep gulley in Lorna's Pass. They suspect he had been travelling drunk, and had simply not seen the road turn, before stumbling headlong into the crevice.  
When we finally heard at home, I experienced what it feels like to lose a brother.

# 35th of Phoenix

Over at the Brusah Steading today, after having linked up with the Chapter earlier today. They moved in to Crossroad as expected, and we're now back with the main troop body. Not too soon either, we saw the fires over the steading earlier, and moved down in force not long thereafter. Seems Wulfbane's steading here has come under attack by Svanir. I knew they were riled up, but Wulfbane and his folks pride themselves on keeping close guard on their grounds, often making short work of the Svanir. Not this time. Seems Wulfbane and his people helped out repulse an attack on Crossroad Haven; the same fight we saw traces off when we arrived here the days before. The Svanir then retaliated, and attacked in some numbers. Wulfbane's held them at bay, but there are dead and wounded. The trees around him are also hung with grisly trophies to ward the Svanir away, some not too nice to look at. Doubt it will have any effect on the Svanir; they'll just claim the others were weaklings and try again, scarecrow or not.  
He'd be better served taking those down and burning them, before they attract unpleasant animals, or vengeful spirits. Svanir or not, they're still norn.  
  
Anyway, many of his clan have fallen. We burned the corpses out on the pyres. Thankfully, Siggy and the children are safe and sound, and there's still a good number of Wulfbane's warriors left to hold their own. We've occupied the lodge anyway, and will likely reap vengeance for the fallen.  
It was an awkward reunion. On one side, I am relieved that Sigrun and the two little ones, Sigrid and Sigismund are alright. On the other, I wish it was not on such an occasion where we need to drink to the victorious dead, and tell their tales while their ashes are still cooling. Wulfbane is also losing his resolve; he considers moving south, away from the encroaching Svanir. And I can't blame him. He told the tales of those that fell defending the lodge; too many. He can't keep this up for ever.  
  
At least we're in a position to help now. I've got enough explosives to split the Thunderhorns in two, and then fire one half into the sea. With the full force of the Chapter behind me, we'll be able to wreak bloody vengeance for our dead kin, and lay waste to the spirits-forsaken Dragon worshipers. And then, we'll shoot that damned Claw out of the skies, and rip it to shreds.  
  
Kristen is also here; came when she saw the fires, and aided in the defense. Keen eyes and quick arrows; I have no doubt she saved many lives, and accounted for herself in such a way that I can feel nothing but pride and love at the thought of it. She was there, playing with Siggy's children, comforting them. One day, she'll be a great mother, I'm sure, and something in me can't wait for that moment. But not yet. We have other paths to walk in our life before we embark upon that journey. Besides, the wonderful woman is still adamant I need to build her that dragon lodge first.  
Ah well.  
  
The pyres have stopped burning, and Maeva has stopped beating steel at the forge, so all is quiet. Wulfbane opened the kegs and had a feast laid out for us, but it could not disguise that it was a mournful event in many ways. In more than one way, this was both a terrible failure and a glorious victory for Wulfbane's clan and his steading. It could be the end of what he built here, or just another trial for his kin to endure. Either way, the stories to be told are worthy ones.  
  
Normally, I would have written about those who died in Orr, during the first war. But not today. Today, I will remember the heroes of the Brusah Clan, who fell defending it from fell attackers in the night. Hail to the fallen!  
And so I remember Rugga Svensdottir, whose arrows felled many, both in battle and in the hunt.  
I remember Gudmundr Oxbreaker, follower of Minotaur, who broke the enemies on the snowy slopes.  
I remember Krumr the Avalanche, whose roar made the mountains tremble.  
And finally, I remember Hugun Axespitter, trophy-taker and warrior.  
Let the tale of this great battle live on in our hearts, just as their spirits live on in the Hall of Spirits, where they join those warriors of legend as equals.  
  
75. Rugga Svensdottir.  
76. Gudmundr Oxebreaker.  
77. Krumr the Avalanche.  
78. Hugun Axespitter.  
  
And now I will return to my bedding and my love, and cherish that we are alive.

# 36th of Phoenix

A day of work, clearing away the threats from around Wulfbane's lodge. Lance drove off the Svanir, while Blade went into a nearby mine, and freed a handful of norn prospectors and miners that had fallen into the hands of yet another group of spirits-damned dredge. We routed them easily enough, however, even found some fancy looking stones and crystals, as well as something that looks like a Molten Alliance weapon. The Alliance hasn't been around since Scarlet's attacks, some time ago, but we still found one device that looks like it. Fused molten stone and metal. I've put it asides for the engineers to look over; hopefully, it's not a new weapon. The Flame Legion and the Dredge working together again doesn't sound like something we need right now.  
  
The Dredge sent back some reinforcements, but we were out before it mattered. Some shells fired at us from those burrowing turrets. We destroyed a handful of those, but they seem to return not too long after, having suffered little damages. The Dredge probably have something deep below the ground here. Not much we can do about them in that case, too far away. We'll just have to keep a watchful eye.  
  
For the rest, we're staying over at the steading until it all clears up again. Wulfbane is a good host, and we don't want for food or drink. Kristen's off hunting too. Suspect the entire Chapter made it too crowded for her anyway. I don't mind, she'll be back when she's back. Not like we're hard to find.  
  
  
Now, for the tales... these are those whom I knew in Orr. They are many, and unlike the previous ones I've told, they will not mentioned in order of their deaths.  
Let me start by remembering Fjolda, Kurnsdottir, who was with us in Orr, and fought on the plains of Malchor's Leap. We'd been ordered to relieve pressure off of a Pact force near the ruins of Wren, flying in from out staging post in the Straits, and then dropping off the troops. We made our way into Malchor, but landed at the wrong ruins, too far west. We had to punch through a large mob or Risen to get to Wren, while also fending a rearguard action against dozens of Risen that seemed to crawl out of the ground where-ever we went.  
  
Fjolda, whom I had not know for long then, was on that rearguard action, while the rest of us stormed the Risen around Wren. We punched through cleanly enough, and the Pact troops at Wren were able to link up with us, and reverse the direction of our attack, hoping to capitalize on the ground we'd just cleared in our push to relieve them. We wheeled around, and did just that, but by that point, the rearguard had all but overrun. Fjolda was found to have held a narrow chokepoint, an old alleyway between two sunken ruins, and had stacked her foes so high the bodies sloped up and away, raised almost to chest-height by her valour. She was dead by the time we got to here, dragged down by the sheer numbers and shredded to pieces. We had no choice but to burn her along with the risen, to stop them all from rising again if we delayed.  
  
A pity, an heroic deed like that should have merited the proper rites. Instead, I will remember your glorious death in battle, Fjolda, daughter of Kurn.

# 37th of Phoenix

Relatively meek day, seems we've already run off most of the Svanir and the Dredge, or at least curbed any ideas they had about having the run of the region, with a Vigil Chapter embedded in the middle. As a result, most of the day was drill exercise and sparring. Went up against Lionhead and Grimstone in a free-for-all, though I only stepped in and smacked Grimstone once before it was over. Bowled them both over when they started grappling. Seems Grimstone smacked his jaw again, and was back into medical. Didn't even see what caused it. Figure Lionhead punted him straight in the face when their backs were turned to me or something. Ah well. Nightshot bit Mirka, who in turn snapped the Charr's arm. So they're both out for a bit. Seems pretty problematic that a routine sparring exercise results in three injuries, of which two are lasting walking-wounded.  
  
Bah. Asides from that, Wulfbane and his kin handed out some thick winter cloaks as a gesture of thanks for the Chapter's efforts. Overly generous. He's already handing us food and drink, and we sleep under his roof. Should have sold the skins, and stocked up some provisions. Anyway, I've rolled it into my bedroll, and I'll probably use it as bedding. It'll serve some of the other folks better, especially those struggling with the cold.  
  
No idea how long we'll stay, but I think we're bound to head north again soon.  
  
  
Today, I remember Grox Pawcrank, gunner on the *Ramming Speed!*  
Older, Iron legion veteran that seemed like at least one of his two parents were actually cannons, rather than Charr. So called because he apparently had the fastest loading-hands in his warband. We heard, as much as saw, him in action a couple of times; he was charged with working the deck cannons, firing off bursting shells at encroaching dragons, one of the more dangerous tasks.  
  
He died when the ship was attacked by a rather large one over the Cursed Shore. I saw him die, second away from blasting a hole clean through the critter; alas, the dragon was quicker, and mangled the cannon as it fired. The back-blast blew old Grox apart.  
We avenged him, though, by squashing the blasted creature into those curving pillars that reach into the heart of Arah. Our first dragon kill, done the hard way. He wasn't the only one that died then, of course, but their tales will be told later.

# 38th of Phoenix

Very quiet day at the steading. Most of the bustle around is Maeva's forging work, which I had the pleasure of watching in action. Spoke a bit while she did that, too. Never hurts to get to know eachother better. Besides, apparently the Blood Legion is visiting, so that's the reason for all the snark and light fuses. Suppose talking a bit and beating steel into shape does well enough to divert the mind from that sort of thing. The result is that we now have a good amount of refurbished weapons; Maeva's been hammering the old Svanir steel they left behind into better shape. Wulfbane'll be able to use those, either in hand or to sell. He'd do well to get some more supplies. When we leave, the Svanir may eventually come back and besiege his steading again. Ah well.  
I spoke about the lodge I promised Kristen, too. She liked the idea of using a dragon's corpse as the base; the bones could be used and carved meticulously. I hope I can raise it in the north, the old Nornheart domains. Such a steading would attract many great warriors and heroes, I'm sure. It's a nice dream to aspire to, and something to look out for ahead. Kristen's still out hunting, mind, think she headed back west for now. She won't be far behind if we decide to move.  
  
Mirka is also getting ill. I think getting bit yesterday is not doing her well, and the wound is infected. Rioleth was fussing over her, and it looked like she had a fever. We changed her bandages and gave her the vials she needed, but I'll have another medic look at her first chance. Also need to talk to Nightshot that she needs to stop biting people during sparring. Too dangerous, and the injuries are bad.  
  
  
Today I tell about the Charr, Anger Furystrike, Blood legion, and part of the Ironbreakers during the first landing in the Straits. He fell taking the beaches, as we surged into the risen hordes and mushed them into dust. Furtystrike was close by, and we were surrounded. The smaller risen were easy enough to dispatch, and they fell quickly. I remember thinking that it was not as bad as we expected. Then came the abominations, and we started losing cohesion as they crashed into us. Furystrike stood his ground, and to his credit, did what Blood Legion Charr are born to do, and counter-charged. He managed to barrel into one and nearly bisect it, before a second clubbed him away like a ball, and smashed him into a piece of coral. But we followed his example, rallied, and charged them head-on, a tide of angry steel. We swarmed the abominations and killed them, and simply trampled the smaller risen under our weight.  
And thus, we remember the death of Anger Furystrike, who did his name full honour in his last moments.

# 39th of Phoenix

Another day at the steading, living off of Wulfbane's hospitality and staying within the lodge's warmer confines with Siggy's children making a mess of things and occasionally wailing and gurgling their way through the sleep patterns of our soldiers. It's quiet enough, though, the Svanir haven't caused too much issue since, and the Dredge seem suitably chastised not to bother us. The usual hustle and bustle of a norn steading, then.  
Mirka's still out sick, even after Marcus had a look at her proper. Not much to be done there.  
  
In other news, Rajani, who was listed as having deserted some days ago, ambled back into camp with a confused story of falling down a cave and then getting lost. She was arrested, though with a degree of force I felt was not required. She's alright, but I don't feel good about putting her in manacles. She found her way back into the camp, didn't she? No actual deserter would return to their own encampment. I'll admit her story is not very solid; which, I guess, is why the officers are being suspicious. Hm.  
  
Went out to check on explosives stocked up in Crossroad Haven; found a Svanir tag marked up on one of the Haven's walls, on the inside. Rather worrying. The deputy explained to me that two Sons of Svanir had tried to climb over the wall two days past, and planned to take off with some supplies, leaving the tag as a warning or as a mocking. Except the Lionguard sentries caught them, and threw both of them into a cell. The deputy had our explosives moved to a different spot, just in case the Svanir had their eyes on our stores. Good man. We checked them quickly, and they all seemed there. Lions hadn't even opened the crate.  
While we were there, some human traveler called Faith took an interest in what we were doing, and asked if she could come along. Wulfbane granted her the hospitality of the lodge, and the lass stuck around a tad. Seemed to try and make friends with Ravenwest, but ended up pressing some buttons. Good intentions, perhaps, but I'd rather not have random people question my soldiers or their sanity. I stepped in, told her that that wasn't the sort of thing we'd tolerate. Carmine and Ravenwest seemed to have made good with her afterwards, though. Still; one of those wandering nobles who like to stick their noses in things. Did the same with the molten alliance weapon while I was having a look at it with Ravenwest.  
Ah well.  
  
Asides from that, talks with Maeva and Rioleth, pleasant enough. Little of note, besides more confirmation that we're heading north.  
  
  
Today, I remember Bjorn Piersson, who hailed from Lornar's Pass, and fought bravely against the Risen and Zhaitan in Orr, where he went to fight for a better world. I did not know him much, but I saw him fall from the jostling deck of our airship, fighting the dragon over the Cursed Shore.  
I remember him because seeing him die made me realize how quick, sudden and pointless one's death can be, and that there will be many thousands of good people with worthy deeds, and kind and honourable hearts that will never be remembered in name. Bjorn's tale, short as it is on deeds beyond his mere death, is my lament for those faceless and unremembered dead.

# 40th of Phoenix

Much the same as usual, nothing too special to report. Scouts picked up some Svanir attacking steadings to the east, even though it's all quiet here so far. Most be the same lot attacking the Haven and Wulfbane, just shifted to the other side of the road when we took up guard, or something akin.  
We'll deal with them soon enough, I figure.  
  
Rest is quiet. Some more people passed through the Lion Road, though.  
  
Don't feel much like writing today.  
Bah.

# 41st of Phoenix

We're at the lodge, where the usual boredom of idle soldiers is starting to set in. We did some shield practice earlier, but that's about the gist of it. Being surrounded by people with good humour, and plenty to drink turned out to be rather stale if you're not allowed to actually go outside for hunting, or partake in the drinking. So, we've been sitting on our thumbs, trading tales and boasts with the local lodge folks, but that's about the gist of it. It's a sort of quiet that will pass over soon enough, into the thick of things again. Honestly, after all our work in Snowden, a little bit of a wind down isn't even that bad. Odds are we're going to be knee-deep in bits and bobs of Svanir before too long.  
  
  
Today, I remember Echo Ashcrawler, who was with the Order of Whispers when we were in Orr. Echo was one of the sneaky types that can turn all but invisible, even without magic. You could be talking to him, and next instant, he'd be gone, just melted away into the scenery like a leopard into the drifting snow.  
He'd usually go ahead, making sure the ship could approach without being blow to shreds by some magical weapon, so we could disembark the troops. Did a good job, too, far as I can tell, since we never got shot down, after all.  
  
We don't know what really happened to them, though. We were supposed to be landing at Penitent Path, but we never got there. Ashcrawled signalled the onboard encryptor, and de diverted, landed away south near where the ground teams were setting up Caer Shadowfain, and marched on in footh. Penitent was swarming with Risen; and not just the normal ones. Spellcasters and other much that would have cost us a lot of lives if we'd been forced to drop into it, rather than getting the run-up in formation.  
Two hour battle, around and about, before we had it. No idea where Ashcrawler ever went. We couldn't find him. Not among the risen, nor the Pact dead, nor alive. We had him listed as missing, in the sort of way that meant we'd never find him.

# 42nd of Phoenix

Finally, back into the action. We've moved out east, following up on the reports that Svanir had shifted their attention there, after failing to achieve anything under Wulfbane. Not just them either, Grawl too. So, we get over there and find a large dragon totem, which the primitive knuckleheads promptly set to worshipping of course. So we tore it down, and built our own little scarecrow out of somethings Vendrake's homestead could miss. A leather coat, some packed ice, a practice carving of a ram's head, and we had outselves a fairly impressive goat-man totem. To really make it hit home, I have Rioleth enchant (or is this a hex?) the thing with a fear-inspiring spell. Gave me shivers to look at it after that, I don't envy the Grawl. But at least I hope it keeps them in their village for some time; I didn't feel like we just had to butcher them. They're malicious and cruel, but mostly, they're just stupid. If I killed people for being stupid, I'd have butchered half the recruits in their first day.  
  
It was a pretty lengthy trek, we found the Svanir raiding camp not too long after, hidden away in a nook behind a rockface. Pretty impressive, if thoroughly corrupted. They might have hid it away from us a bit longer if they hadn't put up Svanir banners outside the entrance. We stormed the place and put them to the sword. Unlike Grawl, they can't be excused their choices.  
If all goes well, the steadings now have a lot less to worry about; at worst, we sent a clear message that if they're going to raid and pillage, we're going to slaughter them where they sleep.  
  
Didn't feel like talking much afterwards, though. It always bothers me that they're norn, in the end.  
  
  
Today I remember Vaiwhyll, Sylvari valiant who was with me at the storm on War's Cathedral. He was one of those that survived that battle, and carried on deeper into Orr with me. He knew death and he knew fate; for them they were merely old friends he looked forwards to meeting again.  
He fell fighting a risen knight, striding into the monster's magical fire to deliver the deathstroke. He stepped back, his sword ending whatever magic had kept the beast animated, but his skin cracked and blackened. And then he simply knelt down, as if to pluck a flower, before the light in his eyes faded.  
  
Hail Vaiwhyll the Valiant! A name well earned, even in death.

# 43rd of Phoenix

Still in Wulfbane's steading, after yesterday's excitement. All sort of wound down, we had extensive drills, which I think Maeva was supposed to. But, Khil did his usual bothering, and she stomped off and dragged him over to the officers for something or other. Didn't look too good. I had the folks run over formations instead. A little off the cuff, but I managed well enough, I think. Let's hope they remember some of it.  
  
Everything is quiet for the remainder. I spoke with Aaron, told the story of Hejja Dark-Eayer, the way it's told by my own folk (that is to say, the version where she's a witch). Oh, and Vatorn asked me something odd about a raven bothering him. I don't know why, and he wouldn't tell either. I think he might have walked into some shaman's companion animal or something, it was a bit confused.  
  
Hm. Attack plan for tomorrow was just put up; we're going to strike at Svanir's dome, the big clump of corrupted ice north of here. Guess that's going to be fun, I'll prepare some explosive packs, and get some sleep.

# 44th of Phoenix

Drakemoor's dead.  
  
  
We attacked Svanir's dome, with the Lionguard. Drove them all the way back into the heart of the festering mound of corruption, slaying Svanir as we went. We cornered their shaman, the coward, into his steading, surrounding it. It was a won battle. What emerged wasn't a shaman, but an angry icebrood colossus, roaring and terrifying. It threw us around, and we fought it best as we could. By the time we were done, Drakemoor had been pierced by two big shards of ice, through the ribs. A handful of lighter wounded too.  
  
We rushed back to the steading, set the medics to work... but she'd just bled out. We tried to save her, shock her heart back into action, but the lmight in her eyes had faded.  
  
I don't know what to do. What to say, who to speak to, or even what to think.  
We were friends, we fought alongsides many things, and making jokes at Drakemoor's expense was something everyone did. Spirits, I can't even make myself write her name without faltering. I want to go out there and smash something, to build a mount of skulls in vengeance and to lay siege to the bastard dragon that robbed us of a good soldier, a kind woman and a friend.  
  
Raven's feathers... the memories. Pryde and Drakemoor in Southsun Cove, both fresh recruits. Scouting operations in the fens. Making constant jokes.  
I can't do this. Not yet.  
  
  
May your six watch over your spirit, Zara Drakemoor, you will be remembered.  
  
79. Zara Drakemoor.

# 45th of Phoenix

Nothing happened today.  
  
Keeping busy.  
I finished the sword carving. I'll make a gift of it to Kristen, I think. Can't bear to look at it now, though.  
  
Everyone's sullen.

# 46th of Phoenix

Where to start today?  
We're still at Wulfbane's steading, though everything has quieted down here as far as Svanir and the like go. It was quiet most of the day, people going about their business and trying to act like nothing happened. Same for me, just trying to do my work, keep my hands busy, and my mind occupied with simple, if menial tasks.  
Keep walking into the lodge, expecting to hear someone say "hey up" in a terrible Reacher accent, before I remember Drakemoor's dead, and wincing. It is the damnedest thing to miss.  
  
We went out to the hot springs, regular folks were allowed to take a dip, First Crusaders and officers tomorrow. It was good; almost everyone seemed relaxed, and several of them had their laughs splashing around. Stonefist and Bloodletter picked up Ravenwest, and threw her into the hot water; fully clothed. We put it all to dry next to the fire almost immediately, though, so no harm done, really. If Sinclair hadn't made such a huge fucking fuss about it, the day might even have been nice.  
Bear's arse, I grow so tired of so-called soldiers who end up in place of authority, but apparently miss even the slightest insight about the notion that the Vigil is composed of people, not golems. It's a miracle the desertion rate isn't higher than it already is, if idiots keep squashing morale down the drain on count of a prank.  
  
To make matters worse, Bloodletter tried to off herself by overdosing on medical supplies. Tricky and Rioleth were able to find her before it was too late, but Raven's feathers... I have no idea why, either. Rioleth's mortified, and almost everyone's mood has been brought even lower than it already was.  
  
It's one of those periods again, where everything seems to be going downhill; it always gets better, eventually, but spirits, it frays the nerves and makes the heart bleed. I wish Kristen was here, just so I could talk to her about these things.  
  
I feel like I don't know anyone anymore. All just strangers with the same helmet.

# 47th of Phoenix

Things are returning to normal a little, I think. The initial emptiness is slowly being bridged by pragmatic soldiering. The First Crusaders and officers had their time in the hot springs today, which did small wonders for all of us, I think. Just let the mind go blank, and listen to the sound of the water coming up from the ground. Also turns out Maeva's hair is ginger, though it might have been dyed because it is a rather vibrant tone. Seeing her without a helmet, or anything at all for that matter, was an enjoyable change. She looks younger and more girlish without the nose-guard obscuring the lines of her face. Keeps her hair short enough, as you can expect from someone wearing a bucket most of the time.  
  
Also made a bet to see through a drinking competition with Lionhead, on rum. Good chunk of hair on the line, too, though I don't doubt I could drink her under the table easily. Lion's Arch folks don't know anything about moots or the volume of drink that passes through.  
  
I miss Kristen a fair bit. I need to talk to her about the Chapter marching north regardless.

# 48th of Phoenix

Another rest day. All is quiet, thankfully. We took yet another trip to the hot springs, for those who missed out on the first one, two days ago, because they had watch duties, patrols, and so on. The usual.  
It did good, I think. Force needed it; apparently one of his warband died off, way east in the brand. Tough, especially because he isn't there. Though I suppose tomorrow's rites, which we are holding for Drakemoor, Raven guide her soul, will help him put two memories to rest.  
  
I've been doing better. Lionhead is unduely worried, I think, but I'm fine. Just always takes a few days to stomach the hit and move on, even after all these years. Especially if it's someone I counted as a friend, like Drakemoor. But she's gone; all that's left of her are the memories we carry of her, and the tales we tell our kin and our children. So I will. I'll tell them about Drakemoor shooting karka out of the water, of her being the but of entirely too many jibes, and of her bravely standing her ground at my side, more often than I can count.  
I'll miss her, until the time I cross over into the Mists myself. But until then, it's time to make peace and march on for the living.

# 49th of Phoenix

Currently camped in Yak's Bend, Frostgorge Sound. The ancient dwarven village that ones stood here replaced by norn tents and small dwellings for the locals, some of whom remembered me from the last time I was here with Kristen. It's not changed much, except that it is slightly warmer, now it's later in the year. It is still beautiful, though, the mountains dressed in ice and frost. You can hear the ice in the glaciers crack and tremble, ever shifting. It makes me pause, and look around, to this wonderful place, and wonder how the lands of my ancestors must look.  
  
We left from Wulfbane's steading earlier today, after we erected the pyre for Drakemoor's body, and sent it off to the afterlife, where she'll wait for us to join her. I hope she remains in the good company of other lost friends. Who knows, perhaps Drakemoor and dear Freyja are sharing a drink now in a place I can only imagine.  
It was a good ceremony. Simple, but heartfelt. I'll miss Zara.  
  
We also said goodbye to Mirka and Khil. They're being sent off, following something or other. Khil apparently got discharged by Maeva for pulling some shenanigans in medical, and Mirka tried to off herself, so we naturally can't take her into a warzone. It's somewhat unexpected, but then a lot of things have been so far. It wasn't good seeing them leave, truth be told. I still don't know what happened to Mirka either.  
Rajani's also been dismissed as an oathbreaker for deserting, far as I can tell.  
That's four, suddenly gone from the ranks.  
  
Regardless, we marched on north, after having said our goodbyes to good folks of Wulfbane's lodge, who were so kind to us. It'll be a pity not seeing the children playing around during the day, and I'll come to miss the warm hearth sooner rather than later, I suspect. But on the other side, it helps to move on away from it, given what's passed these last few days. Seeing the pyre burn did it's fair work to banish some ghosts, too.  
  
On to what passed this evening with Vatorn; engineers came back from their usual perimeter checking, when Vatorn complained about needing to see a special doctor for some odd injury he had. I pressed him on the matter, when he said he'd been hearing voices telling him to do rather unpleasant thing. I ordered him into medical, something which he roundly ignored until I had him all-but dragged there by Rioleth. Idiot didn't realise it was for his own safety and everyone else. Reminded me too much of Vanholm.  
  
He started speaking pretty quickly afterwards; turns out that some sort of evil voice in his head has been telling him to use his magic for evil. He made it sound pretty damned bad, and I was inches away from just lopping his head off and being done with it. Calder, who knows a good deal more about magic than I do, however, managed to slowly get through to the truth of it by questioning Vatorn.  
  
We found out Vatorn had pocketed some sort of artifact, which he claims he's gotten from the Maguuma. He said it calmed his mind, but I knew it was what poisoned it in the first place. Like poppy sap, once you have a taste of it, you only want to have more. I wanted nothing less than to yank it away, take a war-sledge and shatter it into a hundreds of pieces. We were discussing what to do with it and Vatorn, who was clearly getting badly corrupted, when we heard Boyd scream. Apparently he twas offered the stone by Vatorn; it hexed the lad alright. Calder dispelled it easily enough, thankfully, and he got away with a mild head-ache. More importantly, Boyd had managed to chuck away the stone, which apparently felt like it had burned his hand. We took it away, which seemed to rid Vatorn of the voice haunting his head, at least.  
  
I volunteered to try and obliterate it, but Maeva wanted to deal with it herself. I hope she destroyed it anyway. Keeping that sort of malign artifact around doesn't do anyone any good.  
I'm guarding Vatorn, to make sure it's all passed over safely. I hope for him it has; if he's corrupted, there's little we can do but put him down. Something I'd rather not have to do, if I was offered a choice.  
But I won't let him become a second Vanholm. Not if I have a say in it.  
  
I also need to have a stern talk with Rioleth, who apparently knew about Vatorn hearing voices before, and didn't think to tell anyone until I cornered Vatorn about it. Those are the sort of things that have to be reported, a lesson I learned myself, the hard way. Dragon corruption, or anything that threaten to destroy us from within, has to be stamped out as soon as it rears its ugly head.

# 50th of Phoenix

Another day in the beautiful fjords of the Frostgorge Sound, in Yak's Bend. Busy enough day today, so I'll get down to today's events:  
  
Seems our actions against the Svanir in Snowden and the Foothills has caused a good deal of them to move north into the Frostgorge, with us close on their heels. That's caused plenty of problems for the Pact and Vigil troops holding the northern front, however. Scouts reported a nearby Pact encampment having fallen under the onslaught, so I was sent to take Blade out to recapture it. We passed through an ice cave usually filled with imps, but now mysteriously empty, crossing across the mountain ridge that splits most of the Sound in two. We found the encampment in Vigil hands, thankfully. Apparently the local garrison troops have been contesting the entire valley with the Svanir; same place Kristen and I went hunting drakes last leave. We could see the signs of the fighting, patches of corrupted ice and wounded soldiers. As we stood there, the Claw flew overhead and dropped a good several ice crystals right on top of our heads. We had to repulse a sizeable Icebrood Svanir attack shortly afterwards. Hard fighting. I counter-attacked them, smashed two of their crystals, before we were slowly pushed back. But we held the damned line. Ravenwest got a nasty gash as a parting gift, and Tricky got smashed with a frost hex that Rioleth and I had to get rid off afterwards.  
  
We got them both back to the encampment, and treated. They'll both be alright, even though I had to stick Tricky in my armpit to keep him warm for a handful of minutes. No doubt he won't enjoy the thought of that, but it did keep him warm. Seeing Rioleth cast the spell to pinpoint the hex' source was haunting, though. If I didn't trust the lad, I'd have thought he was going to devour Tricky's soul, casting shadowy wraiths and such. He did his job, though, finding that the frost hex was attached to Tricky's chestpiece. I threw it in the fire, for all the good that did it.  
  
I also had Rioleth signed on a vial of sleeping potion. He looked ragged as the Underworld, and Holm had already notified me that he wasn't getting enough rest. A stern talk about straightening old, and some encouragement also helped. Mirka getting dismissed for trying to end herself has rattled him, but he's got to harden himself and move on. Much as I regret having to tell him so, it is needed. I can't have him coming apart at the seams right when we're about to fight a dragon. The talk did him good, though, so I hope he'll overcome his difficulties and manages to forge on.  
  
What else?  
We got a new recruit, one Morgan. Human, Elonian tint, dressed a fair bit too light for this climate, I think, but she seemed willing enough to get into the thick of it. Of course, she instantly got into Lionhead and Boyd's company; I can only hope they don't spoil the apple before it's dropped from the tree, or whatever that saying is.  
I also had the engineers review their work. Nothing of importance, but I had Lionhead ready up the carronade. Odds are, with that Claw circling about, it'll be needed before long. I need to look at the ordnance stocks myself, and see how much we can attribute to specific munitions. We've got enough dynamite to blow a new sea into the mountainside, but I'd rather do something a little more targeted.  
  
I need to talk to the Warmaster as well.

# 51st of Phoenix

Fought the Svanir today, out west. Same bunch that's been pestering the valley near the camp we fought at yesterday. Joint attack with Dauntless Chapter, the same folks who've been working with us in the Shiverpeaks since our deployment. Big fight. We stormed a badly corrupted Svanir hold, and blew the gates open. Inside, we cornered their shamans, who pulled the same trick the one in Svanir's Dome did. They turned into giant ice-beasts. But we were prepared enough. We battered them down, and killed them, though we had another fair share of wounded. Mithra took a full-on ice burst on her chin, and is medical, knocked-out. Athy's arm is mangled, crushed. Handful of minor injuries to go along, but no deaths.  
We butchered them, though. And not a few of them either; we littered the slopes of the mountain with their corpses and destroyed their shamans and their totems. Some of them were giants, corrupted into great beasts made out of pure warped ice and magic, but they too were destroyed.  
We avenged Drakemoor's name today, that's for certain. If we had lingered, we could have built her a mound of skulls to remind the Svanir that for every one of us they kill, we'll butcher fifty of theirs.  
  
Chen, who was badly ill, was sent south, too. Severe blood poisoning, to the point that the medics thought she might perish if she didn't get proper care soon. So we had her carried to Crossroad Haven, where the Lionguard will care for her. It's better, they have walls, warm fires, and they can get her to Hoelbrak within a day if things get worse.  
She's yet another soldier we've lost, though thankfully not to death. We're bleeding badly, though. Drakemoor dead, Mirka and Khil discharged, Rajani deserted, Chen's sent south because of illness, and Mithra and Athy are out wounded for some time, by the looks of it. It'll be hard on the rest of us when we do end up fighting that Claw of Jormag. Thankfully, Dauntless seems to be out in some force, so we're not out all alone.  
It'll be a hard enough fight anyway.  
  
Oh, and Vatorn tried to kiss Maeva, and apparently got punched for it, much to Lionhead's delight, who can't stop cracking jokes about it. I don't really know what he was thinking, but I doubt he's realised norn women don't swoon and fall for any pretty lad that strolls up to them. You have to impress them first of all, and prove your their equal. Anything less will probably just end up with you getting laughed at. Or getting punched, as it stands.

# 52nd of Phoenix

Bear's arse, what a day...  
Celdric came back, looking for Tricky. I figure he had some questions as to why he was still alive, after all... Caused a titanic fuss, too. Celdric came in wounded, trying to hide his identity. He broke Lionhead's nose before we even knew who he was. Figure she probably tried to help him to medical. Then all hell broke loose. We left him to speak with Tricky for a split second, and before we knew it, they were fighting, throwing fists at eachother. We intervened, and finally managed bring both of them down. Turns out Tricky had needled Celdric with a dose of purple vial he recovered from Mikra's stack when she tried to off herself.  
It took Rioleth and me to bring Celdric down, and even then, he was unarmed. At one point, I nearly skewered him on my sword, but thankfully, that dose of knock-out medication worked in just in time.  
  
Not exactly how I expected to see him again, truth be told, but then Celdric was never an easy one to handle. I wish we'd never ended up in this mess. I think he was my friend, somewhere, some time, but now it's all just devolved into something I am loathe to be a part of at all. I don't know why Tricky faked his death, or what Celdric has to do with... anything. But I'm growing tired of it all. Forcing someone down on their chin with a sword speared at their shoulder blades, wondering if you're really going to have to make the choice to finally run through someone you used to know. And I don't even why.  
  
It's a mess. Apparently the warmaster knew Celdric was on his way too, through some of Tricky's letters. I chained him to a cannon, for good measure, until she can have a talk with him. Rotarn's under arrest for brawling and nicking those medical supplies off of Mirka. He was a serious mess, and Rioleth was worried for him. Can't blame him, to him all of this must have been like pandemonium.  
  
Loonhead at least doesn't look much worse off with a busted nose. She fought through it like a true brawler worthy of her feat name. Rioleth too did good work, though Celdric stabbed him with a poison blade. Thankfully the medics were on it really quick. I've commended both of them in my report, as they deserve. I hope the officers give it some credence. Easily the best recruits we still have with us.  
  
I need a kask of ale after a day like that, and Kristen. The carving I made is coming along alright even though it's still rough. I need to do her face from memory though. I want to use pinewood to make inlay for her skin markings. It'll be some fine work, but it it pays off, it'll be beautiful. I wonder if Vatorn will finish his carving of Maeva, though.

# 53rd of Phoenix

A quiet day, for once, praise the spirits for their mercy and compassion on this weary warrior's nerves! Only thing of note was a spar between Lionhead and Boyd, won by the former, as can be imagined.  
  
For the rest, it's been a restful day. I've been making good progress on Kristen's carving. I'm close to the hollow core of the bone, but I've got more than enough room to detail the entire thing. I have to work on the shape of he face and her hair, and use a rough stone to smooth it out. It'll be another good couple of days of work to get it shaped out properly, but it'll be worth the effort. Vatorn's finished his, though the sneaky bugger made his out of ice. I'd call it cheating, but we did say any material. I suspect he did it a little out of spite, considering everything that's passed. Carving Maeva's likeness out of an ice shard seems painfully ironic as a result.  
  
Celdric and Rotarn are still securely where I left them, thankfully.  
We'll see how all of that plays out sooner rather than later, I wager.

# 54th of Phoenix

So, everything sort of fired off at once again. Celdric tried to escape, after the Warmaster had made clear we were going to hand him over to the Lionguard. Apparently he'd managed to undo his manacles, took four of us to dogpile him again. Force caught a round in the shoulder when Boyd tried to shoot Celdric as well. He'll be alright, though, thankfully, as Marcus was there to treat it in short order. Rotarn panicked, though, and kicked Boyd's family jewels into the Mists, poor lad.  
Warmaster decided pretty quickly to hand Celdric over to the Pact garrison at Skyheight Steading, west of Yak's Bend, across the valley. So we did just that, while he was still knocked out after his second round of thrashing. No doubt he'll just try and escape again, but there's really nothing else we can do at this point, besides get him out of our camp as quick as possible.  
When we returned, turned out that Rotarn decided to run off.  
I'm too fed up with those two Sylvari to care anymore at this point. They've been a constant, constant source of trouble, injuries, and more, and I'm done. They can fight out their feud or romance or whatever it is somewhere else, away from me.  
  
I've also spoken to the Warmaster about Kristen and the Claw of Jormag. If I know her, she'll be coming north sooner than later with an eye on being there to hunt this dragon. I was worried, however, that the officers would take issue with a norn woman just barging into the fight; as they should. The Warmaster listened to my plea, however, and will consider allowing her to come along, if she does end up showing up. I vouched for her good behaviour. Besides, Kristen's hunting wouldn't be bad for our stomachs either, I wager. Not to mention that I just really miss her around too. She's good company, after all, and the Frostgorge isn't nearly as beautiful without her.  
  
The carving goes well, too, even though I had little time to put in the work I wanted, with everything going on. Maeva's apparently also taken up the challenge, as Vatorn told me, which will be interesting. He's starting his carving again as well, for the sake of it. We've decided that Lionhead and the Warmaster should judge which one is best, once we're all finished.

# 55th of Phoenix.

All quiet. Didn't sleep well, so I've got a headache now.  
Just going to go to bed.

# 56th of Phoenix

Moved camp over to Skyheight steading, overlooking the Leopard's Tail valley in the east, and the Kodan Sanctuary of Blue Ice Shining in the west. The great Kodan iceberg drifts slowly in the water; we can only see the prow from here, and the main masts sprouting up from the side. The sails are rigged likes scales, rolled up and tied down. The vessel has no-where to go anymore, locked in by land in the south, and Jormag's corruption to the north. It'll slowly sink below the waves, before long. In some respects, it's tragic; the Kodan have lost their homes just as my kin has, so many years ago. I suppose it forges some form of kinship between them and us norn.  
  
I remember going up there with Kristen, dragging that giant Drake Broomother along and selling off the meat and the minotaur skins for those two bows we have. I've hardly used it, feels too precious to actually risk using it, though I'm told the ice won't melt. The Svanir weren't as hostile around back then, and hunting here is a good memory.  
  
In different news, Sigra Geartwister is apparently stationed out here with Dauntless Chapter. She's doing well enough, except she's apparently lost her journals about what happened before the Magus Falls tour. A pity, because she's lost her memory, and it means she is no longer able to recount the tales of an old and lost Charr warband she used to serve with. A tragic end to their stories and legends, if any. I wish I was in a position to help, but there is very little to be done about it.  
  
We'll see what the day brings.

# 57th of Phoenix

We set off to the Kodan Sanctuary today, see if we couldn't establish some trade. As we neared, we already saw the comet-like trails of sporadic inaccurate Dredge mortar fire. Seems that the same group of cranky mole people and the Blue Ice Shining Kodan are still in a constant sate of war that neither seems to win. As usual, we charged in and put the Dredge back in their place; however it seems that it's now a serious mining operation. If anything, I half-expected to be required to start applying some dynamite to support beams. It got worse, though, as the Dredge counterattacked us while some of us were onboard the Sanctuary. I was up on the prow spurs, looking over the bay, when I spotted the attacking mole-people. I was just in time to see the narrowly sculpted ice-bridge connecting the Sanctuary to land collapse as Dredge Miners started to group at the base of the ship. Unfortunately, the Warmaster was caught in the middle of it. Lionhead and I, carrying Klixxa, leaped the gap, and managed to shock and awe them back for a moment. A few Kodan workers managed to repair the access quickly enough, but it was a surprisingly brutal and direct retaliation from the Dredge. Usually they try to tangle with us too much if they can, because they understand we have more and better resources than they do.  
  
The Warmaster got a nasty rent in the side for her trouble, I'm sorry to say, and we had to evacuate her to the steading, along with Rioleth who suffered severely from the intense cold alongside the ice waters and the heavy snowfall. Thankfully, the Warmaster likely will be alright, if incapacitated for a short while. Rioleth, I rolled him up tightly into the great-bear skin Kristen gifted me, and then Calder rubbed him until he got better.  
That's about it for wounded, though, thank the spirits.  
  
Took a good time cleaning off the blood and snow off my equipment; some of it was starting to gel and freeze by the time I got down to it, which only meant it was a right pain in the arse to clean off. Times like this, I miss a bucket of good beach-sand to scour the chainmail and the padding in.  
Spoke a little with one of the recuits, who seemed to be interested in the norn spirits. Kept trying to compare Balthazar to Bear, though. Figure that"s just humans for you.

# 58th of Phoenix

Right, a day at Skyheight Steading, which is still more a fort than an actual homestead. Nevermind that it distinctly lacks any lodges, and is more a collection of watchtowers and walls. Should've called it Skyheight Fort, to be honest. Mostly Pact folks here too. The Priory people play a good amount of dice, and they have some norn with them that tell a good tale, too. Apparently they're here to help with preserving and studying the ruins, as it were.  
No sign of Celdric, whom we left here, either, though if that is because he's once more managed to escape much needed custody, or because they've already moved him, I don't know. And I don't entirely care, either.  
  
As for today, we were apparently going to play some sort of exercise which Maeva described to us as "punt the Asura". Which is essentially just a close protection exercise designed to teach soldiers how to defend a physically vulnerable person from attack. Or we were going to, except that both Ebony and Lyralii decided to take exception to the notion, and straight up refused to partake. The Knight tried to strongarm them in a rather painful attempt, forcing them to fall out of line and be charged with disobeying a direct order.  
I say painful, because if she hadn't described it as 'punt the Asura', no-one would have cared. Tact isn't her strongest point, I suppose, but on the flipside, it's rather flippant to make an issue out of it, from both sides. We're here to fight dragons.  
I spoke to the Aura afterwards, and they tried to tell me that I'd not enjoy being made fun of either. I'm not sure that's the case, though. I'm a norn; with Asura, it's usually the norm rather than the exception that we get ridiculed. I guess they just don't enjoy being on the other side of it?  
Either way, I think the long-ears need to relax, and that the Knight might need to work on her diplomatic skills. Or develop some, in general.  
  
Instead, we did some sparring, though the pairings were lopsided. I ended up fighting Wynn with one hand behind my back, and still defeating here easily with superior reach and force. I just fought defensively for one pass, and then went on the front food second time around. Third, she tried to throw snow in my face but ended up having to jump at me. She just smacked into me, and that was about the extent of it. I'm four times her mass, so you know. I suppose it was interesting enough.  
  
What else? Oh, we have a new recruit; one of Wulfbane's folks. I think I saw her at the hotsprings and in the lodge several times. Haven't spoken to them yet, though I wager I'll find some time to do that sooner or later.  
Might as well; never hurts to have more norn about, I'll tell you that. Lionhead is nice enough, of course, but we tend to end up making the same drinking dares over and over, with no drink to settle the score. That's no way to make friends, I suppose, but that's Vigil regulations for you.  
  
We'll see what tomorrow brings. The Warmaster's still in medical with that rent she suffered, but the medics do good work. She'll be back on her feet soon enough.

# 59th of Phoenix

Quiet day, so far, mostly just talking around camp. Seleea spoke at some length about what happened after she'd gotten kicked out of Rata Sum, and we had a fair chat with some of the newer folks. Not exceptionally much asides from that. Boyd tried to finally have a go at this norn huntress he's been eyeing up, and got shot down hard. He went through the entire length of making a bet, and even making good on it, but she wasn't impressed. Ah well.  
Seems to be a pattern. Everyone here does seem to try and have their eye on someone. Especially the humans are acting needy. Well, it's as good a time as any, but I hope it's not a pattern.  
  
That's about the gist of it. Haven't heard much, asides from that, and it's been quiet. We're out in the arse-end of nowhere, in some respects. Spirits, the only time I came here was because we were hunting. Not much else out here, asides from us and a good number of critters and angry dragon-worshiping ice monsters that once used to be Svanir.  
  
You know, at some times I feel too old for this, or just too much past my burning point. Having to keep these people together and hardening them so they can fight a dragon is wearing thin. At best, we're an incompetent group of very enthousiastic and very lucky marauders stumbling from camp to camp and striking out at targets of oppertunity. Or at least, it feels like that. At worst, though, we shouldn't even be here. I end up wondering why I have to explain why we do what we do to someone, looking around. They don't understand how close the warfronts we are. There is a Claw of Jormag circling over our heads, a beast so powerful it could destroy all of us if it deigned to land and finish the job. But it doesn't. We're lucky, because bless the spirits, there's enough Vigil troops here to keep that bastard distracted and busy.  
  
I'm being pessimistic, I understand, but I'm growing tired. If it wasn't for the literal fate of the world hanging in the balance, I would have considered greener pastures.

# 60th of Phoenix

Spirits, it's the sixtieth already?  
It was a calm day. Height of it all was Sel playing her flute. Sitting there, smoking a pipe and listening to Sel play a tune was good. Almost relaxing.  
We're still not on the move, so that's that.  
  
I finished Kristen's carving, and I'm pleased with the result. Especially the detail work was hard; the hair and her features were probably the most minute I've ever had to make, made even worsen where I laid in slivers of pine to represent the skin markings. I didn't get it exactly the same as it is, of course, the knotwork on Kristen's skin is a bit too complex for me to know by heart, but I got the best of it, I think. Especially the lines over her face and down her throat and shoulders.  
No doubt Kalla'd remark something snarky. Jealous, I'll tell you that.  
  
Can't wait to show Kristen how it turned out.  
I think I'll also gift her the bone blade I worked on before. She's always been the one for lighter weapons anyway; I remember her wielding a rapier at one point. Besides, the faint red glow that comes off the bone is more her colour than it is mine.

# 61st of Phoenix

Skyheight. I feel asleep yesterday, with everything that happened. Now the morning of the 62nd. I'll write the back-log.  
  
We moved off to investigate a fire over the Sanctuary, turned out one of the Kodan folks snapped, and lit up some barrels of fish oil, stunk up the place and created a fair plume of smoke. They're keeping them locked up in the hold of the ice-ship, under guard. I'm not sure what to think; if it's dragon corruption, then that won't help them much. But then, it might just have been a tantrum. Either way, they're playing this close to their chest, what with their balance and all of that, so not much we could do. I turned around the patrol and headed back.  
  
We arrived in time to be told Astriona was dead. Lorma took the folks out scouting into the Dredge territories below us, and they returned with her dead. I don't know how, yet, but I think it was quick enough.  
I am sorry that I can't say more, because I didn't know her well enough to remember her as she'd have deserved. She looked at the stars, and wondered what roads ran between them.  
  
Rotarn also came back, though only briefly. He talked to me, but at the wrong time. He then left a letter explaining nothing.  
I wish he'd just finally understand all I ever wanted of him was for him to stop running, and finally stand his ground when everything caught up with him. But he's a coward who'd rather feign his death than to own up to his mistakes. I have no time for cowards.  
  
On a better note, Ema's daughter was born some time back, I've heard. Sophia Ælfwynn Rose Darksbane, as the letter says. Some good news, at least. I hope our deaths will buy the little one a better future.  
  
80. Astriona.

# 62nd of Phoenix

Skyheight steading, after a weapons malfunction.  
We test-fired the Dredge mortar we got off of those Kodan in Snowden Drifts, after Sel spent spirits how long trying to retrofit that thing to accept our munitions. Then the damn shell exploded in our face, right as it exited the tube. Showered us with shrapnel during test-firing. The dud rounds went safe enough, but during the live ones, we had two malfunction, of which one was the one I just described. We're lucky it didn't blow right out of the weapon, or we'd all be dead, or severely injured. As it stands, we all got away with minor wounds; thankfully we weren't entirely within the weapon's lethal range. My armour stopped a good hail of razored iron, though. Had to have the chestplate passed to the quartermasters and have it patched. Ah well.  
  
I'd say more, but that sort of thing tends to overrule the rest of the day pretty majorly. That, and my ears ring, so I think I'm just going to lie down for a bit.

# 63rd of Phoenix

We've moved camp, off into the depths of the Dredge mine through a cave. Went underground a fair bit and ended up in some strange Kodan encampment, in the middle of a Dredge mine. Seems they've been here to strike back at the Dredge who've been attacking their Sanctuary. We're holed up in what I think was an older distribution plant. Pipes hang over our head, supported by rickety columns of rotting wood. The ceiling crumbles occasionally, and we all know the merits of Dredge engineering.  
There's a spring of melt-water running into the cave as well, which makes me think the Dredge tap it for their engines. There's something that resembles a crude turbine spinning in the center of it all, though that might be more for ventilation than anything else.  
We left the wounded in Skyheight just as well. No place for them here; too dangerous, for one.  
  
The Dredge also utterly surround us. They're on all sides, above, below, and out both exist we know of. After we passed through the cave, they were quick to seal us in, and attacked us twice. Thankfully, both entrances are throttled though a single chokepoint, so we could repulse them easily, with the help of the Kodan. But it means we're effectively sealed off until we manage to break out. Apparently, we're not going to blow this entire place up, though, which worries me. Mostly because that typically means they have something valuable we need to retrieve first.  
  
I also shaved my hair, for the first time in... years. I took all the rings out, and used a blade to cut it all down to stubble. I've kept the hair; can use it to make some stuffing, or as tinder, since it's soaked in bear grease. Probably could use it as a fuse at this point. Did so while Vatorn gave Knight Maeva a back rub. Damned woman looked like she hadn't slept in days, what with the warmaster being injured. Figured they'd rather work themselves to death than to delegate their properly to their First Crusaders. Who'd have known.  
Eh, it's always the same. Officer comes in, ends up doing the duties of both the officers and the First Crusaders, and then get surprised when they're over-worked, rather than evening up the work load as is intended. Ah well. At least Vatorn seemed to enjoy it immensely, the cheeky bugger.  
  
What else? Oh, yeah, Rotarn is back, though under somewhat questionable conditions. He's been remanded into the Knight's custody, voluntarily. I still have no desire to speak to him. Least of all here and now.  
  
We'll miss Astriona's funeral, I think. A pity.

# 64th of Phoenix

We've moved deeper into the Dredge mines, linking up with a supposed resistance group of rebel Dredge that seems allied to our cause, for some reason. I suspect they need our help more than we need theirs, though, since one of the first things we ended up doing was making some much-needed emergency repairs on their ventilation system turbines, which would have caused everyone to choke in here otherwise. Took us a good two hours, but we fixed it, alright. Unfortunately, there is only so much we can do, and it will need to get a proper overhaul with some spare parts before long. Hopefully, something we can do. The biggest problem is spare parts; we need them to be able to conduct effective repairs. We're in no position to pull sections of piping and cogwheels out of our asses, I'm sorry to say, much the way people often think "scrap" is some form of super-material that will magically allow anyone to turn a can of beans into a tank if they but try hard enough.  
I blame all those damned scrappers out there for perpetuating that damned myth. Bunch of cunts just make my job harder to explain.  
  
Anyway, yeah, we're away from the Kodan. The Dredge rebels here seem to have secured a nook that leads to an exterior exit, on the southern side of the mountain. Probably somewhere in Wayfarer or Snowden, but I couldn't tell where. It seems fairly secure, so far, but I'm uncomfortable here, at best. You can hear their machines rumble and grind all around you, all the time, and their air is stale.  
What's worse, there's a giant statue of Grenth, down in the cave below us. Figures that's why it's all so cold in here. You can tell it's an older one alright, but it's unmistakable. The arms reaching up from the base to grasp at the statue's figure are a giveaway. I wonder why it's here? The dredge might have dug up an old shrine, buried deep under the mountain, but I'm mostly curious why it was here in the first place. These used to be Dwarven lands; few humans passed through here, let alone had any reason to delve deep underground.  
We might never find out, of course. I'll be sure to tell Freyja when I can, no doubt the Priory would be interested in this.

# 65th of Phoenix

We remain under the mountain, under the eyes of death, warded by swords and the strength of our arms. The Dredge rebels do their fair part as well, though as I expected, it us us who are helping them, rather than the other way around. We ventured out into the mine itself to strike against the so-called loyalist Dredge. The mine was huge, but we wreaked some havoc. Pipelines were ruptured, pumps destroyed, and some place called the sonic forge we stripped for parts and the scuttled.  
It was chaos, though. I was only alerted of the full mission earlier in the day, and did not have adequate time to prepare all the explosives as I would have liked to have done. The result is that we had to work with individual dynamite sticks, on their short wire fuses. We had to skip over one of the targets as a result, a hardened exit to the surface that they're apparently using to bring in prisoners and material. So far, I've only seen a handful of enslaved Skritt, but it bodes ill that they're keeping prisoners somewhere deeper in the mine. Doubly so because we weren't able to destroy that access point.  
Even more chaotic was the field leads; no Knights, just the Senior First Crusaders taking the field. But spirits, it's a miracle we got away with only a few injuries, rather than deaths. The stalls, the slowness... I had to ask twice about target priority when we were in the above-mentioned tunnel, and even then, I was already rigging up explosives before field leads finally decided not to blow it up, and prioritize the other targets first.  
  
We were helped by Volk, the same Dredge that showed us the ventilation system yesterday, and one of his comerades, who acted as our guides. We'd have been utterly lost without them, though their use in combat was... limited. They sure did like us wreaking havoc on their mine, I'll give them that.  
  
The mine itself was impressive. The Dredge must have been digging this out for years; great halls of reinforced stone, walkways suspended high above, connected by long spiral staircases that look like long drill-heads that dig into the earth. And I'm sure we've only seen part of it. It goes on, into little passageways and tunnels, deep underground. I'm sure you could get lost on here, and never find your way back up.  
It is both terrifying and impressive, I think. I miss seeing the sky, though. Some of the halls here reach up higher than the Great Lodge in Hoelbrak, but it still feels claustrophobic. I can't feel the air move on my skin, and it so stale and dry. Besides, there is something unsettling about the world vibrating and grinding away around you, every waking moment. It's quieter, now, after the explosions ripped out so much of what they've built, but there's more, in the distance. As if they're digging ever closer to us.  
Bear's arse, I want to get out of here, and see the sky.  
  
I miss Kristen, and Freyja; both women I love that I get to see far too little.  
I'm also sad that, deep under the mountain here, I can't entertain the faint but hopeful notion that Kristen is about to walk into the encampment, with a slain drake over her shoulder and that grin that she has, knowing none can best her in the open hunt. She'd hate it in here anywhere, I think. Nothing to hunt, after all, asides from pesky Dredge. And even then, half of them seem to be either cowed into ignoring us, or too docile and stupid to pose much of a threat. They fire at us with their sonic weapons once in a while; they got Rel that way in the foot, and dented Morgan's cuirass, but most of the resistance we've encountered has been sporadic or ill-directed, running into the teeth of our blades or simply retreating once we engaged them.  
It makes me wonder if they'd decided to give up this part of the mine, and retreat deeper, where they can fortify.  
  
I shouldn't fret so much anyway. We'll see what tomorrow brings;

# 66th of Phoenix

A quiet day. The rebels rest easy in celebration after our victory yesterday, and so do we, even though it is done with the usual Dredge austerity. The mole-folks couldn't build a good feast if you handed them a mead-hall with a fully stacked larder and a swollen cellar.  
  
Instead, I spent some time thinking, and talking. Rioleth joined me for some time, and I told many tales of old. He seems to enjoy those more than anyone I know; it is good to retell old and new legends again to someone who will carry them in his heart. I sometimes feel that he would have preferred being born a norn, rather than a Sylvari. He would've made a good shaman, I think. He has the wisdom and the heart for it.  
  
I think I will ask Kristen to become my wife when leave comes.  
After many days, I know what I miss most; and it is not ale, warm food, or a soft bed. It is not even my daughter. Bear, it is not even Kristen in my bed I miss; most of all, I miss her good company. Like we did when we first met, in Southsun, after that great and terrible battle that saw me so enraged. I was so angry, but Kristen calmed the fires.  
Besides, I want to.

# 67th of Phoenix

Date is getting unclear with no sun to tell the time, but my stomach starts growling at around the same times still, so I think it is the 67th. If it isn't, well, then it doesn't matter much. We're still underground, though we are not doing much fighting. We remain here, watching the Dredge rebels revel in their victory, before they return to what they have always been doing. Their species is an odd one; they so desire freedom, but seem unable to understand what to do with it once they have gained it. I find them pitiful, in a sense, and I am haunted by feelings of contempt I can't always conceal.  
  
I find the caves claustrophobic and unnerving, especially because I cannot tell the passage of time as I would like. The darkness here is lighted up permanently with an ambient haze of lazy light that hangs in the air. It never swells, nor diminishes; it is too bright to sleep, but too dim to remain properly awake. It's a cloying twilight, and I hate it.  
  
We've recovered the parts to fully repair the ventilation system, which we will do soon. Hopefully, we can leave then. I'd rather have a dragon-infested sky than any more of these caverns.

# 68th of Phoenix

Checked the spare parts with Volk, there's enough in there for some rudimentary repairs. I'll bring all the engineers through with a progress report, as usual, before we go to fix it up.  
  
Precious little word or sight of most everyone else. I think the underground is pressing on them.  
It won't be too soon, whenever we leave.

# 69th of Phoenix

We've done the repairs on the Dredge ventilation system, finally, and it's working again. Turns out, however, that that entire work area is just below the Sonic Forge, which was one of the targets we collapsed in the demolitions operation some time back. That detonation caused a partial collapse in the cave wall, but thankfully the ventilation systems weren't directly under it, so they're not threatened. Had to go check, though, with Lionhead in tow, to make sure the entire thing wouldn't just collapse in on itself, making our work pointless. Thankfully, the Dredge seem to have thought twice, and hardened the entire air-duct with stone and masonry, meaning it wasn't damaged by the detonation. The Dredge are already conducting repairs, however, which means they'll only be hindered so long, until we leave. They're like weeds, with roots too deep into the earth to pull out. We can only keep snipping the stems every so often, but they'll always come back. I hope the rebels here make use of the time we've bought them to establish a foothold, and win this war on their own.  
  
I'm hoping command moves us out of here soon, though, now that we've repaired that air-system. I don't see much of a reason to stay, unless we decide to press deeper onward into the depths, which I hope we don't. Either case, I've prepared extra demolitions charges, just in case command jumps us with another surprise demolitions mission. If not, well, I'm longing for the open sky, and feeling fresh air on my skin. This is driving me insane, along with everyone else.  
Adding to that, I have to deal with inane tricks of our soldiers. This morning, some joker left a handful of dead Dredge at our encampment borders; and none of the sentries had anything to say about. Band of worthless fools. But then, of course, Boyd takes my dismissal to "go digs some holes or something" literally, and ends up digging bleeding pit-falls all over the camp. How he even did that through the fucking stone floor, I don't know. I had him fill them again with his hands, and told him to go do something useful, like trip over his shoelaces.  
At which point he went to ask the quartermaster for shoelaces.  
Sometimes I am overcome with awe and amazement at the fact we are all still alive. All the gods and all the spirits must be watching over us.  
  
Something entirely different, I was going through my pack, and found something Rioleth gave me some time ago. He made a dreamcatcher, akin to a spider's web, to honour Owl. I'd forgotten about it, truth be told, and it just ended up lost below my bear's skin. Strange that he made it for Owl, given that Owl's dead. I suspect he just wishes to show his respect for Owl's memory.  
I'm not sure why he gave it to me, though it's a nice enough trinket. I might as well hang it up in my tent; there's a good sort of magic in gifts like that.

# 70th of Phoenix

Well, I found out while we've been staying in here, after all. Turns out command sent us in here in pursuit of the missing Dauntless soldiers after all. Turns out us blowing up half of this mine, and fixing their ventilation system was part of a bargain on our end, in exchange for the Dredge rebels telling us where to find the prison cells. Suffice to say, they were in places we'd never have looked on our own. They were up, above the cave of what's apparently called Bore Lynch, a good climb above the Sonic Forge and the waterworks we blew up five days past. Fortunately, our demolitions works didn't collapse those sections, or they'd have been buried alive, and I wouldn't even have known about it. Makes me a little sick, thinking I might have accidentally killed those people if we'd been less conservative with the explosives. As it stands, though, we mounted an impressive offensive rescue operation, which came with it's own sets of problems. Primarily, we were funneled up the narrow and rickety scaffolding and spiral stairwells the Dredge use, for some reason never with any safety railing. Holm fell down, but thankfully not a great distance. His leg's broken, but at least he's alive. Seleea's worse off; she had a landmine explode in her face. She was in a Dredge mining suit, which probably saved her life, but she's lost an eye, earliest I've heard it.  
Anyway, we cut through the Dredge and to those cells. Four are alive, one of whom is Sigra, which means some of these prisoners were recent. Unfortunately, it seems the Dredge executed a good amount of their captives before we could reach them. But these four are alive, though I can't speak for their sanity. Two of them seem reduced to gibbering in fear; I can only hope it betters when we get out of this blasted mine. Which is soon, I wager. Orders were to move out today, but the weight of the wounded made that hard. We'll probably not delay long, though. The Skyheight Steading encampment is better suited for treating the injured, after all. I wonder if the Warmaster has recovered yet.  
  
I've got to say, as far as warzones go, I'm not looking forwards to following the Dwarves into the depths to fight Primordius. This is oppressive. At least the underground in Rata Novus was lit up by those daylight orbs in the ceiling that bathed it in light; the oddly glowing moss and strange growths that covered the ground and shaped the cave around us there at least had something beautiful about them. Whereas this is all crude piping and Dredge-smoothed stone slopes. I'll be glad to see dusk and dawn with my own eyes again, rather than relying on rough guesswork and Sinclair's time-dial to know what time of day it is. That, and fresh air. Even with the ventilation system cycling, it feels like I'm breathing through some old undergarments.  
I'm complaining, aren't I?  
  
Well either way, I think this has been the last of Dauntless' Chapter, far as I can tell. I'm not sure if we could have saved some more if the Dredge had told us earlier, but... I'm not sure I'm willing to consider that out loud. It betrays that I'd happily trade two dozen Dredge lives for a handful of Pact soldiers. Ugly thought, because I know that I should be better than that; and yet I can't help but feel apprehensive that they didn't tell us sooner. I suppose they thought, perhaps with reason, we'd just rescue our own, and then leave these rebels to fight their own war. Somewhere, I hope we'd be better than that, but the fact I'm not entirely convinced myself speaks volumes.  
  
In all of this, I'd almost forgotten there is still a Claw of Jormag out there for us to fight. Out of the frying pan and into the fire, I suspect. I hope the northern front has been holding strong while we were under the mountain, or we're in for a good deal amount of fighting once we surface again.  
  
Wonder where Kristen's been.

# 71st of Phoenix

We've moved everyone back to Skyheight Steading, pushing through to the mine exit. I've never been happier to get out of a cave than this time around. Thankfully, it wasn't too difficult of a movement, the Dredge left us well enough alone, and the column made it our safe enough. Afterwards, resting out in the snow was the greatest thing since Brothander Halfmad finished brewing his first batch of Bear's Brown ale.  
  
We're about to push up north soon as well, apparently intent on facing down the Claw. I think command wants us to push through this canyon filled with Grawl, but Lorma noted that they're relatively reclusive. Seems a bit odd to draw our swords against them, simply because they're in our way. I mean, spirits, aren't we supposed to protect the innocent, rather than slaughter them? Anyway, we haven't moved against them yet, so maybe there's a way around.  
  
We'll be leaving the survivors of Dauntless here when we do move north again. They're in no state fit to fight, and most them look like they could use a good couple of seasons somewhere warm and quiet before anything is asked of them. I still don't rightly know what exactly happened to them, but it seems cruel to question them too thoroughly now. I fear that if there was anyone else left in that blasted mine, the Dredge will have killed them by now.  
We should have exterminated that entire hive of rats. Damn them.  
  
At least Sigra's doing better, which I'll take a sign of some absolution, in absence of revenge.

# 72nd of Phoenix

Moved north, now at a large Pact encampment called Earthshake, where we're mustering to bring that Claw of Jormag out of the air and destroy it. Most of these people have fought Jormag's lieutenants before, and they're confident this won't be too different. Artillery emplacements dot the road west, into a kill-field where they will force the dragon to land, before it can be fully destroyed. The arsenal of weapons on display is impressive, to say the least, counting six heavy guns. The type we'd use to hammer Orrian dragons out of the sky on the *Access Denied!*, so I know they're effective. Also several secondary batteries of flak cannon, looks like Charr guns. The entire area is crawling with ballistics crews and weapons teams, as well as Priory and Order of Whispers specialists. It's a difference from the rather meager forces arrayed further south, though I suspect the Pact has been trying to pool all available troops in Frostgorge here, in response to this Claw appearing. The Kodan and Quaggans are here too, in discreet but heavily armed delegations, doing their part for Tyria.  
  
We left the wounded and injured in Skyheight, since we had to cross rough terrain. Lorma's objection to going through the Grawl seems to have been heard, and we navigated the narrow ice ridges running north of Yak's Bend instead, providing our own cover. It was filled with ice elementals and imps, but those are easy enough to fight. Our guardians did excellent work providing us barriers while our ranged troops picked off lone enemies from above. Smooth movement, and no unneeded Grawl-slaughtering. They're not nicest of species, but I'd like to think we're above breaking down their doors and killing them where they sleep.  
  
I'm waiting for Kristen to show up, as I know she will. It is deeply unfortunate the Warmaster hasn't recovered yet, as I would have wanted to know if she'd allow Kristen to accompany the dragon-hunt or not, as I fear that Maeva won't allow her, which will put me in a very difficult spot. I have no desire to eclipse Kristen on this deed, and bring her to shame by putting her in my shadow. But on the other hand, I have a duty and an oath to fight this beast, both to Tyria and myself. I can only hope I'm able to smooth it out before I'm forced to make that choice. I resent the idea of risking either my honour or my love, as both are dear to me in the broadest sense.

# 73rd of Phoenix

Readying up in the encampment. It's interesting to see the people come and go. It's one of the busier and bigger Pact camps I've seen, excluding such bastions as Resolve and Trinity, of course. But there's plenty of traffic. Engineers and ballisticians going over the emplacements, work teams going out for lumber, supply trains from nearby Ascalon that bring in Dolyak and Marmox laden with medicine, rations and munitions. It's so busy, that I find myself with oddly idle hands, always wanting to help, only to hear it's already been done. I guess I can prepare mentally for the big fight, whenever it comes. The Claw sometimes passes overhead, but we haven't fired on it. Probably trying to wait until we're ready and entrenched before we'll start filling the sky with flak shells, and forcing it to the ground.  
No sign yet from Kristen, though, which has me worried.  
  
We did go out east today, for a couple of hours, into the Ascalonian territories that lay just down the pass, where the ice starts melting and makes way for though, hard grass and small trees. We passed by a norn hall that was housing many Kodan refugees, in the shadow of some long-crumbled human ruins. It was a wonderful place to build a lodge too, overlooking a lake, beneath an ice mountain that will never truly melt away as long as snow piles up from the north. Pity it was crowded, or we'd have stayed some time, I think.  
  
Asides from that, the camp is quiet. Some minor disciplinary grumblings happened between Vatorn and Zikk, but that's just your usual business. They wouldn't be soldiers if they didn't get into arguments and start complaining about things anyway.

# 74th of Phoenix

Exhausted. Spent the day working on the emplacements.  
A lot of fortification work to do.  
  
No sign of Kristen, still. Claw passed over once, but off to the west.

# 75th of Phoenix

Same shit, different day.  
  
We're crowding around the encampment, waiting for the word to come what part we'll play in the coming battles. We're not sure how or when it's going to happen, though, there seems to be quite a lot of effort going into preparatory work. Meanwhile, Kodan are coming through to the encampment, fleeing the encroaching icebrood. Most of them come from the waters west of here, where their ships are drifting in the narrow seas between the icebergs and the drifting ice. Every time a Claw appears here, the beasts surge forwards from the corrupted north, and drive more of them south, before we manage to repulse the attacks. Then the refugees slowly return home, until the next time they're forced to flee. It's no wonder so many of them have decided to go south permanently, and find better fortunes in the Shiverpeaks or in Lion's Arch, where Kodan are no longer uncommon sights. The Quaggans do the same, but we see them much less. Few make it out of the waters. Thankfully, the fish-bags breed quickly enough to keep their villages populated, or I doubt there'd be any of them left in these waters.  
  
Lorma spoke about the last time she fought a Claw, and the picture isn't pretty. It seems we'll be relying mostly on heavy weaponry to fight it, as the way she describes it, getting up close to it will be extremely dangerous, on the verge of suicidal, unless we want to be frozen solid or impaled on magical ice. It'll be a fight worth fighting, I can imagine, and I can't help but be filled with a sense of mild trepidation at the idea.  
I'm still waiting for Kristen to show her head, for that matter.

# 76th of Phoenix

Somewhat busy today; more on account of events than actually doing meaningful things, I mean, but still. Better than spending a whole day sitting on your arse and polishing your shield, so I'm not going to complain too much. It's always like this. We wait for days and days on end, and then it all happens fast. And we complain about both, of course, because we wouldn't be grumpy old soldiers otherwise. I mean, right now, I'm complaining that this Claw of Jormag, a giant monster that you'd think is born from the Underworld or the Foundry of Failed Creations, isn't bothering us enough. And as soon as it turns up, I'll complain about that too.  
  
But enough ranting. I took the engineers out to the field again today, fairly rudimentary work day. Just going over some of the secondary armaments. It's impressive to see how much weaponry is being stocked here; we've got Charr rocket tubes and flamethrowers in such amounts, they're being kept in barrels, along with the more conventional munitions. Figures we'll need them; more and more people I speak with tell me that we're not likely to get within an arrow's distance of the creature, let alone within sword's reach. Either case, we've got enough weaponry here to besiege a small city for a season or two. I'm anxious to know what role we'll play in the battle we're making ready for, truth be told. No clue when the trap will be sprung either. The Claw circles by every now and again, but it doesn't seem bothered by us yet. I wonder what would happen if it decided to come down now? We'd probably retreat into the camp, and repulse it, before continuing our work. Here's hoping that won't be needed.  
  
Some smaller news, Lionhead apparently wants to cut down a gun for in close quarters. I'm not entirely sure why, but there it is. Mirka Bloodletter has also rejoined us, against my expectations. Last we saw her, she'd tried to off herself nearby Wulfbane's lodge, and we sent her back home. Well, apparently, she's rejoined us after getting examined in the Keep. Unfortunately, her return was marred by some commotion between her and Vatorn. I'm fairly certain Vatorn caused it with his incessant need to make everything into an issue. They were shouted down in relatively short order, though, by myself and the Knight. That and some prodding by Ravenwest apparently turned them around, since they seemed to be in a reconciliating mood not long afterwards. I also had to babysit him 'venting' again; killed some ice imps in the ice canyons just outside camp.  
Oh, that reminds me, it was also reported to us that one of the sentries spotted Vatorn creeping outside the camp boundaries in the morning. Maeva wasn't too pleased by the news, because him leaving the camp without permission to do is would be deserting his post. Of course, the lad denies it, as he would, so it's word against word. I don't trust it, though.  
  
On the other hand, I managed to petition Maeva about allowing Kristen to accompany us on the field, should she show up. I'm not even sure she will, though I'm pretty sure that if she doesn't, it won't be because she didn't want to. In any case, Maeva's willing to here her out on my account, and then perhaps consider letting her join us for the fight. It lifts a weight off my chest that, since I was afraid I'd be forced into a very difficult position, where I would have to make a choice between going into battle against it, or not on account of Kristen. If I fight that Claw while Kristen is forced to watch from the sidelines, she'll forever be in my shadow; I doubt this is something we can both live with, no matter how much we'd wish otherwise. And then, if I would decide to abstain from fighting this dragon and remain with Kristen, I would break my oath to fight the minions of the dragon where they stand.  
Here's hoping I will be spared that choice.

# 77th of Phoenix

We took to the field today, just outside the encampment, doing sweeps. Lance headed south, into the lattice of frozen gulleys and canyons, while we headed past the emplacements, north, to a small Kodan camp nestled into the fold of the mountains that run on the northern flank. They were far north, where the ground starts warping with pockets of bad ice, the jagged blue claws of the dragon's evil ripping up through the ground and clawing at the sky. We had to fight through icebrood and other evil to get to them at all. We went there to convince them to fight on our side against the dragon, I think which they have agreed to. We had to help them restore some balance into the world, though. Smashed through a cave that was holding corrupted Kodan. Had to put them down when they became aggressive. Not much else to do, with their minds gone and their hides warped. We fight them almost every day, but it's still shocking to see flesh and skin blacken and crack, before shimmering blue ice is revealed, weeping out of their wounds like pus. At least I hope they don't feel too much pain, and that their mind leaves their body long before it turns against them.  
  
Also got some reshuffles in command. Lorma's acting Blade lead, Lyralii got transfered to us as second, and Sinclair got senior for Lance. Don't know why three out of four of our First Crusaders are now in Blade, with only the most junior one in Lance, but there you go.  
  
Slight hitch in what happened in camp today, following a joke gone wrong. Long story short, I think we upset Claridge by joking about her crush on Belmont, to the point that it looked like we were all still bairns at their first hunt, waffling their mouths off without thinking too much. Of course, we made our apologies as soon as we realized we went too far, but still.  
Humans are a little too touchy on those sort of matters, I feel, but I know better than to voice that out loud.  
  
What else? Oh yes, Nerissa, who was a recruit... must be more than a year ago, showed up, wanting to talk to Force. She was discharged before we headed into Orr in '28 by Graceful Mist. Hadn't expected to see her again, truth be told, but there you are. She's apparently staying in the encampment for a few days.  
  
As for the Claw fight, it seems that we might end up entrenching the cannon emplacement, and trying to keep it from being attacked and overrun. Not the most glorious position in the line, but probably a vital one. Maeva noted that we're not sure yet, since the planning is still ongoing.

[the page is slightly blackened, as if someone held a candle much too close to the paper during the writing. It seems generally clear from the jagged and sometimes barely-legible script that this was written down with little consideration for the health of neither the pen, nor the paper]

# 78th of Phoenix

Cleared out an icebrood infestation off of a Sanctuary out west today. Marched a good while to the inland ice sea that's formed there, and then had the mesmers weave a portal onto the nearby landmass. We were there for some Dredge that apparently laid siege to the Sanctuary, but those were mincemeat; barely offered any resistance. We boarded the Sanctuary after and found it heavily damaged and dotted with icebrood. I think the Claw flew over not long before we reached it, drove both the Dredge and Kodan away, before attack their Sanctuary directly. It was a brief scuffle, before we secured the Sanctuary in full. Passed around and sectioned groups of soldiers to every entry. Vatorn also helped the ice shapers with repairing some of the damaged ice. It was fascinating to see them at work. The Kodan simply weave it out of their paws, and sculpt it majestically. Times like that, I envy the elementalists their gifts.  
One odd thing we encountered when we boarded was a Kodan driven to a frothing rage, smashing friend and foe alike. They're furious warriors, and this one was big and marked in black patterns all over their fur, like an intricate tattoo would look on bare skin. We were forced to confront it after a brief stand-off, when it charged our lines. We forced it down to its knees, hopefully without injuring it too badly, when it was seized and dragged away by the Icehammers. I'm not sure what happened afterwards, though, we had to spread out fast and secure the ice-ship. Once we'd driven off the icebrood and destroyed those few clusters of corrupted ice that the Claw dropped down, we remained on station for a while longer, until we were finally sure we'd repulsed the attack. Then we repeated our first trick, and leaped back across, walking the short distance back to the encampment.  
  
Back in camp, Kristen'd arrived, as I expected she would. Apparently she's been staking it out in western Fireheart Rise, camping out the grounds near that one norn hall we visited on patrol not long ago, Haymal Gorge I think they call it. The locals here told her that we'd passed by, so she packed up and came for the encampment. I took her to speak to Maeva, as I had said she would, but it seemed Maeva never had any intention of letting her join the fight. She first asked Kristen if she'd be willing to join the Vigil for the fight. Kristen wasn't enthousiastic about the idea, as I expected, but when Kristen eventually said she'd be willing to talk to a recruiter in order to be allowed to fight alongside us, Maeva just walked off saying "that was all she needed to know". I could have strangled her, I was so angry about this up-shot cunt of a woman who thinks so much of herself, but then pisses down on willing volunteers for basically no reason, even when they readily state that they are willing to join our ranks! I told her I'd resign, and walked off with Kristen. And I would have walked out of that encampment, and back to Hoelbrak, if Kristen hadn't been so adamant about staying anyway.  
She said that she'd never walk out of this, especially not if it meant I had to give up on my oath. Also reminded me that I fight for more than just myself; which is true. I'm still conflicted; if I could, I would have left. I have no desire nor inclination to take orders from someone who has no honour and no integrity, but I can't force Kristen to leave either. So I am stuck between a rock and a hard place. I wish Maeva dropped dead, and that the Warmaster was here. This sort of dishonourable, despicable, treachery would never have occurred with Alleshia around. Verril would have simply thrown them overboard.  
  
But as I said, I'm between a rock and a hard place. So, I accepted that Kristen was adamant about her, us, staying, and apologised to the Knight, stating that I had suffered a lapse in judgement, and wished to retract my words and continue fighting alongsides the Vigil.I did so more for the sake of my fellow soldiers, Kristen, Freyj's future, and the greater cause of the Vigil than for any respect I have for the Knight.  
She demoted me. Made it conditional to me "rejoining". I'm back to recruit fucking Tzahr Davidsson, despite all I have done for this Chapter. More than she has, I'll tell you that much. If Kristen wasn't here, I would have refused, and packed my things on principle.  
And I still will. I'll slay this dragon, for my fellow Crusaders and the recruits of the Chapter, for Kristen, for the people back home, for the Kodan on their ice ships and the Quaggan in their villages. But after that, I am going home with Kristen, and then I sincerely hope Knight Maeva Arnsdottir dies a pointless death, alone and forgotten, as befitting someone of a character so low that it would even shock Grawl.

# 79th of Phoenix

So, interesting day. First of all, I am no longer recruit Tzahr Davidsson, I am once more First Crusader. Maeva offered her apologies, and reinstated me, if we both agreed to wipe the slate clean. I'm not sure what to think about it; on one hand, she did still refuse Kristen with a ploy that makes me doubt her honesty and integrity. On the other, asking for second chance is what I did yesterday. It would feel hypocritical not to do so. So I'll allow her to prove herself worthy of being followed into battle, if she wants to do so. I'll stay for the others regardless, and because Kristen wants me to stay just as well. I'll see how I feel about it all after we've slain the Claw of Jormag. Perhaps it is time to find somewhere else to go, and different goes to fight. Or perhaps not.  
  
We marched out west again, today. The Kodan whom we helped yesterday provided us with boats, and their took us across the ice sea, all the way to the northern shore. It is probably the furthest north I've ever been, which should fill me with excitement and a sense of discovery.  
It was a corrupted hellscape. We see clusters of bad ice every now and again around entrenched Svanir lodges or around Dragon totems, but this was much, much worse. Everything was warped, oozing a numbing and terrifying cold that made your fingers and nose go numb, and the water in your eyes slowly freeze if you stared at something too long. There were icebrood wandering aimlessly along the shore, in every direction we looked. They were just... there. Like the risen stumble and lurch across the surface of Orr. It was truly Jormag's domain. We killed plenty, thinning them out, so that Claw would have less minions to call upon, but we had to retreat soon enough. There were too many, and the cold would have killed us if the icebrood didn't first. Maeva got wounded as well, mangled her hand.  
  
We got back to the encampment safely enough, but it was a taste of Jormag's domain I won't soon enough. I hope that the rest of the Far Shiverpeaks has not been twisted as badly. Otherwise the trek north once the Fang of the Serpent is shattered will be a hard one.

# 80th of Phoenix

A lot quieter today, given Maeva's injured and not able to fulfill her combat duties. Besides, after tow days of action, it pays to calm down again. Only issue is I'm quickly running out of pipeweed, and I haven't yet found anyone here that seems to have any for trade. I suppose I'll have to start trading in my ration tickets for more of those cheroots, and resort to those instead. Not a bad idea, truth be told, now Kristen's camped up here with us. Sharing a ration cigar was how we met, in Southsun, after all. Spirits, that seems so long ago now.  
  
I'm not sure what she's planning to do, but she seems adamant that she will indeed face this Claw, regardless of what was said or done. I'm worried that she'll do something stupid, but I doubt I'd be able to stop her if she did. I'll admit I'm still divided about my willingness to fight against the beast if I know she's in chains or set aside. I don't know what to do or what to expect, though I suppose I'll have faith in her and her choices, if that's what she asks of me.  
The idea that we'll allow a divide to be built between us eats at me, though. More than the prospect of facing one of Jormag's terrors.  
But she's nearby, and I know I've missed her the way I feel when I hold her close. There are moment when I wake up at night, and I listen to her steady breathing to fall asleep again, together with the howling wind, and distant sound of the watchfires. They're moments that I hope last forever. What we're doing is right, whatever anyone tells us. We belong here together.  
  
So yes, it's been calm. Only had to manage a disciplinary question concerning Vatorn acting a little... odd towards the Knight yesterday. Ravenwest was so good as to report it to me, noting that Maeva, who was drugged up to sooth her injuries, went off to sleep to her tent, where she fell into one of those sleeps that'll carry you through an artillery barrage. Vatorn thought she needed help, and then proceeded to look into the Knight's tent. Ravenwest took exception to this, and called him back, which he apparently refused, insisting he needed to help the Knight undress. It sounds a little off, but when I questioned him about it, he seemed to state that his intentions had been strictly and purely honourable. Maeva herself was pretty damn furious about it, but deferred to my justice on the matter, though she did note that this was not the first time the recruit had violated the Knight's privacy. In the end, I chose to accept that the lad might have genuinely be inclined towards offering help, even though his secondary motivations might have been suspect. As it stands, however, he did not actually break a formal regulation, he merely transgressed on the Knight's privacy under debatable circumstances; I decided to merely issue him a stern warning, and give him a direct order not to transgress against the Knight's privacy again, or be deemed insubordinate. I suspect that the reputation damage his actions have caused him will also suffice on an informal level. I doubt the other soldiers will have much respect for someone they see as a lecher; I'm fairly certain Ravenwest's opinion of him has steeply declined, for one.

# 81st of Phoenix

Earthshake encampment, waiting for the signal, still.  
  
Kristen's joined the Vigil. Not the Ashen Chapter, but the local garrison lot. I was very, very surprised, considering I highly doubt the rigidity of the Vigil are to her liking, nevermind not being allowed to go where you please. I said as much to her, you can't pen up a leopard, they have to roam free. But she doesn't mind, says it's a price she's willing to pay in order to be there with me when we fight the Claw. I was stunned, in the best way, to hear that. I gave her the bone blade I finished some time ago as well. I was right; it does suit her better.  
I'll also say that Kristen wearing Vigil armour was one of the more enjoyable sights I've seen; spirits, but she's a beautiful damn woman! Every time I look at her, it's like she has become more beautiful, more radiant, than she was before. It keeps surprising me, as if my mind cannot comprehend fully how lucky I am to have met her on that beach, four seasons ago.  
  
Hah, I find myself literally unable to continue writing now, as I feel it would ruin the rest of the day's account, when all that really matters to me is that I love Kristen.  
Sometimes, it's that simple.

# 82nd of Phoenix

Nothing of note passed today, really. Keeping quiet here while we wait for the muster.

# 83rd of Phoenix

So, orders came down, finally, seems we've got one more target to tackle before command's willing to finally shoot down the Claw. We're continuing our work on assisting on securing the surrounding area before we commit to it, however, and will be boarding another Kodan sanctuary that's been overrun. This time, it's the biggest one in these waters, the legendary Honour of the Waves that drifts off like a city hollowed into an iceberg. I find it fitting that we're helping the Kodan return some balance to their homes; I hope that, when the day comes and we all head north again, they'll remember it. They're good, if strange, allies to have.  
  
And after that, it'll be the great battle against the Claw, one of the greater of Jormag's minions, where our courage and bravery will be tested. It's one of those battles that only comes every now and again, when all that is good stands against evil, in the conviction that we will and shall prevail, to safeguard those who lead more oblivious lives. Every now and again, the Vigil fights a battle which pays for the good order of the world in blood and lives; because, as so wisely stated by General Soulkeeper, some must fight, so that all can be free.  
We'll be holding the cannon emplacements in the battle, a vital enough role if we're to win, since without those cannons, we can only barely damage the claw. It has a hide of thick magical ice that will turn away our blades and spells, so we have to resort to the good old Pact practice of shooting it with high-yield magical artillery fire. It'll pound the bastard out of the air, and keep him on the ground until he's banished into the Foundry of Failed Creations, where it belongs.  
  
I took out the engineers to the emplacement, taught them at least the basics of those cannons, in case circumstances call upon us to man them. I hope not, since our duty will be to protect the gun crews, but we can never know. The dragon might drop crystals on top of us in a form of counter-battery fire, which may claim any number of lives. At least we've got some hands that can at least try to bring the cannons back into operation if able. Directing fire on this beast will be of the utmost importance, after all.  
I also took them out a little further, so we could see the massive hulk of the Honour of the Waves drift off into the distance, and reminded them of their duties as engineers, especially onboard a Kodan vessel that's taking water. We'll have to be ready to blast our way through obstacles, without endangering the vessel. We'll be going there to reclaim the Kodan's home, not destroy it. Either case, I've given them orders to prepare the required explosive packs, just in case, and to be ready for whatever is asked of them.  
  
And Kristen; well, she's going to work with the garrison troops in entrenching and fortifying the entire position until we've done our work on the Sanctuaries. After that, we'll be on the fire line against the Claw together, and spirits, willing, bring it down side by side, just as it should be. They'll be watching us, the spirits, and they'll protect us. Kristen's favoured by Leopard, after all, and she'll grant her the fortitude and skill to come out unscathed. And if not, I'll be by her side, with my shield and my sword.  
It'll be only a few days now.

# 84th of Phoenix

Right, so, we boarded the Honour of the Waves in small teams, going ever-deeper into the ship. I took a task team with Rioleth, Ravenwest, Lionhead and Klixxa to hunt down and kill a Svanir champion somewhere onboard. It was a hard, hard fight. They opposed us at every turn, and we had to think on out feet. Not just any Svanir or some icebrood either, but big beasts, empowered by their totems. They put up a damned good fight; but we still cut through them. Had to resort to throwing grenades and hoping for the best a number of times was we pushed deeper into that ship, deck by deck. I'm still shaking a little. It took us two hours. Two whole hours, to go in, fight our way through to the center, kill our target, and get back out. The damned bastard was holed up in a cargo room, so deep down that we had to rope down into the hold from a higher deck, right into a nest ballistae. Thankfully, the troops did excellent, and none of them got injured beyond just some exhaustion. Considering the amount of enemies we fought, and for how long we kept going, that says something about their quality. I'm proud of them; I have no doubt they will do well against the Claw, which will happen any day now.  
  
I'm rambling a bit, because of the adrenaline. It's easy to hide, but hard to for it to fade away. I have to say, this attack, it was one of our more glorious hours. It felt almost like reclaiming part of home, going in there and cleaning out the decks for the Kodan. They'll remember what we did for them today, I hope, and when we finally avenge the exodus, their ships will sail with us north again, to wage another, grander war, on Jormag himself. It is a pity Kristen missed this, but then, this was war, not a hunt. I'll tell her all about it when her watch ends, of course, hopefully before the exertion catches up with me.  
  
The other strike teams did well too. We had to put Claridge and Holm into command of their own strike teams as well, which suddenly made clear to me how many of us were recruits, and how few of us have been with us for any time. But they both did well, I heard. None of us was left behind, even though some are wounded. Force might have been off worse, I think he broke his legs. I hope that the others in the care of the medics are only there for light injuries. In the end, this was not even the big fight. We'll need them, soon enough.  
And then we can go home!  
  
I made some food today, since Claridge was in medical after her command. Basic food, but it's been a while since I made some for the Chapter as a whole. All tinned meals, but they seemed to appreciate it. Nothing like a good, full belly after a long operation like that, I'm sure.  
Oh, and one of the Dauntless people we saved from the Dredge, Hazel Pearce, has rejoined the Vigil her, despite the trauma she's bound to have gone through. Resilient, and exemplary in the pursuit of her duties, I think, to pick up the sword again so soon after everything that have suffered through. She fought alongsides one of the strike teams today, I think, so she's already repaid her debt to us.  
  
Spirits, I'm suddenly tired. I'm not sure if I can keep awake until Kristen's dusk watch ends.  
You know what, I'll smoke the last of the pipeweed, and see if I can't see her walk her tours from the watchtower. "Recruit Dragonsbane".

# 85th of Phoenix

Seems like another one of those quiet days after a main assault. The quiet before the storm, as it always is, when the only way forwards is to storm that keep, but you still find this moment of serenity right before many, many people die. It's one of these moments today, too. The battle against the Claw will happen, soon, and it will be dangerous. Extremely dangerous, even. It's this odd sensation when you speak to someone, it might be the last conversation you'll have with them. It's always people you don't expect to perish that end up making a crucial mistake, or run out of luck at just the wrong moment for them to get robbed away.  
Here's hoping against the odds that this battle won't claim any lives.  
  
We'll see what the morrow brings; if the sword falls, may we fight bravely and proudly. Kristen will be with me, and so will be many of the Chapter's soldiers. We're the shield against the darkness, and we'll break the dragon's minions on our resolve.

# 86th of Phoenix

It's done. It's over. We faced the Claw in battle, and emerged victorious.  
It was some battle, alright, chaotic. We marched towards the emplacements soon enough, arraying ourselves around the hill, with the engineers helping out on the cannons. And then we waited. Eventually, though, the creature reared its ugly head. It passed overhead, dropping ice crystals on us and flooding the area with hundreds upon hundreds of icebrood. They crashed against our position like water on stone, splintering and breaking where their corrupted flesh met Vigil steel and magic, ripping them apart as they came. The Claw itself was something else, though. It was huge, enormous, easily putting the Orrian dragons to shame with its sheer massive power. It was, as Calder described it, like a living blizzard. We shot it out of the air after it passed over a couple of times, forcing it to land. Where is set food, the earth warped and cracked with intense frost, large spikes of terrible ice ripping up from the ground to shield it. We could feel it radiate, turning beads of water and sweat into runnels of ice that cracked and hurt the skin, flash-frozen by the monster's sheer malevolence. As we shelled it, it rained down ice and terror on us, and it took everything we had to keep those cannons firing. Icebrood burst forth from giant ice crystals it rained down on us, trying to destroy our guns, while our own troops desperately tried to fight them off. It almost escaped, but we kept shelling it, until it tried to take off and landed badly, smashing itself into the ground off to the side of the emplacements, too low for the cannons to fire down at. The engineers had to seize flamethrowers and burn paths ahead for bomb-golems to rush at is, and destroy it.  
We effectively clamped the Claw between the bomb-golems, whom blew great cracks and rents into its magical carapace, and the cannons that prevented it from taking to the skies again. If it had tried, the guns would have pulverised it. It was brutal, as the Claw unleashed every last of its monsters on us, but we destroyed it. I came so close I could almost touch it, feeling the water in my eyes turn solid as I ran, the flamethrower belching out huge clouds of fire and heat. In that small cone, right before the dragon's magic shattered, I stood eye in eye with evil that defeated my people. And then it blew apart, hurling its broken corpse into the water with the force of the detonation when the last bomb-golem blew it apart, splitting it open tail-to-head.  
  
There were many, many wounded. The fighting was hard, and it seems that I'm one of the fewer that seems miraculously unharmed asides from several freezeburns. I'm sorry to say that Boyd Mackie, that blessed idiot and good-hearted fool, died during the attack. I wish I could tell something about his final stand, but I can't, because I don't know what happened. I feel a pang of deep, deep regret at all the things he never realised in his life, and the memories of his goofs. He leaves a legacy of his own, which will be remembered. Not because he was the man who discharged his gun into the roof to wake the quartermaster, or because he believed in pixies, but because he dared to pick up his gun, and go out hunting for a dragon's horns and a norn's heart with no more pause than he would have gone hunting for Drake. May you fund your way into the Mists.  
And fear not, your family is also not forgotten.  
Asides from Boyd, I fear Sjöfn might not survive the night. She was badly mauled over the head, and we were slow on the treatment. There is little we can do but hope she finds Ox's own strength, and clings on to life like a warrior. I have no desire to see more pyres come morning.  
  
On a less gloom note, we got reinforced by a number of extra hands right before the engagement. The Warmaster was not well enough to take to the field, so command befell the Senior First Crusaders, and me for the engineering, and, unlike Maeva, we had little qualms about accepting their offers. Ironic, considering Kristen's case, but aye, she was there alongside us. Fought like a she-lion, wielding the bone-blade I carved her into battle, where it served her well. In her hands, it cut through the icebrood as if they were mere water. There was another norn from the Guild Initiative that fought alongside us, as well as the human, Hazel Pearce, who once more prove her resilience and her valour. She's worthy the memory of Dauntless Chapter, at least. Finally, we had two last-minute recruits, one Charr ironically named Moonshield, though they bear no relation to either Rajani specifically, or Force's band in general, and a Sylvary called Kidemonas, or "Kid". The last one carried with him one of Vanholm's old totems, something which struck me keenly. He only barely knew Vanholm, not even by name. Turned out Vanholm was the reason this Sylvari joined the Ashen. I told him that Vanholm died fighting the dragons, in Orr. Which is true, after a fashion. He threw away the totem, afterwards, but I couldn't... well, I picked it up, and kept it. It didn't feel right to throw it aside.  
I wish Vanholm had been here today, to banish this evil out of the world. Perhaps it could have banished some of his own demons from his mind, too, and purified his soul a little.  
  
I suppose I honour him still, in the blade Kristen used today, so that's a small consolation. And Kristen, spirits, we've killed our second great dragon together. This time both as soldiers of the Vigil, though she's admitted as much that she'll sign out and return to her hunting again, as I expected. But, before that, I suspect we'll have a period of leave, and we have eachother to attend to. I asked her if she would join her legend with mine, and she said yes, so... that's what we're going to do. It feel strange to feel so happy, so uplifted with the thrill of victory, and so relieved, while also remembering the dead, both old and new. But then, what better way to honour their sacrifices than to be happy we're alive. Kristen's going to be my wife.  
  
I considered signing out, and going with Kristen entirely, but I know her and us well enough to know that it's too early for that. We love eachother, we're worthy of eachother, and we'll become one in the eye of the spirits, but she's leopard's daughter, and leopards hunt alone. So I'll let her hunt, while I soldier, and in between, in the days and hours we find ourselves sharing, we'll meet and we'll love eachother as we are want to. And then, perhaps, one day, when we're old, tired or simply bored of girding ourselves with swords and arrows, I'll build her a lodge and a home for us to become grey in.  
And if that lodge is set among the fallen bones of the great dragon Jormag, then so much better for us!  
  
  
81. Boyd Mackie, slain in battle.

# 87th of Phoenix

Spent most of the day in a form of half-revelry, enjoying the aftermath of the victory, and the choices we've made as to Kristen and mine's joining. Not much else to say to that, I think, as that seems obvious enough. We're both expecting the Ashen to be sent home soon, at which Kristen will request her discharge, and make her own way south. Should be a lot calmer now that the Claw is gone; I don't doubt the remaining Svanir will be on the backfoot, trying to keep themselves from getting mopped up by the garrison troops. The assembled soldiers will also slowly return back to their stations. We might assist them in the clean up for another few days, but I doubt we'll be here come Phoenix's end.  
  
Sjöfn is still alive, thank the spirits, though I doubt she'll be able to do much more soon. Or ever again, for that matter. I suppose it is still better than being dead, mind, so aye. She'll be sent on home soon. Spirits, that Claw fight has us with a lot of wounded. It's never good to see that many people in medical; I find it hard to talk to them. I want to leave them to the medics, and not bother them until they're well again. Sometimes I find it terrifying to think I'm going to tell someone they'll be alright, and they're not. As if it's a promise I can't keep.  
  
Hm. What an odd thought.  
Anyway, I'm going to return to my rest, my future wife, and the bottle of mead we kept from yesterday's celebration.

# 88th of Phoenix

So, aye, as expected, we got pulled out earlier today, set onboard choppers, and flown all the way back to the Vigil Keep in Gendarra, where I am know. I said goodbye to Kristen for now, but she won't be far behind. A few days at worst, if she doesn't make good speed through the foothills coming south, but I don't doubt she'll surprise me.  
  
We're all expecting leave to happen soon, so that's good. Usually happens after a tour like this, when we get flown all the way back to the Keep. After that, I have a lot of work to do for the preparations. I'll head south to Lion's Arch, sent Usha and Freyja a letter ahead. Spirits willing, they're around, and should be able to make it known to the skaalds, long before Kristen and I arrive in Hoelbrak. We'll wait some days, give old friends and witnesses a chance to make their way over, and then it'll be done quickly, I think.  
I'm looking forwards to it all.  
  
On a quieter note, we burned Mackie's body earlier today. There's not much to say about it, except that it is a loss, and it saddens me to have said goodbye to him.  
I've made sure his kin back home receive something, now he's gone. With some kindness, I hope to cushion their mourning a little.

# 89th of Phoenix

Bear's arse, my head. It's the morning of the 90th today, but because I got utterly sloshed with Lionhead once we hit Lion's Arch yesterday evening, I wasn't in much of a state to write. I woke up this morning stripped naked on a pier around noon, with a healthy sunburn across my back that's red like an angry crab's shell. I can't remember most of the evening, except that Lionhead's got a strong bloody liver. No idea where she's gone off to, truth be told, but I suppose that doesn't matter too much.  
  
Anyway, yeah, we got leave! So I made my way down to the Arch pretty quickly after that, sent a whole lot of letters ahead, and to Freyja and Usha, before I took Lionhead up on that bet we had. Should've known not to try and beat her in her home turf, with her own drink. At least, I don't think I won. And if I did, I can't for the life of me remember how. Thankfully, I don't seem to have been robbed, my armour and pack were all just neatly tucked away in a corner below the Marriner walls, with everything inside them. Including Boyd's human-sized harmonica, which he apparently left me in his will. I suppose I'll have some time to practice, I always wanted to learn a musical instrument.  
  
Anyway, I'm about to head off through the gate to Hoelbrak, and start organizing in earnest. Mostly catering, truth be told, I'm sure the rest will provide for itself soon enough.  
  
Oh, and in other news, before I left the keep, Force told me Arca's expecting cubs, and is off to the fahrar with them. He's staying along with us, of course, the way Charr do it. It's good, I suppose! I hope he's able to get to the ceremony. Force's seen Kristen and I fight half a dozen places, he'll have something to say.

# 90th of Phoenix

Right, later in the evening now, as I've been in Hoelbrak for a good few hours, and it's now well after dusk.  
The arrangements are being made; we'll have to do it a little bit later than I originally wanted, but that's not too big of an issue.  
  
Freyja had a letter sent back by a Priory novice, who seemed to know who I was on sight. Writes that she'll be here tomorrow. Can't find Usha yet, but the folks at the brewery told me she's around, and she's got my letters. According to them, she bounded on the table and set off at some speed to prepare.  
I'm excited myself now, more so than I was before. I'm eagerly awaiting the day Kristen'll have made her way south again, which shouldn't be too long. Then it'll be waiting; if we're lucky, we should be able to do some hunting before the big day itself.  
  
I'll need to start sending letters and invitations to people tomorrow, too. I put up a notice before we got dismissed for leave, some days ago, but the date wasn't set yet. Have to make sure we can get as many of them to come, to witness this moment. After all, they've all contributed to it, in some way. I wouldn't have met Kristen if it wasn't for us being in Southsun at the time, after all.

# 1st of Scion

Preparations are underway, and I've sent off the letters to everyone I could remember writing. Here's hoping they'll all show, and have many good things to say for both of us!  
It's good being home, that's for sure, and planning a wedding is a hunger-inducing gift. I've missed good food, and good ale! Thankfully, both are easily found here. Twice now have I stopped for a drink, and ended up staying a handful of hours to tell tales, laugh, joke, and win several bouts of arm-wrestling with some of the younger lads.  
  
Hah, "younger lads". Days away from being bonded, and I'm a old man again! I kept calling Wulfbane "chief" on that account, but now I'll be right up there with him. Well, not quite, since I have not intent to settle down yet in the coming years, and neither has Kristen. We can do another five or ten years of adventuring, soldiering and hunting more. Besides, still have to raise that dragon-lodge on the bones of a great serpent! Pity we blasted the Claw asides in Frostogorge. Though, those weren't really bones either, more just... well, whatever living blizzards are made of.  
  
Anyhow, I've found us a respected shaman who's heard of both Kristen and me, and who would be more than pleased with overseeing the ceremony. It'll be on the sixth of Scion, in a few days. Gives me a chance to find some nice furs and clothes to wear. Freyja, whom arrived later in the day, is jubilant, but also firmly determined that I'm not going to get wed while wearing ogre-armour. She's taken to fussing about it all to the exceptional degree, but I don't readily mind.  
It's good to see her again, too. I'm glad she doesn't look too bothered about it, but then, I think she and Kristen have gotten along better since that first time they met.  
  
It's good to be home.

# 2nd of Scion

Kristen's arrived at Hoelbrak today, found her calling on Leopard's Lodge in the morning. A stalker in her lair, that. Thankfully, most of the preparations have been taken care of, leaving the rest of the day for us to enjoy. It's been one of those, where the hours go slow, we tell tales, and we never stray too far from the fire. It's good.  
Freyj's been drinking impressive amounts of ale in the meanwhile, apparently telling every single soul that wishes to hear how great our legends are, and challenging everyone who doesn't believe her to a bout of blecher's bluff. Eventually one of the Wolfborn dragged her back to the lodge here, because she'd gotten too drunk to remember where she was going, and ended up trying to crawl into an empty keg and claiming it. She's snoring in the corner; I don't envy her headache come morning.  
  
Well, I suppose that if she's already knocked out, we won't have to worry about waking her up later, that's always a plus. She makes a terrible fuss otherwise.

# 3rd of Scion

There was a dispute at the Asura gate earlier, something about some mercenary trying to stop someone from leaving. A fight broke out, but the Wolfborn broke it up in short order and made it clear that they could try and settle their business at the other side of the gate if they wanted, but that causing a ruckus within Hoelbrak was an insult to Whitebear's hospitality. They paid a 'compensation' which disappeared into some pockets, and were sent on their way soon enough. It's good to see some form of order still being enforced by Skarti's lot.  
Reminds me I need to go talk to him about making sure there's no trouble come the ceremony; I'll bring them a keg of mead, that'll do the trick.  
  
And the day is now approaching. I'm nervous, happy and pretty sure it hasn't entirely set in yet. Will things change? I mean, I see Kristen when I can already, and I don't doubt that the close future will still mean time spent under arms and at war. I suppose it doesn't change much short-term. I suppose it's more like a pledge to face the future together. If war, famine, sickness or just bad luck doesn't slay either of us, we'll have something to build when the world quietens down.  
  
Oh, and Freyj's been sick all day, retching up bile, and complaining about how she can't feel her liver, much less her head. I think she's sworn to give up drinking at least half a dozen times before noon alone, and that was before that girly of hers dragged her out of bed and into the markets. I've been there; it's nothing a good fatty meal and a tall glass of wheat beer won't cure before the evening.

# 4th of Scion

The day's nearly there! We went out into the Foothills to make small offerings and meditate at the wayshrines there. Might as well garner the favour of the spirits on such an auspicious occasion! We stayed longest at Leopard's shine, on Kristen's account. Bear, too, made her presence known. It's rare that they still speak to us, but it is good to know they're still there. And we know now at least that both we're in both Leopard and Bear's graces. I could not has asked for better patrons.  
  
Tomorrow morning, I'm going to head away myself for the last day, prepare myself, ponder my vows, and hunt a wild stag, both the ale variant and the actual one. Won't see Kristen until the ceremony, as it should be. I'm nervous, I'll admit, in all the best ways. Soon! Soon, soon, soon!

# 5th of Scion

Tomorrow is the day. Tomorrow is the day!  
  
I'm prepared. Spirits, big battles and large wars frighten me less than this does! But I'm ready. I've spent the day hunting in the foothills; no wild stag, but a minotaur bull. Used the Kodan bow for it, too, seemed fitting, considering our previous hunts. It was good, restful, refreshing. Skinning and carving the bull too; took me a few hours of work. I offered the meat to the shamans in the Rookery and the skin will go to Knut's folk, for hosting us in the great lodges of Hoelbrak. It's been a long, long time since I've been able to do these sort of things, to hunt alone and leisurely, to spend a whole evening prying the skin off of a magnificent creature, and honouring its spirit for the worthy hunt it turned out to be. I understand why Kirsten makes it her life; it's calm. Serene almost.  
  
Now comes the keg of ale to celebrate my last day as a lone hunter; the next dusk will never belong to just me again. An old tradition, meant for much younger people. I appreciate the sentiment enough to honour the practice, but I'm used to living my life for and with others, ever since Freyj was born. Tomorrow, though, I'll have two reasons to be at war! And that's worth the drink, at least.  
  
So, today I'll drink! Not to say goodbye to freedom, but to welcome someone else into my heart! Long may she reign.

# 6th of Scion

And it's done. Kristen is my wife, and we face our future together. Many people came for the ceremony, earlier in the evening, and stood witness. People from the Chapter, Freyja and Grace, but also the entirely of the Brusah Clan, Mire as well as Ema and her sister, who came all the way down from the Reach. It was good to see them all assembled there; they honoured us with their presence, and many spoke for our strengths. Then we spoke our vows, and it was done. Well, not quite; there's a long night ahead of us, but that's not for polite reading.  
  
The remainder of the evening was spent in excellent company. So many people brought gifts and trinkets for us, leaving us with a small pile of gifts. Maeva gave us paired bracelets adorned with floral patterns and inscribed with the words 'duty' and 'honour'. Kristen and I each wear one, of course. Bjorn carved both of us into a logside, along with a lodge in the background. Rioleth also gave us a carving, he molded bone into a Leopard and a Bear that fit together as a sculpture. It'll be a reminder for when we're apart. What else? Oh, alcohol. A lot of it, of course, including a bottle of excellent whisky from Ravenwest, and a pack of Lion's Arch cigars from Maxson. Mire offered us a lucky arrowhead from the wars in Maguuma, which is always a good token, we got a pair of hunting blades from Ema, along with some handmade scarfs that will no doubt look exceptionally silly, but also very warm, so I can't complain. Claridge made us a knitwork toy-bear, prompting Kristen and I to have another child, which was only slightly awkward. Not that I would mind Kristen and I having a child eventually, but it would complicate matters a great deal, what with the wars and such. The gift was made with good intentions, though. Aska gave us a carved bowl... oh, and Vatorn an especially hardened metal carving blade. It's not just plain steel; it's a lot lighter and sharper. I can't wait to use it for something.  
  
But yes, many, many gifts and good wishes, along with an excellent ceremony. Kristen looked beautiful too, wore her hear tied up with a golden chain. She's my wife now, bonded before the spirits, for all these witnesses to see. I'm writing this right before we go up to the lodge, break open the mead, and then celebrate the night together. The other guests remain outside, at the brewery, armed with kegs of Cragstead Red and other good ale. But enough waiting. This night is ours, and ours alone, little book.

# 7th of Scion

Ugh, hungover. I'd note down the details, but I expect someone to read this journal at one point, so I won't, for their sanity. It was a good, good night.  
  
The day was mostly sleeping it off, drinking the remaining mead, and finally making ready to march back to the Keep tomorrow. The revels were good, but the world is still in mortal peril. It feels odd to part ways with Kristen so soon again, after only just passed through a ceremony that binds us together, but as I've written before, we know eachother well enough to know we can be one, even when we're apart. Kristen needs to hunt, to run free and to roam, and I need to keep my oath and fight the dragons until they're ended.  
Besides, knowing she's going to be back home when I return from what-ever front comes next is a good motivation to make sure I do indeed come back with all my limbs attached.

# 8th of Scion

Right, so, back at the Vigil Keep, first day of the new deployment tour. Long day already, with the prospect of a lot of training exercises in the near future before we end up going wherever we end up going. In any case, I said my goodbyes to Freyj and Kristen -calling her my wife is still a little odd- this morning. Freyj's gearing up to go on a long hunting trip south with Grace, and Kristen's also planning on her next great hunt, so there's that. At least I'm not feeling like I'm leaving anyone behind. Oh, and Freyj had the wedding gifts that I couldn't take along stored away in Usha's strongbox, along with a number of older weapons and trophies. Saves me from lugging it all around; I also forgot exactly how many arms I own. Well, they're in there until the next time I need them.  
  
I was at the keep in the early afternoon, which was early enough. Most of it was quiet; even the initial line-up was fairly rudimentary. We have a few recruits making the grade, including Rioleth, something I'm personally pleased about. Then we had some volunteer patrols, intended to let some of the recruits get a hand on leading small task detachments on patrols. I ended up hovering over Ravenwest's shoulder for one of those, while we marched along the mountain pass east. Seemed quiet enough asides from some Dredge attacking the Lionguard Havens. Seems the odd moles took back the damned mine along the Lion road again, and are harassing the traders. No doubt either us or the Lionguard will swoop in to root them out again sooner rather than later.  
  
We got back soon enough, before we saw a red signal flare come from Applenook. Turns out the other patrol, under Vatorn's lead, came into the village while it was suffering a major pirate raid. We've got badly burnt buildings and a whole lot of injured and dead people. Thankfully, we were able to provide some assistance and get the survivors off to Lion's Arch before long, with the Lionguard sending a strong detachment from the Marriner garissons to cushion and secure the area. Between the Keep and Marriner, those pirates are in for a spectacularly bad time. Rock and a hard place. Still, it's a sign that the Pact's been undermanned again when pirates and dredge have the run of Gendarran. At least the centaurs haven't spilled east beyond the Ascalon Settlement, or we'd have lost our own hinterlands.  
  
Anyway, aye, Applenook's been raided, which will take a fair amount of time to repair. I've no doubt but the people from Lion's Arch and the Vigil's own workforce will put in an effort to repair it, though, and subsequently retaliate against those blasted raiders. Applenook and the surrounding acres of farmland keep a lot of people fed. Only place where they grow more's Queensdale's heartlands.  
  
Well, regardless, we'll do what we can.  
  
Oh, yes, and Lionhead told me I did lose the bet, so I shaved my beard. I look like ridiculous, and my chin is cold.

# 9th of Scion

Right, so, medical examination today, which was what you'd expect. I'm cleared for duty, no major comments from the medic, so that's good. Asides from that, it's been mostly calm. The check-ups took all day, though thankfully I was lucky and managed to get in early, so I was able to do some work in the afternoon.  
We've been cutting up some trees from the forests below the keep and sawing them into planks, for a materials consignment due to be sent to Applenook, following yesterday's raid. They'll need if they want to rebuild. It'll keep us busy for a few days at least, since it's hard work.  
  
Still no idea where we're heading, though.

# 10th of Scion

Gear check-up today, and apparently short-term prospect is to go on a recruiting tour again.  
Nothing out of the ordinary, though I'm vastly less excited about the prospect of going through some of the towns than I was before. Sufficient to say that I'm not exceptionally looking forwards to revisiting the jingoist idiots that live in the Citadel, or pompous idiocy that represents the Reach.  
Anyway, passed the equipment pass with little issue, so I'm ready for full deployment on paper. We'll see where we end up after that recruitment pass, then.  
  
The rest of the day was mostly lumber work for Applenook. We've been making good progress, but spirits, do they need a lot of materials to shape up their village. I suspect we'll be able to finish up the work on the morrow, and then have it sent over with a detachment.  
  
In other news, there's some word about magical anomalies happening throughout Tyria. The Priory's taken an interest, as I mentioned before I think, but so have, apparently, the Inquest. There's also some word about rampant bandits out in Kryta's countryside, and the Shining Blade offering bounties to mercenary companies. I'd think we'd risk getting deployed out there, but the Krytan heartlands are policed severely enough by the Serpah. I'd have to be dire before we'll get called in there.  
Who knows though, we'll probably end up hearing more about it when we're in the Reach.

# 11th of Scion

Right so;  
The wood consignment for Applenook's been filled and made ready to be conveyed there by Dolyak caravan tomorrow. Took us most of the noon once more to get it all covered, but it's done. They should have plenty of excellent pine to work with. Give these people something to rebuild with, and everything, while the Lions do their best to root out these bandits.  
  
In the evening, we got two visitors. One was a rather naive and idiotic sapling that got itself bit by a spider. Only twenty-seven days old, after their own testament, and already out and about getting themselves horribly killed on the open road. They were heading to the Priory, for some reason or another. I've taken the liberty of keeping them in medical. Technically, we have no authority to detain them at all, but then, they seemed impressionable enough that when Darin and I told them they shouldn't leave, we meant it. At least until they've recovered.  
  
The second was Devin, who apparently was tangled up with Ravenwest's affair. See, apparently he's to blame for her capture by the cultists some time back; they had a large argument about it, though I only followed half of it. Ravenwest didn't look too solid afterwards. Maeva and I eventually had Devin escorted out of the keep and sent on his way politely enough. That man is nothing but trouble, though he always seems to end up there by accident. Apparently he's become a father too, which fills me with some degree of apprehension.  
Either way, that was the gist of it today.

# 12th of Scion

Last day before we march off on recruitment tour. Can't say my feelings about that are entirely positive, compared to last time, though I'll say that *most* places we're going seem to be pleasant enough, when you think about it in earnest. Rata Sum, the Grove and Hoelbrak at least, are places of some leisure. Anyway, that's old news. We had the construction consignment for Applenook shipped there, though I wasn't present to personally oversee the dispatch. I heard they ran into some small amount of trouble, but nothing the Vigil couldn't overcome. Either way, the people in Applenook are aided, as it should be.  
  
Different news is our new recruit, who apparently is one of the Sicarius cultists, again, only this time, Ravenwest and Carmine aren't being apologetic. This is apparently, not one of the good ones, and he drips with contempt. That's deeply unfortunate for him, because I'm not willing to give him much credit. If he thinks he can get away with being a smug cunt because he remains within the letter of the rules, then he's going to bump head-first into my armoured fist on multiple occasions, since I tend to uphold the spirit of rules much more than the letter. I don't even understand why command considered letting him stay, especially when they did consult Ravenwest on the man. Needless to say, Carmine would rather have the fellow shot, and I, incidentally, would rather have him hanged, harsh as it may be.  
I suppose I'll be forced to see what he makes of himself, until command snaps to. I already had to separate him from Carmine once, despite apparently being ordered specifically to stay away from him. I made it abundantly clear that this was an order he'll follow, or he can take his ill-gotten gains, and be on his way.  
Bah!

# 13th of Scion

Hoelbrak, on recruitment detail. Which, in Hoelbrak, means sitting in the boasting hall and telling tall tales until someone decides that they're suitably grand, and they enlist. It was nice enough to be back home, in either case, even though I hadn't really been gone all too long. There was another moot hosted by those mercenary people, which we were welcome to join. It was pleasant, truth be told, with good tales being exchanged by both sides. Shouldn't really expect anything less from a band of norn mercenaries, truth be told. Pity we can't drink.  
I hear we netted three new recruits, by the by, though I've only seen one of them. An older norn who seems to have spent a long time with the Kodan, apparently looking for balance. Not a bad place in the Vigil, if your concept of balance includes smacking a dragon into the dirt.  
  
We'll be off to the Grove tomorrow, which should also be pleasant enough. Who knows, maybe we'll pick up a valiant or two.

# 14th of Scion

Spirits what a long day! We're in the Grove, but it's been a long, long day of travel, work and fighting. I can't feel my feet.  
  
We arrived here in the morning, and did our usual. We went around through the entire place and told tales of battle to the saplings and the craftsmen. The saplings are, as always, their own thing. Unbridled curiosity and wonder; hearing fantastic tales of battle excites and scares them at the same time. Hopefully, we've convinced some of them to take up arms once their mentors are done with them.  
  
After that, well, turns out that command received a report about Pact prisoners being kept in a Hylek village further north in Caledon. A group of us under Marcus set off briskly enough, except that it was *far* north in Caledon. As in, it took us most of the day to get there. We eventually found the village well enough, but the Hylek didn't seem exceptionally friendly. We put a fair amount of them down, and were forced to break into some sort of holy shrine. It was terrible. Once we were inside, the gateway sealed itself behind us. We were in some sort of deep tunnel crawling with Hylek champions and poison traps, with sharpened stakes hammered into the wall every so often. At the end, there was some sort of magical test where we had to place great orbs on pedestals to open the door to get out. It was a slog, but eventually we made our way through, where we found, to all our surprise, Bridgit Forgewood. We had assumed her dead long since, but apparently she isn't. She's completely off her rocker, though, and was in dire need of medical aid. We carried her out of there, and Marcus took the detachment into Caledon Haven, since the full march back would not be possible with the wounded. I volunteered to march back on my own and alert the others in the Grove, which I did.  
  
It was a long, long walk, well beyond dusk when I arrived. Marcus' detachment will head to Rata Sum come morning, which is ironically closer. There, they'll be able to regroup with us. I reported as much to Maeva, who allowed me to have a drink for the trouble. I had to sit down for a fair bit, though. That distances was too far.  
  
Oh, and Vatorn was considering resigning last I saw him, following a double run-in with the Chapter's regulations. First, he refused to follow Mithra's orders while she had a field command over the visit protocols, and second because he was refused to go and have a swim.  
I don't think he understands that simply because we're in a city, we're allowed to act as if we're on leave. Either case, he packed his things and honestly considered just walking off. I warned him that if he wanted to leave, he'd have to formally resign, or he'd be deserting. In the end, though, the entire choice is up to him. Truth be told, the Vigil doesn't seem the place for him, he seems unable to wrap his head around what rules mean for him, and that he's not allowed to take liberties with them. Perhaps he'd be better off doing something with more personal freedom, and less people he can endanger with his recklessness.

# 15th of Scion

The Citadel today, which, surprisingly, turned out to be pleasant enough. We managed to link-up with the other folks soon enough, and enlisted two new norn lasses for the fight. One Lena Eisdottir and an Inessa Stoneheart. The former's nice enough, if a bit on the simple end of things, while the latter apparently was driven away from her home by the icebrood after they overran her lodge. Either case, it doesn't hurt to have them on our side of the fight.  
  
Marcus left Bridgit in Lion's Arch; she'll likely require some time of revalidation, the state she was in. Makes me wonder if anyone else we thought was dead survived? They're incredibly lucky to be alive after all this time; if anything the tale of what happened after she got dragged off the ledge will be one to tell. If she recovers her sanity, of course.  
  
Back to the day, I took the engineers out past the great smelter and the Iron Legion armoury, which was a pleasant enough diversion. Sigra, however, seemed a bit distracted, and was eager enough to get out of the Citadel for a bit when we headed past the Nolan township just outside the Ashford gate. Not sure what to make of that, truth be told; I think she was struggling with some old memories, considering she's worked with this warband I mentioned some time ago before. Perhaps something unpleasant came flooding back? Well, she didn't seem to be wanting to talk about it, so that's for her to work through.  
  
We ended the day with having an excellent fire flank at the grill, and talking. It was a pleasant enough evening in that regards. I think we're off to Rata Sum come morning.

# 16th of Scion

Rata Sum, the city of floating cube and loudmouths of small stature. Where signing a piece of paper is one of the more potent dangers. It's an amusing enough place, if you can appreciate the intricacies of the species of their peculiar aesthetic senses. If anything, it's a technological marvel. Or a deathtrap, if you're afraid of heights, like Ravenwest. Either case, we're still on recruitment, though most Asura seem more interested in researching than fighting the dragons, so you can guess how well that went for recruitment. We still picked up two of the smartasses for service, though I didn't pick up their names yet.  
  
We found this peculiar little toy shop on the lower levels on patrol that sells all manner of constructs and, well, toys. Most of them are too expensive to just by on a whim, but I bought a rather authentic-looking stuffed golem. I had intended to keep it, perhaps give it to Kristen as a lark, until Dawnsong told me she's got two young children waiting in Wulfbane's steading. At that point, I just gave it to her. I bet that'll be a pleasant surprise next leave! Besides, odds are Kristen would've just mocked me for playing with dolls, cheeky woman.  
  
More depressingly, it seems Athy was discharged on medical grounds yesterday when we were eating. Depression, apparently, for which she's been sent home until she recovers. Seems like a prudent enough choice, though I'm surprised she didn't bother to say goodbye. I suppose that does explain why she'd become more distant as of recent. Unfortunately, that's left Mithra in some state of distress, with very little we can do but to encourage them to work through it. These things pass soon enough, if I'm allowed a moment of pragmatism.  
  
Either case, we're going to continue onward to the Reach come morning, after which I assume we'll be returning to the keep, or Marriner. We'll see.

# 17th of Scion

Divinity's Reach, last stop on the grand tour of picking up wastrels and strays, before we start applying the hammer to the steel and bend them into shape a little. We'll have to run them through the training gamut once we get back at Marriner and the Keep afterwards, but that's not something we haven't done a dozen times before.  
  
The Reach were meager enough pickings, as it turns out. We did get into a spot of pit-fighting, where Lionhead fought some local norn beefslab and won, much to our enjoyment. Showed the local mercenaries and patrons that the Vigil breeds real soldiers, as opposed to the whining little Skelks that prowl all these taverns, claiming they're great warrior because they've offed a centaur here and there. Of course, Maeva took issue with it, and both Lionhead and I have fourteen days of latrine duty once we return to the keep. Considering the keep doesn't really have latrines, I'm not too sure what that's supposed to entail, but eh. It worth seeing the look on their faces when Lionhead slammed the big fellow into a support pillar and knocked him out.  
  
I took a stroll around and had a talk with those Shining Blade folks that have been issuing bounties. Seems it's a serious problem, and there aren't just small time raiders. These are bandit warlords and chiefs that have become too much for the Seraph alone to handle. Seems that while we were looking north, half of Kryta was getting overrun. There's also some vague news about things going on from the western front, which is always exciting. Nothing on the dragon egg though, just a tale or two about some sort of combat operation in a pass north of the Brink. Probably more clean-up detail.  
  
Asides from that, some small news. Sigra's decided to drop the Geartwister name, probably after the visit to the Citadel. She seemed rather relieved to let go of it, so I hope she's put some daemons to rest.  
Oh, and I think Carmine and Ravenwest got drunk while we weren't looking. They were acting odd, parading about what I can only assume was a friend of theirs that looked like a really small version of her. It was strange.  
Humans are weird.

# 18th of Scion

Two days in Lion's Arch, where it's all quiet, asides from the wind and the sea, and the seagulls flying ahead. Today we did recruitment, and in change, we got tomorrow off, which means we're free to grab a drink and get in some semi-leave. We spent some time marching about, I even held a speech for some pirates at the Crow's Nest, but we didn't end up attracting many new recruits. Still, it was pleasant enough.  
In the evening, I took some of the folks to go and have fried squid with lemon and a rum-fruit cocktail at that one pirate watering hole I've come to frequent whenever I pass by. Dawnsong, Ravenwest, Sel and one of the Rata Sum enlistees, Paffet. Apparently he and Dawnsong used to work for some sort of charity group called Ambermoon but it disbanded. Well, the Vigil's a good place to pick up where that left off, I think.  
  
Oh, and I went to see Forgewood, who is doing better. She's still bed-bound, but considering, that's hardly surprising. Either case, it looks like she'll recover given time. I sent a letter to her home, to let her family know she's alright.  
  
Anyway, I'm going to finish this big mug of spirits, and then go for a swim and a sleep.

# 19th of Scion

One of the most serene days we've had for a while. New Lion's Arch has found a surprising way to evoke a gentle sense of quietness and rest that it didn't have before. The white-limed building and the elegant architecture of the rebuilt city is nothing like the pirate hive it was before, but it's replaced it with something a lot quieter. Oddly, it feels like it's less bombastic. The tangle of wrecked ships and vividly coloured houses have made way for a more human and uniform way of building. I like it. The market's lost some of its 'black marcket' smuggler's fair airs, being replaced by an open plaza where it used to shelter between crumbling nooks and crannies, but the wares are much the same. Trinkets, oddities, and just about every thing someone's willing to sell. Engraved Karka shells, jade, blood-oranges and Applenook apples, just as well as much more expensive and prized wares and artifacts. Old books, copies and originals, of writings from across the seas, or in languages barely spoken by any alive. "Real" Dwarven steel that looks the part, but is far too brittle for anything but to hang from a wall. Craftsman offering to tailor you the finest suits of damask, or finely forged steel, depending. And the food stalls! Spirits, Lion's Arch is worth the visit for the food stalls alone. Fresh sea food, fried and spiced, still smelling of ocean salt. Best of all was the Tengu though, who cut you a pail filled with thin slices of raw fish and served them with a strong spice made of ground seeds.  
  
So, yes, the day was quiet and enjoyable, for the most part. Kristen and I should come here again next leave, stay a few days before we do something else. Perhaps hire a boat for a day, and sail around Claw Island. I wonder if Kristen's even been sailing on the southern waters? I wonder if she'd enjoy it.  
  
I returned to Marriner quite late in the day, content to be away from the rest for a day at least. When I arrived, turned out there was some sort of spat between Vatorn and Alessa, with Belmont as a bystander. A load of misinterpretations and petty infighting, as it turns out, and really nothing I can be bothered writing down. Just goes to show you that I go away for maybe a small day, and everyone's already in eachother's hairs. Figures, eh?  
  
Eh well, we're back to the Keep tomorrow, I wager, and then we'll see where we end up going. With all the upheaval in Kryta, wouldn't surprise me if we're going on a peacekeeping mission.

# 20th of Scion

At the Vigil keep, with a full complement of fresh recruits, ready to start training. Sinclair already started the physical exercises come the morning, though it was a pittance compared to what we used to run as exercise. I remember when things like that were daily exercises, just to maintain base fitness. Ah well.  
  
We'll be here for a while it seems, considering we have a good lump of new faces to run through the hoops. A couple of them seem promising, while a good deal already gave me the impression of not lasting very long. Well, no bother, the Vigil isn't for everyone, after all.  
  
On that specific matter, seems Geran was stalking around the keep, for whatever reason. I have no idea what he hopes to find here, truth be told, but there you go. Kept bothering me while I was showing the recruits around. I wonder if he was going to try and rejoin. With his record, that's going to be a hard task, to say the least.

# 21st of Scion

At the keep, after a day of exercise and cleaning the Keep's sanitary, because that's what apparently translates to latrine duty on station. It's a lot cleaner, though, than actually digging trenches and shitting into an empty kegs.  
  
Either case, we started well today, the old "rope down the battlements and run back up", which I've done often enough before. It's a good taste for the new recruits of what they can expect in form of of physical exertion. It showed that most pushed themselves to the very limit, on the edge of collapsing. One of them, an Asura recruit called Lajju, did, but that's because they tried to play smart and use mesmers portals. Add to that the Asura in question is afraid of going into medical because of their gloomy past, and you've got a situation alright. They ran away from examination twice. I've since alerted command of the issue, in the hopes an arrangement can be made with the recruit, because otherwise this is problematic to say the least.  
  
Oh, and we had a case of insubordination. Recruit Pentos Lannister, a human, refused to be ordered into line, and walked off when Sinclair apparently hurt his feelings. I made it cleat to the fellow that he was on the point of disobeying a direct order, and the idiot then demanded I apologize. Even if I was inclined to do so, that'd have undermined both my own and Sinclair's authority, so you can guess what the answer there was. Either case, he's been put on charges for that. A bad way to go about your first day, I'll say as much.  
I wonder if they're aware that station at the keep, we're expected to put the boot down and run the recruits through the full gamut of exercises, and start separating the wheat from the chaff.  
Ah well.  
  
We'll see what the next few days bring.

# 22nd of Scion

Training continues. I was asked to jump in for the basic formation training, which we did with little enough issue. Had the formation march up and down the keep and collect a fake wounded for us along the battlements, before marching back. Seems everything is in order, those present did as expected. Especially the new recruits Stoneheart and Lajju are picking up the basics smoothly.  
  
On the other hand, it seems that the troublemaker from yesterday has already left the Vigil. Apparently even chased him out of the keep because he called him a midget. Figures you're not going to last very long if you start complaining to a First Crusader about hurting your feelings during initiation training, but spirits, at least last more than single day. This might be the single worst volunteer we've had to date.

# 23rd of Scion

Another day at the keep, today was sword and shield training, with a little exercise at the end. Had them affix clothes with wax to their chest, and then try to "kill" eachother by stabbing away the rag. It went well, we didn't get any wounded either, despite that being a habit in the Chapter. Seems good, people we can work with.  
Asides from that, it's all pretty quiet. Training days tend to be like that.  
  
I wonder what Kristen's doing now? Odds are she'll be out hunting something, somewhere, while I wear down my teeth on the recruits at the keep. After that, who knows where we're going? Rumour is we're off to Kryta, though, on account of the banditry plaguing the country.  
Oh, and Freyj and Grace were going south on a long hunting trip. Wonder if they're going to say hello to the local Hylek, or try and spear some krait. Ah well, good bonding for them, I figure.

# 24th of Scion

A lengthy medical session today, going over the elements of fundamental first aid and wound dressing. Took better part of the day, into the evening, going over all the basics. Not bad, just old hat for most of the veterans. Ah well, a good refresher.  
  
Apparently we'll be dropped off for a survival exercise on the 29th, where we'll be put into groups and sent into rural Kryta without supplies in a survival scenario. Sounds interesting enough, though it shouldn't be much of an issue. Thankfully, Kryta's temperate and it's high season, so forage should be easy. Here's hoping we don't run into bandits eh?  
  
Oh, and the Vigil's sanitary is still spit 'n polish clean.

# 25th of Scion

A surprisingly quiet day, as it stands, aside from a delivery made for Ravenwest for her brother, that I had to sign for. A surprisingly pleasant and good-humoured fellow, I didn't actually believe they were related at first. Probably sucked on different sides of the teet, if I had a guess.  
He's around, trying to pin down his sister to say hello, or some nonesense.  
  
I should probably write Usha at some point or another, haven't seen her in a year.

# 26th of Scion

Nothing of note today. Or at least, nothing I picked up on. Spent the majority of cleaning my kit, after I'd attended to my other duties in the sanitary. At least the penal duty is almost over, so I can stop wasting time and effort polishing slate cobblestones and pouring buckets of water down the sewer.  
  
Ravenwest brought that one woman who she claims is her "fake-daughter" along to the keep, apparently with intent to sign her up for the Vigil. Well, I suppose another recruit doesn't hurt, as long as they don't make it weird.

# 27th of Scion

I'm all packed and ready for deployment now, went over everything a second time today, just in case. Looking forwards to this survival exercise they've got planned the day after tomorrow, if anything. Keep's been a slight bit monotone, asides from the usual pranks and gubbins the regulars start playing on eachother. Nothing worth noting on my end, though, which is fine. At least that means there's no more disciplinary transgressions happening.  
  
Oh, and Ravenwest's "kid", one Beatrice Small, signed on for the engineers. I need to remember to send in a note to command about that.

# 28th of Scion

Last day of preparations before we're sent off into the wilds. Everything looks calm enough, as it stands, despite the rumours of trouble over west. Still getting reports of bandits going around causing issues, and there's word about the Shining Blade getting serious about it, on top of the bounties. That can't mean anything good, truth be told, but at least it hasn't spilled out this far east.  
  
I had a pleasant enough talk with some of the folks today, but that's about the gist of it. Recruits and idle chatter. Sometimes I feel like all my friends have died.  
Ah well, we'll see what comes about tomorrow.

# 29th of Scion

Position is somewhere in Kessex, where we've arrived after a leg-breaking forced march through Gendarran and Queensdale. I'm in command of my strike team, with Sel as my second, and bringing along Vatorn, and recruits Lajju, Cassandra and a quiet but efficient white Charr called Kaitark. Our task is to locate and assail a bandit strongpoint under our own strength tomorrow, while two other teams do the same elsewhere in Kessex, before we pull out again.  
  
The majority of the day was marching here. The other two groups tramped straight into Kessex in a marching column along the Lion Road. Given we're dealing with highway bandits and raiders, I decided not to do that. I had my folks strip off their insignia's and pose as an escort for Vatorn, who got to play the noble for the occasion. We decided to pass north through Queensdale instead, and only divert to Kessex through the swampland. It was already night when we got there, which spooked the detachment well enough, but thankfully didn't cause too much of an actual issue. It's the same bog where Kristen and I once went killing Aatxe daemons, to see how tough they were.  
  
Either case, we're a few kilometers away from our target, off the road and out of view behind a forest. There's centaurs trampling around, but they shouldn't find us either. Vatorn erected us a shelter by shifting some rocks, and we have moa and grubs for food. Already established a safe approach to our target, which we will exploit further tomorrow, when we'll conduct a full preliminary recon, before we plan the offensive. Lajju's a mesmer who can glamour us, so we have a tactical advantage, which I intend to exploit fully. It's a sizeable camp, and we're only a mid-sized task group, so it'll take shock and awe. I'm hoping we can give the impression of being more than we actually are when we attack, cause the rest to panic before they put up too much of a fight.  
  
Watches are arranged; it's now the dead middle of the night. I'm writing by some frail moonlight, looking out over the road down the forest we're camped at, making sure we don't get encroached up on. I don't think we were spotted along the way, and if we were, they don't know we're a Vigil arms team, so they have no suspicion we're camped out here. Still, you never know. Should have another hour of watch before I can go back to sleep. It'll be a tough day tomorrow, that's for sure.  
  
Oh, I almost forgot with everything going on today; Devin visited us again right before we left, at the Keep. Apparently he came to apologise to Ravenwest again or something. He didn't stay long, either way.

# 30th of Scion

Currently at Black Haven, following a day of field operations against our target. I'm happy to say we're all alive, and only Vatorn is lightly injured. We spent the day conducting recon before we took the entire thing apart. Two tiered encampment, both bandits and what looked like Harathi centaurs of I know anything. Working together too, which makes me suspect they were slavers. Bandits pick off people from the road, fence the spoils and sell off the survivors to the ponies, before they're sent north into the hinterlands, and we never see them again. Well, their slaving days are over, if I have anything to say about it. Tough nut to crack, that camp, built into a hillside and fortified with stakes and earthworks. But, that doesn't help you much against a small strike team with a mesmer. Recruit Lajju gated us right in the middle of them, and we had half of the camp dead or dying before they knew we were even there. Sealed both exits with fire, so we didn't have any runners either. I half-expected a good couple of them to surrender, but they didn't. Probably realized that even if they were going to surrender, they'd still hang sooner or later.  
Odd thing, though, one man dressed in what I can only assume were temple robes. He jumped us when we were getting Vatorn back up on his feet -lad got dragged a bit by a centaur- when he started ranting about the 'traitor queen' and being 'everywhere', before he stabbed himself in the chest, dead. First thing he reminded me of was those Sicarius people. One of them bit his tongue off and caused himself to bleed out while we were in Scholar's Cleft. Same thing here, seemed a nonsensical suicide. Alarming, to say the least, though I tried to wave it away for the troops. Still, I decided to take a liberty with the rules we were given about camping at allied fortifications, and moved us to the Haven anyway. Just in case someone or something comes for us overnight, I'd rather be safe than sorry.  
Sel took pictures and we retrieved some sort of prayer book dedicated to the 'Unseen Ones', whatever those are supposed to be. Some folks here say it's supposed to be White Mantle, but those nutters haven't been around for the last 200 years. I doubt they'd show up now. Still, it hints at something problematic. If anything, it does explain why bandit activity has been stepping up as much as we've heard. If some sort of cult is trying to overthrow the human queen and has been organising these bandits, we're up against major opposition. No wonder the Seraph and the Shining Blade are getting swamped.  
  
So aye, we're in Black Haven. The other folks are at ease well enough, except for some minor shenanigans with pouring tea over eachother, for which I put them on notice. I'm usually lenient enough about those sort of things, but it was just getting ridiculous. On one hand, we took apart a fortified enemy position with enviable ease, and on the other, the troops seem unable to act like actual soldiers while they're sat around a quiet table. Figures, all our recruits are just socially dysfunctional psychopaths who feel more at ease ripping a bunch of centaurs into gibbets than when they're offered a tin of tea. I made them sleep in the courtyard for it.  
  
Oh, and Lajju, despite being a fundamental credit to team's successful deployment today, has apparently been lying to us. Turns out she stole some sort of map detailing magical concentrations from none other than the bloody Arcane Eye, and has been covertly trying to take measurements while she thought we weren't looking. That's a whole other can of worms. I've set Sel to watch her, just in case, and once we make the last leg of the journal tomorrow, the officers can have a leisurely chat with her. At this point, I'm not sure what's going to happen. If the Arcane Eye really want that map back, and demand us to extradite the recruit, I'm not sure how much room the Vigil has. We don't really want to get into problems with the Asuran secret service over a single recruit, I can imagine.  
We'll see, I suppose.

# 31st of Scion

We got back to the keep without too much issue, thankfully, and everything's been reported to the officers. Up to them to figure out the missing pieces and tell us what we're looking at, because I don't know at this stage. Distressingly, the other task groups, while managing to achieve their objectives, also found some oddities. Ravenwest's group outright claimed they stumbled on some sort of plot. I didn't press them for details, though, might be sensitive information. I have a gut-feeling that this is all connected somehow, though. Rumours about increased bandit activity, the Shining Blade posting bounties, the Vigil deploying in Kryta for surgical strikes, and then rumours of a plot and our mysterious suicide priest? That's a bit too much to be all just coincidence, isn't it. Here's hoping it doesn't tear Tyria asunder. Again.  
  
Anyway, we'll get a banquet tomorrow for a mission well done, and the day afterwards is off. We also got some serial promotions issued, a lot of experienced recruits made the grade, and Mithra got First Crusader stripes. An odd one that, but she's been with us longer than I have. Odd to think that now qualifies you as a hardened veteran.  
A whole lot animated chatter and gossip, too, but that's not unusual. Had to help a few recruits get their bearings, specifically those that didn't get deployed the past days. Nothing of note however.  
Lajju's case is with the officers, as it stands, whom will get to decide what happens to the quirky Asura. Seems a bit daft in the head, truth be told, but we'll see what happens. I have a bad feeling we'll end up handing her over in short order, however, she did steal from them, and admits to it, after all. I'm not sure what the Arcane Eye does to their arrests, though. Worrying.  
  
With all that chaos going on, I hope Kristen didn't pick out Kryta as her hunting grounds, seems to be a place to avoid. Here's hoping she went east again, or even pushed through to Caledon or Metrica.  
That's a thought, I wonder how the Silverwastes and the Magus Falls fringe is doing? If the Mordrem have died down, it might be an idea to go on some more serious hunting over leave, see if she appreciates the saurians and the exotic cats.  
  
Oh, now I think of it, Kraxxi wrote me a letter. She's in Rata Novus, as far as I can decipher from the fairly obvious hints she's marked down in the writing. Lucky her, seems like something she'd thoroughly enjoy! The Asuran are keeping it all under wraps, however, which is fair enough considering it's their city. I've seen what I wanted to see of it anyway. I wonder if they'll allow mail back, if I just address it to Kraxxi's krewe? I'll sit down and pen a couple tomorrow, I need to write to Usha and Freyj too anyway.

# 32nd of Scion

So, command is throwing a two-day celebration to relax the nerves, and served us up some good food and ale. I brought up a keg from Applenook for the occasion, which was well-received. It was to be a relatively pleasant night of socializing and friendly chatter, until some fop from the Arcane Council showed up with a signed order to hand over Lajju into his custody. Sealed with the local Rata Sum authority, so we had no choice. Direct order. I didn't like it at all, since it meant we were essentially handing one of our own over for trial and, very likely, imprisonment. But, then again, she did admit to the crime, and I suppose if you start making exceptions the entire system collapses. Same as with the rules and regulations here, I suppose.  
  
Either way, yeah, that but a downer on the rest of the evening, despite some otherwise pleasant carousing and boasting. We've seemed to pick up a good number of norn recruits all of a sudden, which doesn't bother me in the least. Most of them seem relatively inexperienced with warfare on a scale of the Vigil, but that's not something they can't learn, given time.  
  
In other news, word's been going about that there was a significant disturbance up north, which the troops at Resolve and the Dustbowl observed. Not too clear about what it is exactly, but I hear there's troops dispatched on site. Here's hoping Mordremoth didn't keep a sneaky tendril of himself hidden away. A second Maguuma warfront would do no-one here good.

# 33rd of Scion

More of the same, celebrations! I sent my letters today, though I just now realised I didn't send a note forwards to Fort Trinity, which is something Kraxxi asked of me.  
Eh, I'll get to that later. It's too late now anyway. Maybe I can sneak one in with tomorrow dusk post, if I don't forget like a dunce, of course.  
  
Anyway, the talk is good, the food was surprisingly fine, considering the supply cuts, so all is well.  
Camp's abuzz with rumours about some sort of conspiracy going off, which makes me worry a bit, considering what we saw not mere days ago. Most of them seem wild and impossible, though, and I wouldn't believe them if I didn't know that there was at least one crazy idiot who stabbed himself to death. To make matters worse, I know Ravenwest's team saw something too, but I don't know what exactly it was.  
  
I suppose if it's relevant, I'll hear of it soon, enough, eh?

# 34th of Scion

Vigil Keep, preparing for a deployment. Seems we'll be moving into Harathi in two days, so there's a lot of last-minute preparation. I need to issue orders to the engineers promptly, and ensure we're at full wartime stock on explosives and munitions, as well as make sure our heavy weapons are ready for use. The carronade and the mortarts alone will help a lot in such a warzone. The Harathi front is remarkably static, though that might be more because the Seraph and the centaurs still prefer hurling rocks at eachother, rather than using more modern weapons.  
  
Anyway, we know this, because the Seraph apparently came to the Keep. We promptly set out in squads to check if the reports of a centaur incursion were true. They are. We ran into a sizeable grouping of them in from the Provern Shore, with warbeasts and siege engines, probably heading for Ascalon Settlement. Again. That warfront keeps on spilling back to that damned settlement. Nebo Terrace too was, apparently, under assault. What it means is that we're going to have to relieve the overtaxed Seraph. With the bandits causing trouble and the centaurs on the offensive, it's a bad time to be a Krytan, I suspect. It makes me worry, too. That camp we raided, in Kessex, it had centaurs and bandits. With the bandits acting oddly and in concert, and now the centaurs suddenly breaking through a warfont that's been relatively silent for over three years, I hope the Harathi and the bandits are not working together towards some perverse plan.  
Oh, and the weird suicide cultist and the rumours? They're true. It's the damned White Mantle, come back after hundreds of years to cause chaos and disorder in Kryta. It's odd to think the entire country was once ruled by them in name of some strange creatures like the Mursaat. It's even weirder to think they've been hiding for all this time, only to surface now. To make matters worse, apparently they've been using bloodstone dust as some sort of magical reagent. That is, actual dust from a bloodstone. That's a whole lot of very old, very powerful magic that they're grinding up and carrying along with them. Whatever their plan, it sounds like something we should stop.  
I suppose I can add the White Mantle to the list of debased cults I have on my kill-list.  
  
Today's operation also nearly got us killed. So, we raided the centaur encampment I mentioned, when one of our recruits suffered a leg injury. We got surrounded in short order, and had to breakout before they could close the noose. Close shave, but we got away, well enough. Still, that attack might've been a little more than we could've handled. I'm glad we didn't pay for the overconfidence with any lives, but still.  
  
Anyway, I have a lot to prepare. The storm boats will need to be brought out of storage as well. They're, thankfully, only out in Marriner, so that shouldn't be an issue. Ah well, at least centaurs are fun to fight.

# 35th of Scion

A whole lot of emergency packing being done, and last-minute stock checks. I've had to bring the engineering stocks from rest to wartime in a single day, which took most of the day. There's a good deal more work to be done, but some of the engineer Crusaders will do the grunt work, like checking individual shells for packaging and rigging their own demolition charges. We'll need them.  
Sat through a lengthy enough strategy meeting on how to commence our assault on the Harathi positions not too far north from Gendarran into the heartland. Seems not even command saw this coming, as we were putting down basic attack strategy and wargoals. We'll be circumventing the centaur camps already in Gendarran and committing to marine landings up-river from Lake Gendar, where we'll proceed to push up the eastern shore and collapse a large number of centaur camps along the way. Principal war-targets are a cluster of entrenched positions in areas called the Hangman's Saddle, Thunder Rock and Stoneman's Notch. From there, we can control one of the main bridges to the western shore of the river, into a region called Splintered Teeth. If we manage to push the battle line all that way there, we'll be able to link up with the Seraph troops still in the region. We hold that position until the Queen's army from the Reach manages to march the distance, punch through a single encampment and then pour in through the bridge we control. If we manage that, we'll have wrested control of all of southern Harathi. Once that's done, we'll cross the river properly to the west shore, and relieve the besieged city of Seraph's Landing. But that's a long term gone. Our short-term attack plans have been set, and we'll start acting on them tomorrow evening.  
  
I'm looking forwards, in a way, to this invasion. I doubt the Harathi centaurs are expecting a Vigil marine assault from a completely different angle than the usual Seraph scuffles. Not only that, but for all their bravery and strength, the Seraph don't routinely pack mortars and cannons. It'll be a different sort of fight for both sides. We're used to fighting dragons and their minions, and they're used to fighting humans with trebuchets. Here's hoping our rapid offensive puts them off-kilter long enough for the Queen's reinforcements to muster and march the distance. We'll help them seal the day, too.  
  
One concern is the vast number of human slaves. We've got some plans to save as many as we can, but especially when they order us to shell positions, it'll be hard to know what we're hitting. To be fully fair, it would've been easiest for us to assume all of the captives to be dead until they are rescued, but that's not really something we want to do. Here's hoping we get out as many survivors as we can.  
  
Back to keep business, asides from the ongoing preparations, everything seems to be in order. I accidentally smacked Small in the face when she blinked right into me for the giggles, right after I'd told her that I respond poorly to things suddenly appearing around me. Well, at least it's just a bad bruise. It could've been worse.

# 36th of Scion

We've landed in Harathi, into a mercenary camp located right north of the keep proper. A lot of preparation for little actual work, to be fair. The landing went as well as you could hope, with the storm boats still doing their daintly little task. We've still got them with us, though I doubt they'll see more use here, unless we plan to do another covert crossing up-river.  
We've not yet fought any actual centaurs; the mercenary company running this camp is surpisingly competent, and their fortifications are such that I find it hard to find immediate fault in them. To their credit, they've turned this southern post into a bastion that they can probably hold out until my hairs are grey. The area north of us looks lousy with centaur earthworks, though, which never means anything good. We're now digging in, and preparing for offensive operations. We're without our main equipment at this moment, but it can't be far behind. In any case, the mercenaries here have an impressive arsenal of heavy weapons. Enough at least to perform a goods amount of rudimentary shelling.  
  
Our supply itself doesn't really exist, unless you count the waterway that runs under keep, down south. It's not problematic, since one of our nearest objectives involves securing a bridge across the river for the exact purpose creating a corridor for us to get resupplied through. Since the centaurs don't know we're here yet, we might be able to surprise them.  
  
In different news, there's some form of Ox graveyard behind the camp, where old Dolyak come to die. It's a hallowed place; when we passed earlier, we same spirits of Ox manifest around the boneyard. The humans barely seem to understand how significant that is, to find something so precious and beautiful in so unexpected a place.  
I'll go there to meditate come dawn, I think, and see if I am not able to commune with Ox. If anything, some endurance will do us well in the days to come.

# 37th of Scion

In the middle of an overnight field operation, establishing a fire base in order to shell a centaur camp up shore. We're bringing in mortars and shells across river to some civilian camp that's been sheltering here. They're brave folks, and their work isn't too bad, truth be told. They've got a landing pier out of sight and a hidden overlook burrowed into the side of a rock formation. It's ideal for setting up a mortar, since they won't be able to see us firing until the shells hit. Only issue is we had to bring over equipment overnight, or the centaur patrols would certainly have spotted us. So, it's an all-nighter for the engineers, probably longer too, if we start shelling the centaurs.  
The local folks here proved to be a little problematic, of course, not wanting to leave what I assume's been their home camp for a while so suddenly. Still, they saw some sense when I explained to them we'd be able to get them to safety, and that to stay here was to risk getting caught up in the fighting. So they've left, sent them back across to the main camp on the stormboats, while we start digging in here. There's a good load of work to be done, stakes to be embedded and generally harden up the place in the event the ponies amble up.  
We're expecting the Chapter to show up tomorrow somewhere, and proceed with our assault. Here's hoping that works out as expected.  
  
Anyway, back to work.

# 38th of Scion

We did the overnight. I'm dead tired, but the target is destroyed. We shelled it first, then stormed it, planted charges, and pulled back. Scorched the place. Spirits, there were trebuchets at the back of the camp that we didn't range in, though, they smacked us around a little on the approach. Thank the spirits for the guardians keeping everyone safe. Cost them their energy. Two down with magical exhaustion, one with an actual wound after catching a boulder. She'll be alright though.  
Engineers did a wonderful job, though. Small and Ravenwest are good. They'll get far.  
Sleep now, though.

# 39th of Scion

Slept like a boulder today, with everything from yesterday. Still, no rest for the wicked, so we marched off io escort a land-line resupply from the keep. It was needed, because there's still a centaur encampment on Provern shore. We had to get the Dolyak, packed with subsistence supplies, past them without getting too much hooves in our proverbial soup. We ran afoul of a handful of outrunners, and a dead Seraph patrol somewhat north of the Ascalonian Settlement, but that was about it.  
A long damn walk, though, I was hoping they'd send the supplies up river, instead of overland, but there you go. I'm going to catch up on some more sleep.  
  
Oh, and they retrieved the equipment from the fire base back to here. We had to leave it behind in a hurry when we conducted yesterday's demolitions job on the Shieldbluff camp. Engineers were too damn tired to keep going after that, so we had other folks pack it up and ferry it back over using the storm boats. Still one of our better projects, those. Better than relying on a rare mesmer to cast portals across, useful as that may be.  
  
At any rate, rest.

# 40th of Scion

Finally, a good, old boring day.  
  
You know, sometimes I think I'm a cranky old man, and I can hardly recognize myself from how I thought I was. A lot has changed over the last few years. It's like everything before that was simply a prelude to the bombardment of event that took everyone by surprise, and put the world on top of itself several times over. I mean, when was the last time I had a quiet year? Four or five years ago? Spirits, now I sit down for six days, and I'll have felt like I've sat still for a small eternity.  
The dragons have changed everything, Tyria is in turmoil, ripped apart and shocked by wave after wave of disasters and catastrophe; I still haven't fully parsed we killed Zhaitan, let alone everything that came afterwards. It's hard to sit down and look back at what we've done this year alone. It's pure madness to try and understand it.  
Fighting in Orr, fighting in the Queen's Jubilee, sailing south, the shipwreck, everything with the Chapter, it's all been a blur. A haze of things that happened, adventures that were set out on, glories that were won and lives that were lost.  
  
Bear, I used to think eating the flesh of my enemies would make me a better warrior, that it would give me the strength I needed to be what the world needs me to be, but even that is almost forgotten. It remains as a vague memory of some superstitious magic that lingers in my mind, but has long since proven to be useful.  
These few years or so since I took up the sword and said goodbye to my quiet life seem like they were more like fifty. Or five-hundred.  
I can't keep going like this. I am years and years away of being considered an elder of my people, but dear spirits, I can't keep going like this. It will leave me a burnt-out husk before I am forty, filled with the memory of a thousand men, driven completely insane by the sheer pressure of it all.  
  
Blegh. Perhaps I should take a moment and sit near the Dolyak yards. Ox heralds endurance, after all, and I could do well with their blessing. At least for a few more years.

# 41st of Scion

Nothing of note. Some people being grumpy, and Vatorn barging on about walking up to Beigarth and asking him to make him a weapon out of Dwarven steel. As if.  
  
Sometimes I wonder if I'm not actually dead, and I'm forced to mind a bunch of children disguised as hardened dragon-killing soldiers as some form of punishment.

# 42nd of Scion

Tactical meeting today, figuring out the next stages of the campaign against the centaurs. Welcome break, if only a temporary one from having to mind the circus of insanity that represents the remainder of the Chapter. Who knew that the prospect of fighting inhumanly savage quadruped barbarians would be a welcome break from having to deal with your fellow soldiers, eh?  
Either case, we've got a lot of work ahead. We're looking up against a cluster of three camps to our north, all in close proximity, heavily entrenched and filled with angry horse-people. Seems the centaurs take their territory disputes with the humans seriously, considering how heavily they defend their lines.  
We'll have to go on a multi-pronged assault over the course of several days, roll up the encampments and hope for Leopard and Raven's guidance. If we're unlucky, the centaurs outflank us horrendously when we fail to advance the line faster than they can consolidate, and we'll be in for one of those Seraph horror stories that go on about getting run into the ground on an open plains.  
So, that's what we'll be doing in the coming days.  
  
As for today, Ravenwest went out to gather some eggs from the griffon roost right around the bend south, and that somehow resulted in recruit Srorr charging head-first into a griffon roost, like some sort of maniac. Not only that, but both Small and Carmine then broke regulation by heading back on their own accord to get those eggs anyway, while the foraging group was ordered back to the camp.  
So, yeah, first off, Srorr is a moron who fails to grasp the basic principle of the Vigil's tactical orders - staying in formation. This is the umpteenth time the Asura has gone on and let bravado and brawn come before common sense. In that sense, he's being a discredit to his species, and a disappointment.  
Second, Small and Carmine did an idiotic thing, and ended up getting an infraction notice for something petty and idiotic. Doubly so when they could've just asked Ravenwest, who was their field lead, for permission. Now they're restricted to basic rations, and will have to miss their own forage. At least it saved them from having to do perform punitive duties for a bit. I'd have let them off the hook, if they wouldn't have been so damn bloody blatant about it too. But no, they had to quip up in front of both Sinclair and Maeva about it.  
Urgh.  
  
Good grief, I can't wait for the assaults.  
  
Kristen, dear, I hope you appreciate the things I do for the world and our future, because I swear to you, I will kill one of these recruits before long if this keeps up.

# 43rd of Scion

That's another camp down. We moved north into a camp called "Barricade", and once more leveled the place. The place was well-defended, but we put an armoured wedge down their front door, and crashed their party. Centaurs build frightening defenses, but seem a little awkward with actually holding them. Or maybe that's because we don't baulk at charging uphill into a nest of stakes with a catapult on top, suicidal as it may sound. But we've certainly got the weight. Between Force and I, and a good couple of the Charr and norn heavies, we might just out-shock a centaur charge. It's great to feel them give way when you shoulder your shield into their bodies, and feel their knees break with the strain.  
I don't like centaurs. I've heard some damn horror stories that would set my hairs on end. I feel like killing is never something I should be doing gleefully, and I don't, but damn them, I feel little regret about ripping those four-legged slavers apart when it comes down to the wire.  
Anyway, the camp we took was built around a ruined human wall. Proper big one too, except it was aimed north, and we crashed in from the south. If we'd had to attack that thing head-on, we would've been in for a bit more than just breaking down some wooden gates, that's for sure. Works in our favour, though, we can now hold it against the ponies much easier. Well, not us, but the Seraph reinforcements that are on their way will. We're going to keep the assault going tomorrow. Blew the camp clean in the meantime, stop the ponies from getting back into position for a few days.  
  
That, though, was a close shave. We're still running around with manually-triggered wire fuses on our demolitions charges, because they're the easiest to set up without too much planning. Except that we keep running into almost-fatal cases slowness. This time, Ravenwest was a bit slow on getting down, which really started to weigh on my nerves. Oh, and one dud. No idea whose though, but I suspect someone didn't wire theirs correctly.  
In any case, I'm bringing loops of detonation wire and a detonator with me in future. It'll need some extra space in the pack, but I'd rather not spend too much time running away full-tilt while also keeping a steady countdown in my head, and hoping I didn't skip ten second here and there. Better to wire them up safely, if we can.  
  
In other news, apparently hiding injuries from medical is a common thing now. To the point that Kaitark remarked it to me, and I had them call up the squads for a case-by-case lookover. Turns out recruit Lalowa had a broadhead stuck in her side, and didn't think to mention. I hope this is not a trend. What sort of idiot hides a wound?  
I swear, you'd think that getting injured make you want to do the opposite of hiding it, like yelling "Ow, mommy, I'm hurt" really loudly or something.  
  
Ah well. At least we hard warm food today.  
It's not as good as what I used to shake out of my boot in terms of hearty meals truth be told, but Holm and Claridge do well enough to fill some stomachs. Still, after sitting on hard tack and jerky for so long I forgot that food doesn't have to be 99% salted, I can't complain.  
  
Now all we need is for the people around the fire to actual have something worth mentioning, asides from staring ahead blankly as if the tuft of grass right in front of their feet is the most captivating thing they know, and it will almost be like I'm in the company of actual people, who do things like speak, and think.  
Alas, I remain stuck in this lifeless desert of skritt-possessed golems wearing Vigil armour and claiming to be sapient.  
  
  
Ox, I'm cranky today, ~~bear with me~~.  
Torment!  
  
You know, I would like to talk to people more. Seems every other thing I say these days is an admonishment or a lesson for someone. As if I'm some sort of distorted Chapter elder. I'm not that old yet, damn you! Stop making me feel like I'm supposed to be have grey hairs!  
I'd talk to my superiors, but the two Senior First Crusaders are joy-sucking black holes of apathy, Maeva's a mature vampire-skelk in disguise for whom I have little time anyway, and talking to Marcus or Lyralii for any length of time makes both my head and my neck hurt.  
  
Raven's feathers, being a cranky old boulder in my own journal doesn't help either!

# 44th of Scion

Assaulted centaur camp.  
Went well.  
Fucked up detonation wire length, though, too short. Had to set off within lethal distance. Guardian shield.  
Ringing ears. Could've been worse.  
  
Got hit by firebomb during attack on Recovery. Padding caught fire.  
Pain's bad. Getting medicated; mostly arms and knees. Blisters in my armpit, I think.  
  
Write a little bit, but it's bad to move arm. Burning sandpaper.  
  
Write more later.

# 45th of Scion

Spent a day in bed. Healing. Burns sting tremendously, but medication helps.  
  
Others went on a fought a giant. Apparently. Claridge has a scalp of matted braids and ropes of thick black hair. Looks like a really big one too. Sad. So few of them left. Would've made a wonderful trophy, too.  
Several wounded, though. Rioleth seems clocked out. No-one told me what happened, but it looks severe.  
I'll see if he wakes up tomorrow.

# 46th of Scion

All quit, nothing's happened.  
Pain is better.  
We'll see when I can walk a bit again.

# 47th of Scion

All quiet. Slept a lot today.  
Burns are easing out, can move my hands a bit without too much issue now. Bad ones on my lower arm still sting, however. Have to heal better before I do anything intensive.  
Haven't tried walking yet, though I think my feet are getting better. Annoying. Have to pee in a bottle. Hate being confined to bed. It's like that time in the fens.  
  
There's supposed to be a command meeting tomorrow, but I'm not sure I'll be in a state to do much.

# 48th of Scion

Was able to move a bit on crutches. Hurts my feet like you wouldn't believe, though. Had to hop over into the command tent for the follow-up meetings to determine our next couple of moves. We'll be trying to rescue a good bunch of slaves from the centaurs in a few days, and then punch through with them in tow to the other side of the river. If we manage that, we'll have crossed an open line all the way into Gendarran, just waiting for the Queen's Seraph to pour in and man the wall. They're apparently not far off, currently trying to force a break through to us. The big camp in Gendarran, off of the Ascalonian Settlement is probably going to hold them up.  
Well, here's hoping they force a break while the window is open, or all we've done will be for nothing.  
  
I'll be carried along with the civilians, apparently. That, or the wounded will be sent back to the Keep.  
I guess if I become a burden, there's little to be done about that. Might write Kristen to see if she's passing by the Lion Road if I'm sent back to the Keep. It's only a short while off of Lion's Arch, and it sure would beat looking up at the ceiling of a tent until the last sores heal.

# 49th of Scion

Orders dispatched, and Ravenwest set to work for tomorrow task. That's about the gist of it, truth be told, the rest has been dull. No visits asides from the regular attention of the medics. At least I can hop over to the latrines on my own now, so I'm spared that great calamity.  
The other wounded are sparse company. I get to talk to Sel a little when they're awake, but they have bad ribs. That giant from a few days back threw them around. She doesn't talk much as a result. Rioleth's still a vegetable, for better or for worse. I'll hear tomorrow if I'm being taken along to the next encampment, or not.

# 50th of Scion

Moved camp, all the way across the river, to some place called Wynchona Woods, some distance south of Seraph's Landing. Getting here was a serious trial in endurance, having to hop along my crutches along with Lance squad. Never has anything seemed further away than hopping those last few meters across to the sparse Seraph tents set up here. I feel badly for delaying the march, they had to wait for me once, and I slowed them down on the last stretch. Risks they could have avoided, if they had sent me back to the Keep. Rioleth's been sent back. Should've gone with them. I'm still a way off from being fit for duty. If anything, this has knocked the air out of me for the next few days, at the very least. The worst of the sores are still raw and stinging. I need my painkillers to move around at all. Well, I suppose I can move at least.  
  
I'm not alone in medical either, we rescued a large number of slavers from a centaur mine. I wasn't there to see them being evacuated, but it must've been a task. Many of them seem to be in a bad state, but they're almost delirious with their freedom. That's a good turn. When I got burned, few days back, we apparently pulled out some slaves caught between us and the centaurs. Those were a lot less lucky than these ones. They're thin and sickly, but the gratitude is visible in their eyes. They'll survive; if the centaurs didn't kill them, nothing will. Here's hoping the Queen's Army arrives soon, and we can send these people home.  
  
Oh, and Ravenwest and Small conducted the demolition operation on Barricade camp. Expended the remainder of our supplies on it, as expected, but collapsed the thing. They ran a detonation wire through a portal, and it still worked fine. Something new, that. I'll have to remember that trick.  
I spoke with Small for some time afterwards. She's a good lass. Apparently has had norn women as lovers before, and feels some aptitude for the spirit of Otter. Obscure critter, but there you go.  
Expecting a lot of area patrols in the coming days, either to secure our position on the other side of the river, or to harass the backline of the centaur camp in Gendarran, south of us. Either way, I won't be a part of it until I can walk again.

# 51st of Scion

Where to start.  
  
Doctor Payne, one of our faithful if not-often mentioned medics, is dead. So is a whole gaggle of Seraph troops at Wynchona Woods. Good soldiers, even if I only saw them briefly. The slaves we rescued, so close to finally being free? They're dead. We got attacked by an exceptionally well-equipped and organised bandit raid, when the rest of the Chapter was out on reconnaissance patrol. They overran the Seraph guards, butchered them. Only Small, myself, Layfon and the doctor were still there. The killed the doctor quick enough. Layfon was KO'd, couldn't do much. Small and I fought briefly but valiantly. I was too damn slow and unsteady to put much of a fight up. Gutted two of the bastards regardless, before one got in. Couldn't raise the fucking shield. Burned arm just collapsed. Got two stabs in the side for it, and went down. It's a miracle we're still alive. A miracle called Beatrice Small. Wonderful woman managed to glamour us, make us look dead. Stopped the bandits from looking too closely, and finishing the job.  
I'll never be proud I had to play dead, and it will haunt me for the rest of my days that my strength failed me in those few moments where it could have made all the difference in the world.  
But I am alive, which means I'll have a chance to for vengeance. Vengeance, and to repay a life debt owned to Small.  
  
Everything is chaos. We were eventually pulled out back to some underground Seraph camp, south near Gendarran. Close to the Queen's Army. I'm dazed on painkillers, Mirka and Mithra looked over my wounds. Figures, being a bunt husk, trampled and now stabbed.  
I'll find the bastards, and skin them.  
  
There was a commotion earlier, but I didn't follow. Too dazed. I think Ravenwest and Lalowa were shouting. Or fighting. Can't tell.  
My painkiller's worn off. I have no idea what time it is, but everyone seems alseep. I hope it's dawn soon, so I can get something. It hurts a lot. I'm writing by a lone torch. Thankfully still keep my fieldbook under my vambrace. Singed, battered, drowned, but never lost. The pages are sticky with dried blood and worse, but like me, they're not so easily destroyed. Humbled, scared, yes, but never broken. Ox is with me, you fuckers! With Ox's endurance and Bear's strength, I will come for you, split you asunder, and eat your flesh.  
  
I'm half delirious. I keep falling asleep, before I wake up when I try to roll over. Rats stabbed me pretty good.  
Fighting centaurs, I get hurt by some cunt bandit because of a burned arm.  
  
Miss Kristen. Wonder if she'd have found out soon if I was dead. Would be stupid. Married for maybe a season, and poof, done.  
I hope she's okay. Wouldn't want to wish this on anyone I love.  
  
Payne's dead. I think I mentioned that. Old doctor Payne. She was with us for a long, long time. Almost as long as Bob, I think. Patched many of us up. She'll be missed.  
  
82. Doctor Meredith Payne, slain in battle.

# 52nd of Scion

What a horrible day.  
Turns out that the commotion yesterday was nothing less than a brawl than ensued following Ravenwest suffering a mental break, and ending up punching her fist to bits on a wall. Recruits Lalowa and our own natural wonder Srorr tried to stop that, which ended up with Ravenwest punching the blue-haired norn woman (who apparently is forty-five years old. FORTY-FIVE!) until she had to take on her spirit form. This in turn set off Srorr's innate ability to exacerbate the situation by poisoning Lalowa with a tranquilizer, because he panicked at the sight of giant werebear, and thought she was going to maul Ravenwest.  
  
So, asides from Lalowa being slapped with a dose of tranquilizer and Ravenwest mangling her hand, everyone luckily survived, and were put in shackles for the night. The resolution, in the end, was achieved by Carmine calming his rabid girlfriend down before people *actually* got killed.  
This happened yesterday. Today, they let Lalowa and Srorr off the hook, considering their actions were reasonable, and Ravenwest has a punitive confinement of five days inside medical for her utter and total idiocy.  
Lucky woman, because that sort of stint has cost me demotion at least once, and arguably twice if you count that frankly idiotic incident around the Claw of Jormag. At least she seems to understand that what she did was not good, and will be held against her. I've apparently formally been told to consider her membership of the engineers, with the note that having someone with emotional instability handle explosives might become a volatile situation (that one is for you, Kaitark).  
I'm not fussed about that for one incident, but if it becomes chronic, that will change.  
  
I heard that Carmine also took to insulting Lalowa's family and hair over the matter, which I find objectionable, considering the circumstances, if not big enough to make an actual fuss over. I'm still flat on my back in medical anyway, so the worst I can do is sling thinly-veiled insults at people and think of somewhat amusing ways to pester them enough so they fuck off and leave me alone. I wouldn't have to do that if they would have intelligent conversation with me, but they don't. I cannot believe I know think back at conversations I had with fucking Drakemoor of all people as interesting, but compared to some our current people, she was as erudite as one of the epic skaalds.  
  
And yeah, blue-head (Lalowa, not Sel) apparently is forty-five. The blue hair throws you off. Has a bairn too, though she apparently ended up offing the father. I didn't want to press the matter for answers, though one can imagine the sort of questions I had. Another time, perhaps.  
  
Still angry about what happened yesterday. Recommended Small for not letting all of us die, which I can only see as tiny positive compared to the disaster that it otherwise entails. Feel like I failed everyone, but they're too polite to mention it to my face. I know in my head that it's stupid and self-destructive to think like that, considering the state I am in, but my heart weeps that I was not stronger when it mattered.  
  
At least we know who did it. White Mantle. Figures it had to be cultists again. All the worst people are always cultists. Well, woe to them, because now I know who to look for.

# 53rd of Scion

Growing steadily more irritated at our continuing situation here. The Queen's army is not here, while we're sitting in some natural cave off the river. It's the same place where we've been the past few days since the Seraph battack, but I was only able to make a brief tour of the place today. It didn't help my mood much, asides from being able to put my feet in the water for a small half hour. Haven't had a decent wash in water for a few days now, only swabbed down by medical once in a while.  
But the situation became clear enough. The people present here aren't just Seraph soldiers, they're refugees, hiding from the centaurs and the bandits until they can get out of here. I suppose they're the lucky ones, when you think of those twenty people that we got so close to freedom, only to fail them at the last second.  
Damn fucking Seraph hasn't forced a hole through the ponies in Genderran either, meaning we're literally wasting all the progress we've made since we arrived in this spirit-forsaken hole of a country with every passing minute.  
Means it will have been for nothing.  
  
I don't even know if we burned Payne yet. Or any of the other dead, who deserve as much to be passed on into the next world. Even more, really, since they just caught up between the teeth of the Chapter and these cultists.  
Ox, I can't stand it. I keep seeing myself make the same mistake, not lifting the Torment-damned shield. I could've done it too. Stopped them from killing everyone. Give the Seraph something to rally around, and break them before they tore us apart. Damn it.  
  
And then Ravenwest. Spirits. I am disappointed. Acting like a fucking clown with Carmine, when she should have her eyes cast down on the floor, and her mouth shut, and perhaps spend some of the next three days contemplating exactly how unacceptable it is to start brawling with soldiers you're supposed to trust with your life. But no, let us build a pillow fort and fuss around with my jolly best friends like nothing happened at all.  
  
Not acceptable.  
Getting off light does not mean you get to treat it with levity. Quite the contrary. If anything, it's lessened my opinion on the woman considerably. If she is not able to consider with suitable gravity exactly how close to the edge she was, and then act accordingly, she should go somewhere where 'mistakes' like that don't cost people's lives.  
By the Foundry of Failed Creations, I've danced close enough to that edge myself to know that this is not a game. I promised myself I'd never let it get that far ever again, not after Southsun, and I'll well be damned if I'll stand by and make someone so promising gloss over it so easily. And if that means Ravenwest gets to be miserable for three days, then so be it.  
  
I told Ravenwest earlier that ink stains are the most visible on white paper. It's true. A good soldier fucking up is so much worse than a bad one. It's like Force, when he lost his First Crusader grade, or when Drakemoor and Belmont tried to weasel their way out of that thing with Boyd's gun.  
People like Vatorn, Geran, Srorr, they can all make so many more mistakes, because we have lower expectations. We almost expect them to do something wrong.  
So yeah. It stings to see Ravenwest missing the mark that widely. How disappointing.

# 54th of Scion

Spent the day thinking. All black ink in shallow water, little brightness.  
  
Missing Kirsten and Freyj, especially now. It's hard to find someone to relate to anymore. Never thought I'd feel this alone surrounded by people that are supposed to be my friends. Is this what happens? You just stop knowing people, and suddenly you're alone while being surrounded? I'm sure Kristen would have something to say about melancholy and the like. Leopards, eh. I'll admit the thought that I'll have tale to tell, and scars to show helps me.  
  
I can't wait to be back home after this. Or well, away from here, at the very least, and off to somewhere more pleasant than a crabby cave in northern Kryta.  
  
In other news, Lalowa has washed the dye out of her hair, probably for no better reason than not having to deal with the quips about it. And then she made the mistake of drinking too deeply from the cache of contraband I know she has, and ended up getting hooked by what appears to be Kaitark and Cinderkeeper. The former was implicated by Lalolwa herself about apparently having partaken in the drinking, and the latter was staunchly unamused at the entire procedure. Ended up with not-so-blue-anymore getting what I figure is a charge for intoxication on duty and possession of contraband. Has her luxury rations suspended and set up with punitive duties for the next fourteen days. Kaitark was left off the hook, because there was little evidence of him actually having drunk anything, which makes me think Lalowa was trying to drag him down with her. Petty, if that's the case. If it's true, then Kaitark surprises me.  
See, I tend to be lax on the regulations when it comes to illegal drinking, until it gets to the point where people turn up drunk. I'm aware that the first will invariably lead to the second, but I've seen an occasional drip do as much good as I've seen it do bad. Spirits, if anything I could do with more than a stiff drink right now myself, wash away some of the putrid thoughts I've been having.  
  
Oh, and Ravenwest's situation has been improved, if not to her benefit, on account of a notice I sent in to command relating to what I jotted down yesterday. She will not enjoy it, but it will serve her better in the long term to understand that these are not matters to take lightly. Never.  
She can come out of this in a day or two of thorough internal reflection, after which I'm no doubt she will continue to do well.  
  
No news from the Seraph.  
No news from the White Mantle.  
No news from the centaurs.  
I can now walk with some comfort, even though it hurts my side. My burns are better, only leaving thick, scabby sores over the worst one. The skin looks raw and ruddy, but I think that will soften over time into scar tissue. Stabs will take longer, but spirits know, they're not that deep. Another few days, perhaps, and I'll be back to light duty.

# 55th of Scion

It's been another quit day, with little to no news from the outside world, for better or for worse. I am steadily hoping the centaurs have not yet found the time to turn the camps we cleared into fortifications. It makes me anxious for action to think about it, truth be told, and I'd like nothing less than to take out a patrol myself to make sure the ponies are still keeping well away. Alas, I am still not well enough for war. Here's hoping they don't manage to retake the warfront before the Seraph and the Chapter are able to secure it.  
I wish we had reserve troops. Spirits, it's been ages since we had a decent backing. Now it seems Pact troops are few and far between, and we have to throw everything we have at every battle to keep it all from collapsing.  
  
Ah well. I've been struck these past few days with a mood of black melancholy that I hope is now slowly passing. As I noted above, it is now making place for anxiety and impatience. The sword twitches in the scabbard, so to speak. The Chapter itself is not doing well either. We needed the rest, aye, but people need a win now, to regain their confidence. You know, Force said I should maybe do some sort of exercise tomorrow. I might have an idea, but it depends how well I feel come morning.  
  
Oh, and Lalowa, our merry drunk, got hit by a falling stone that smacked the memory right out of her. I'd think she'd be lying the blue out of her hairs, but apparently she's got a sizeable lump on the back of her head. Thankfully, she was wearing a helmet, or we'd be talking about dents in her skull, rather than in her cask. Either way, she'll escape a few days of her labour until medical has cleared her for light duty. I mean, not two days ago I had an internal fit about people not bearing adequately the consequences of their action, so it seems only fair that we ensure the drunk norn does not get away with avoiding hers based on something as flimsy as blunt trauma to the head.  
Reminds me of that time that abomination smacked me in the chin. Still feel the dent in jawbone. Used to speak better before that too, but there you go.  
  
Anyway, we'll see what comes around. Maybe we'll get news tomorrow, maybe we don't.  
I want to feel a sword back in my hand soon, though.

# 56th of Scion

I slept too long. I don't even know why, only woke up in the late afternoon.  
I've been catching crabs in the water, which has, for whatever reason, done a good job of cheering me up. Imagine that, eh?  
  
I don't feel much like writing today, truth be told. I'll note when something happens.

# 57th of Scion

Oh spirits, where to start.  
  
Okay, so... There was a recon patrol earlier, going north. Apparently intended to see how the centaur camp between us and Seraph's Landing is doing. I don't know what happened exactly, but they brought back a wounded Seraph, and there's word that the patrol found another butchered squadron of the Queen's soldiers. Not sure if it's centaurs or bandits this time around, but it seems that anything between us and Seraph's Landing has slipped out of our control. That can mean any number of things, the majority of which don't bode well for us in the next few days.  
Asides from that, the patrol apparently wandered close to the ghosts Lorma spoke about before we go to this camp. The ones we were supposed to stay firmly away from. Yeah. Those. Not sure what happened, but Kaitark ended up with what seemed like some sort of very evil hex or curse. There was a scuffle, before they brought him over to camp. It's been a while since I've seen strong magic afflictions like that. Even Marcus was unsure what to do next. We had the auxiliary, Vahalt come over, for lack of anyone better suited to help. Spirits, times like this, makes me miss having Rioleth around, or even Calder. Luckily, the Vahalt seemed to have managed and break whatever was causing the illness, to some detriment to himself. He all but collapsed when he was done, and I had to carry him into medical. That went as well as you can imagine, feels like I popped a stitch down there.  
  
I've been going around, essentially cleared myself for light duty. No-one seemed to mind, considering I did it in the midst of Kaitark's accident. I thought we were under attack first, and set out pickets around the camp. I wasn't going to run the risk of us getting overrun a second time. That would've been too easy a mistake to make. Luckily, though, it seemed my caution was not necessary. Just a sudden burst of "camp chaos."  
  
To add to the confusion, apparently a runner came, bearing an arrest warrant signed by the Seraph for Vatorn. I have often questioned the man for his suitability as a soldier, but I heard things like murder and sexual assault. So, we placed him under arrest, faced with a legitimate arrest warrant. We'll hand him off to the Seraph proper, and then he'll stand trial, for better or for worse. He himself claims he's innocent, set up by his sister. Some story about claims to the name and fortune of the family or something. Blegh. Some kin to have, if they set you up for murder. That sort of insult creates blood feuds. Either way, I don't like it. Never really did, handing over people of the Chapter like that. Didn't like it with Lajju, didn't like it now.  
  
Oh, the good news, of course; first of all, we've been reinforced by the runner I mentioned. Overheard him introducing himself to the Knights, one Torsten Erikson. The even better news is that the Seraph have, finally, forced an entry north, and are on their way here. We'll be looking to ride the advance wave into Seraph's Landing, after which I hope we can finally go home.

# 58th of Scion

Damn ghosts. Had to be damn ghosts!  
Marcus took the Chapter south into Gendarran, now the way is open, to hand over Vatorn to the Seraph in Ascalon City. While they were out, something strange happened, like a detonation, over in those nearby ghost-infested ruins. Picket said something about a pillar of red light, which never bodes exceptionally well. I almost thought there was a dragon attacking. I went out and hid on the road until the Chapter returned. Took them some time, but they appeared on the road just as well. So, we went into the ruins. I tagged along, against my better judgement, but at least carrying around my sword.  
  
Ruins were... terrible. Mangled corpses in piles and piles, along with many dead spirits. We found the source well enough, deep inside a tomb. An empty casket, with the name Saul D'Alesso inscribed on it, and a raving White Mantle idiot, wielding what I can only describe as magic bombs, fashioned out of a large, pulsating red crystal. Imagine, if you will, a ruby of exceptional clarity and size, and you won't be too far off. We cornered them, but they managed to severely daze a good amount of us with those bombs. Offed herself with it, though. Seemed to corrupt her, warp her body, until she herself blew up. That was worse. We've got half the Chapter down with magical exhaustion, and Mithra seems took ill, throwing herself in between the blasts and the Chapter. Looks almost super-charged, and not in a good way, lashing out with bursts of magic at random. It's gotten to the point where we quarantined her outside the main camp when we got back.  
To make matters worse, we were still in the process of carrying out the wounded when the damned tomb started collapsing. Had to dig Lorma out of a pile of rubble.  
For a moment, it looked like we'd all die, half of us knocked out, the other half torn apart before we got back to camp. Thankfully, however, the sword never fell, and by a miracle we managed to get all the unconscious and wounded people out of there. What a nightmare.  
  
I found nothing else to do but to help out with the wounded, given we were short on hands. Marcus just flopped over in the line up, and I had to sent to a good number of people. Ripped open my own stitches in doing so, but sod that. Never let a small injury stand between a yourself and a greater deed, after all. They'll scar nicely, at least.  
I'm exhausted, now. The burn sores ache, and my side feels like I've been kicked in it repeatedly. I want to take a swim in the river, wash away all the dirt and the blood, but I'm too tired to make my way down over to it now. Nevermind the berating I'd get about getting my bandages wet, and all that.  
I might ask Bloodletter if it's okay tomorrow, if I can remember. If there's time.

# 59th of Scion

It is quiet, for now. Another rest day to allow our exhausted and worn out troops some recovery. At the rate it is going, we will soon be left with a Chapter of soldiers to mentally and physically worn out to be of much use. Seems all our energy has been spent these last few days, vented by repeated quick stabs to our heart by our enemies. It seems idiotic and almost certainly ironic that we managed to cut through the centaurs like a heated blade through butter in service to humanity, but then stumble hard over some human cult of fanatics. If the White Mantle think that by targeting us, they're bringing down the Kingdom of Kryta, well... they're not wrong. If not for their cowardly raid, and whatever that woman with her crystals was doing in that tomb, the centaur front would've been collapsed by now. Instead, we're now forced to recover our strengths, waiting for our allies to show up and do their part while the enemy encroaches on us with every passing second.  
  
At least the way south into Gendarran is clear, so we're not in danger of getting encircled and cut off. In fact, the Chapter sent out some sort of escort to bring back a VIP from Nebo Terrace. At first, I thought the Warmaster herself was finally rejoining us, or perhaps a Seraph captain. Instead, turns out Foolapoo has been sent our way. Something about a Quaggan village nearby needing our aid. I knew there were quaggans nearby, on account of some of their fishers occasionally wandering into our cave-fortress, but I wasn't aware they were suffering any big issues. If anything, the centaur war should not have affected them, since the ponies can't swim. I'm not so sure what they expect us to be doing either, except drop depth-charges into the river. Well, I suppose we'll hear it soon enough. Quaggans have fought alongside the Pact since the Orrian invasions, so it's only fair they fall under our shield as well.  
  
In other news, Mithra's awake. Not well, but awake. Shaking and spurting off elemental anomalies like it's no-one's business still, but she didn't burst into flames and burn to a cinder, so I'll take it as a victory. More distressing is that she described a weird feeling that she said was not far removed from when the jungle wyrm was in her head. Naturally, I am worried sick, both for her health and what that might possible imply. I am now turn between the hateful of duty of wishing a dear friend to be well, and having to watch her with half my mind on my sword in case it turns out for the worse. I doubt it will come that far, but the tiniest possibility keeps me awake with worry. The worst part is that I am sure I'd be willing and able to end her if there was a taint present. I won't repeat the mistakes I made with Vanholm.  
  
Bah, black thoughts!  
  
I've found a spare fieldbook, tucked away into a pouch in my pack I forgot I had. Well, forgot, it was obscured by the big pelt Kristen once gave me. I've found nothing better than to write in it, and perhaps pass on some thing I have learned about being a soldier here to others. Who knows, maybe one day it will be valuable. It's all just ideas and notes, though, but it helps keeping me busy. I've stopped carving for a while now anyway, because of a dearth of materials. I'm sure Kristen will be disappointed I didn't bring anything worthwhile back for her from the tour.  
Saying that, I actually preserved a beautiful white flower in some paper, from when we were in Metrica. I think Kristen still has that Vinewrath bloom I brought her once. I suppose it's awfully human of me to bring my wife flowers, eh. Who knows, maybe I'll take a centaur chief's tail as a trophy. I envy Claridge for that giant's scalp she has. A grand fight I missed, and a grander trophy yet. A pity too, giant-hunting is not something to lightly undertake. I suppose if Kristen just lanced it in the eye with her first arrow, much of the sport would be out of it too.  
  
Wonder how Kristen and Grace are doing.

# 60th of Scion

Another quiet day. Spoke with Lalowa for some time, about things, fighting, children. Apparently her daughter is still very young, kept safe in Hoelbrak's Wolf lodge. Seems that their lives are marred with bad memories, keeping them apart. It reminds me of those years when Freyj and I didn't see eye to eye anymore.  
I hope she doesn't let herself drift away. Our children are the greatest blessings bestowed on us.  
  
I hope that the war ends soon, so she can go home, see her daughter. I made it clear that she'd be more than welcome to pass north with Kristen and I, when the time comes. Who knows, eh?  
  
Anyway. That's about it for today. Nothing worth mentioning otherwise.

# 61st of Scion

No news.  
  
Waiting for the Seraph still. Or hoping they went ahead past us and already sent advance parties to hold the warfront north of us. Don't know yet. I have a lot of questions, wondering what's happening to Vatorn, where the Seraph are going, what we're supposed to do with for the bleeding Quaggans, and so on. No answers!  
  
Irritating. At least I'm feeling better, and I can walk now without wincing. Here's hoping to be cleared for duty in a few days. We'll see.

[margin]

In passing moments of anxiety  
I tend to wonder if what we're  
doing here is worth it. Enduring  
this peculiar hardship of going  
to strange places, see strange  
people, and believe we are  
doing what is genuinely for a  
better world.  
  
The Pact has done many good  
things. It is hard to argue that  
we are not fighting for a better  
world. But at times, it doesn't  
feel that way anymore to me.  
I see good mothers and fathers  
kept away from their children.  
Good, honest people who die  
too soon to leave anything  
behind on this world but a short  
vivid memory in the minds  
of those who survive.  
  
It is a cruel world, that we  
destroy ourselves to save the  
world. It is the dragon's ultimate  
curse; that they're winning,  
even as they are destroyed.  
  
I hope with all my heart for peace  
in our lives, and the lives that come  
after us. This is one legend I would  
not want to be repeated.

# 62nd of Scion

Finally, words on the wind! It seems the reason I have not seen His Aquatic Majesty, Foolapoo, is because he left camp shortly after arrival, one can assume to go and talk to the local quaggans about their griefs. I suppose Kaitark would be so blunt as to label these circumstances as "fishy".  
In other aquatic matters, the other Moonshield, Kirashi, has a problem with water, or at least with being seen in or near water, for whatever reason. Lalowa has been trying to help her, in a somewhat clumsy but well-meaning way. Moonshield's one of those Charr that I know exactly nothing about. I didn't even know she used guardian magic until she screwed up a meditation, and let of a light flash. Nothing problematic, to be fair, but enough to warrant a talking to. It'd have been a much, much worse mess if she's pulsed out a blast of wrathfire. Doubly so because she'd have incinerated or injured Lalowa, who was standing nearby at the time. Ah well.  
  
I spoke a good, long amount with Force, which was good. He's keeping the humour into it. Complained how he was feeling old. Fat bastard is only thirty-something, but has been fighting wars for more than half of that. Shit, I feel old, and I've only been going for five years. Imagine what fifteen will do to you. Though I suppose if you turn out like Force, it can't be all that bad. We've been through a lot of things, now, and he's still here. In a way, that's a sobering and encouraging thought.  
  
Oh, and the Seraph have pushed through north. News came in that they're finally pushing the advance. So, the centaurs are no longer looking at seizing their positions back with impunity. That tells me we're not going to be far behind. Good, because I've been growing tired of this cave, even though it has proven to be a haven.  
Time for some retribution, I think.  
  
I'll have to see someone about clearing me for active duty, sooner, rather than later.

# 63rd of Scion

All quiet. Spent the day spearing crabs for the Seraph. Seems to be going well, injuries didn't act up too bad.  
Things are still quiet. Suppose this was sort of our "back line" leave. Good, we needed it. I think the mood's improving a little, and people are now wanting to get back into the action.  
We'll see what tomorrow brings.

# 64th of Scion

Seraph's Landing. Finally, we've advanced out of that cave, and made the long trek north to the indomitable city of Seraph's Landing, the Queen's northmost bastion in Harathi lands. Seems that while we were recovering in the caves, the Seraph troops managed to pour in, and open up the warfront, and taking upon their shoulders the substantial section of the frontline we've created in the last series of engagements we fought.  
  
It's a strong, entrenched town, sat on a bend where the river turns to a bog, filled with drake. Further north, where the river deepens again, there are large fish and sharks in the water. The walls on one side are thick, and the Seraph have tiered bastions in case the outer defenses fall. On the northside, a torrent of rapids pouring into the bigger river keeps us apart from the centaurs, connected only by a narrow suspended bridge that would force either of us to assume single file. They can't cross, so they've found nothing better than to besiege the place. Not an easy task under the eyes of the more-than capable garrison here, who have erected trebuchets facing out towards the centaur camps, determined to pound into dust anything that threatens them. They have a well-stocked granary, plenty of fish and drakes from the swamps, and ample chickens and farm animals penned down inside the walls. It's a mess, but it's the sort of mess that could withstand a siege for seasons, if not years. Here's hoping that won't be needed. We're the Vigil; these Seraph can use an armoured spearhead to punch through the centaurs, and drive it home. Besides, the Chapter could use a good victory to help them find their determination again.  
  
But that comes later. Today, we settled in, which was a boost to morale all on its own. It's good to feel like we've got the advantage again, and the town's high walls help people feel at ease. Better than staying in that cave, however restful it turned out to have been.

# 65th of Scion

Finally cleared for duty again, and back into the action. Well, somewhat. Back onto the field, the only action we was were some obstinate harpies. We marched out north of the town to go deal with some Skritt. I expected a much larger centaur presence, but to my pleasant surprise, I discovered it was the Seraph besieging the small centaur camp directly across the river, rather than them besieging us. A spectacular reversal of fortune, considering Seraph's Landing has long been one of the most beleaguered settlements in Kryta! The mood is turning better as a result, and many think we'll go home soon. But I digress.  
We went north to help some Skritt, but ran into a cluster of harpy roosts, and a number of dead skritt. Considering our orders, Sinclair had us clean out the roosts, and get rid of the annoying pests. Bloody harpies. Malicious creatures, that. Pity we didn't capture one for a harpy-toss. Now that would've been funny.  
Anyway, we then pressed on and found the main skritt burrows. Interesting place, looks like an old underground river used to course through here. The Skritt the excavated and widened the natural chasm and the tunnel, jamming it full of rickety buildings and scaffolding. The result is colourful, but not very safe. The Skritt don't know very much about engineering, even through they're excellent delvers. We could see traces of deep warrens being dug underground, which didn't help the cave's foundations. We saw minor collapses and signs of badly settling structural weight all around us. Serious hazard. So I had the engineers mark out locations for supports, that would have to be built with some urgency. Only the issue was the scale of the place. Too much work for the field engineers to accomplish from scratch in one day. Maybe two, if we had ready supplies of wood. This wouldn't have been an extreme problem normally. I have no compunction about driving the work team to their limit when it is needed, even if it meant spending two or three days back into a cave.  
  
Except that one of the cave's exits surfaced smack dab in centaur territory. Right in the middle of their north-eastern forts. I can only guess why the ponies haven't bothered cleaning out the cave. I suppose the Skritt put up a decent enough resistance in home ground. That, or the centaurs simply can't be bothered. Either way, it means the Skritt burrows has become a critical advance line for us. It'll allow us to circumvent the brunt of their fortifications. It also means we're not really in a position to conduct major construction works there that might attract the attention of the centaurs. On the other hand, an untimely collapse of the tunnel systems would not only be costly in Skritt lives, it would also seal off the entire area.  
  
We managed to engineer a solution however, of which I am quite proud myself.  
After having marked the locations for the supports, I had Small glamour a number of copper coins I had to look like golden ones. I flashed these around until I had gathered a small horde of Skritt around me. We then proceeded to promise them more shinies if they managed to erect the supports in the marked locations. They set to work promptly and quickly, driven by that incredible love they have for those shinies. It saved us days of work, and the centaurs won't think much of Skritt digging around their own warrens. Why should they, after all?  
I understand it's a gamble, in the case the Skritt forget to do their work, but I don't think they will. They're remarkably driven creatures when they set their mind to something. In many ways, they're more impressive than any of the "greater" species, exactly because they accomplish what they do while not being exceptionally smart. But then, I suppose that if this surprises me, it only proves that I've not yet given them the credit that they're due. Ah well. Sinclair decided to award me my weight in drink over leave (which, I feel the need to mention, is a not inconsiderable amount of alcohol). I'll drink a toast to Ikitik's memory then, the greatest among giants, exactly because he was so small.  
  
Engineers did well today, as a result. I cracked a joke about Kaila only doing an average job, on account of her being grumpy because I had Small tasked to the trebuchets after they'd been yelling back and forth in the yard. Something insignificant. Still, Ravenwest was abnormally quiet afterwards. Think I might have pricked her the wrong way with that barb. I'll see if it betters or worsens first, but it annoys me. Ravenwest becomes incredibly sulky and childish when in a bad mood, which is mildly irritating when you need something done. We'll see. If it doesn't clear up, I'll have a talk with her.  
  
Oh, and Sigra. Found her retching, and feeling ill in the middle of camp, having sat out the deployment I mentioned earlier. She's not well. Worse, it's not something she ate, or at least, not something that'll pass with digestion or coughing it up. Which, incidentally, is why I had her quarantined and issued struct orders to the medics to carry their air-filters when they treated her. Last thing we need is a sickness or disease spreading through the camp. Especially not in Seraph's Landing. If the garrison comes down, the centaurs will walk right in.  
I'm worried about what caused it. The caves and the bogs probably didn't help, and she's an alchemist, which is even worse, as she keeps all manner of esoteric ingredients around, any of which she could have ended up ingesting by accident. Right now, precautions must be taken to ensure that whatever it is doesn't spread. If we're lucky, we'll keep the rest of the Chapter clean and healthy while Sigra is nursed back to health.  
I am slightly worried about Lalowa, given Sigra, in her sickness, managed to cough up her stomach's contents over the older norn. To which her immediate response was to wade into the bog, and scrub down. I nearly burst a blood vessel. I know she means well, and it's all done with the best intentions, but if she falls over retching her dinner over tomorrow, she's got only herself to blame.  
  
She had to switch out to another set of clothing, which she is apparently still carrying out in her packing, which revealed so much skin it would probably make Lyralii scratch her eyes out, and give some of the officers a mild stroke. It was, however, a case of necessity, since her armour was now drenched in Sigra-puke and bog water. Besides, the alternative would have been no clothing what-so-ever, so I decided to hedge my bets. The plus point was that we ended up in rather pleasant conversation, along with Small.  
I'm bringing Small to Hoelbrak over leave, as she apparently wants to visit Silfr, who does my ink work. That, and she's looking for good drink, which I'm sure Usha is more than willing to sell to her, if I point her in the right directions. Given Small's, as you would call them, predilections, and incessant fishing after any norn woman I mention, I think I'll also tell her to call on Hrist when we pass by. I'm sure both would be delighted.  
  
On a more serious note;  
I've also accepted to call upon Lalowa's daughter, Asta, who is being kept in Wolf's lodge. I told Lalowa it would be better if she would visit the girl herself, but she doesn't seem to be willing or able to do that. I cannot help but feel strongly about this, as I know the mistakes she is making now. Time is the most valuable commodity we have, double so because we never know if we'll see to live through to the end of the tour. She loves her daughter, or she would not ask me to call on her.  
It is hard to see such things happen to others, when the knife passes so close to your own heart.  
I can only imagine what sort of dark memory or feelings keep her away. In either case, I hope the spirits are with her, and that she works through this before the canyon of regret has widened so much that it can no longer be bridged by honest remorse.  
  
I thank myself, as a result, for the love I have and receive from my daughter and my beautiful wife, both of whom I miss very much. All the talk about Hoelbrak has made me homesick, and I long to see the long mountains again, and to sleep in the rough under the open skies, while hunting mighty prey. I hope we're right, and leave comes soon.

# 66th of Scion

Seraph's Landing.  
  
At night, while I was writing the previous entry, centaurs attacked the picket and ran off with Claridge before they could be stopped or challenged. Came from the south wall, under cover of darkness. No idea how they got close enough to ambush a soldiers like the Crusader, but there you have it. Either case, it caused quite a panic. None of us wanted to see a fellow soldier enslaved by centaurs. The scouts set off soon enough, tracking down centaur movements to our south. We thought the old centaur encampment between the woods and the town had fallen back into centaur hands, but the Seraph still held it. Eventually, turned out the centaurs managed to take back Splintered Teeth. I knew the Seraph tarrying in Gendarran would give them a chance to reclaim some of their old camps. A thorn in our side; I hope the centaurs have not reclaimed the other three camps we attacked and sacked while we were on the eastern riverside, or the Seraph will be looking at another protracted series of sieges that will never end.  
  
Either case, we marched on Splintered Teeth without delay, and re-splintered the place with a vengeance. Thankfully, they did not have much time to rebuild the place, and only had a large slave pen constructed, asides from the earthwork they so like to erect. In the midst of the attack, the Seraph or whoever is holding Overwatch camped started firing at us from the ridge, sending stones and ballista bolts raining down onto us. Sinclair deflected a big one, knocking him out. Again. We remained unharmed, thankfully shielded from the worst of the fire by the angle and the way the camp was constructed. We found Claridge in the slave pen, after we killed the centaurs. Released a good number of others too, sending them on into the backline for treatment.  
It was good, almost relieving, to get Claridge out of there. Didn't stop them from whipping the woman, I'm sorry to say. She'll spend some days in medical until those heal up.  
  
We got a free ration's worth of drink as a reward, which was a welcome refreshment. Only pity is the Chapter doesn't stock better beer, but there you go.  
  
Oh, and one of the trebuchets on the north-side was destroyed, probably due to counter-fire from the small centaur camp opposite the river. I swear, they try and keep us awake by trampling around at night, ululating and screaming. Wish Drakemoor and her big gun were still around, could take potshots as a response until they learnt how to shut the fuck up.  
Anyway, I've set Ravenwest to repair the bloody thing. I'll find a way to turn out a lumber detachment on the morrow, get it fixed before noon.

# 67th of Scion

Seraph's Landing.  
  
Calm day. Had a dawn inspection, sent those that failed to turn out adequately for the lumber detail with Ravenwest to fix the trebuchet. Had it fixed quickly enough, didn't need too much work. Now the angels can continue flinging rocks at that little tuft of the centaur camp across the north bridge.  
We did the same on the south side; the Seraph took over the camp controlling the approach to the woods, and set up mortars aimed at the centaurs across the rivers. I had our engineers, who have better experience with these siege weapons, range in the mortars with a few shells, and note down the optimal elevation and azimuth marks, before passing them over to the Seraph liason there. Centaurs want to cross, they'll have to carry the bridge while under mortar fire. Here's hoping their sentries don't let any more centaurs slip past and kidnap our pickets.  
The good news is that according to Maeva, we're not far off from finishing the campaign. Seems like the Seraph are getting a handle on the war again, now that they're marching fresh troops in through Gendarran. With Seraph's Landing opened up again, they should have no problem manning the defense lines.  
  
I also started questioning Ravenwest on her theory skills regarding to ballistics and siege weaponry. Thinking about having the Crusaders with a knack for the stuff to qualify as Ballisticians formally, since it looks like most of them have plenty practical experience. Ravenwest did well enough, though I'll probably continue observing the progression as it comes. Others that spring to mind are Seleea and Small, once she makes the Crusader grade. Maybe Tinker, too. We'll see how it turns out, and if they fall short, well, then I know what to train towards.  
  
Oh, and I dug into the Seraph's supplies and made tray of pastries with chicken liver, peas and lard. They turned out well enough, but people apparently don't really like pastries, for whatever reason. Only Claridge, Lalowa and Maeva really eat from them, which I find somewhat disappointing. I'd hoped to provide a nice boost, but that fell flat. Kaitark was even afraid of them, apparently on account that I he only just woke up from that nasty curse-thing that happened in the cave. Only that apparently it wasn't a curse, for some reason I can't really pinpoint. Kaitark tried to explain to me, but I only understood the basics of it. Not sure what he wanted me to do about it anyway, that's one of those few things I leave entirely to other people.  
  
Ravenwest also came up to Maeva and I to note that she's been feeling listless. I think it's an accumulation of combat stress and exhaustion. The White Mantle raid that killed Payne seems to have affected her worse than it turned out myself and Small. I still feel angry, though I'm not nowhere as weak as I was at the time. The next White Mantle bastard is going to regret crossing my path, I'll tell you that. In any case, Small and I were too weak afterwards, but Ravenwest threw that episode that saw her put under guard. Accumulated with the stress of the tour, I think she's getting close to a mental break. Ravenwest has never been the most mentally stable after all, relies too much her crutches to keep going. If anything, the altercation from several days ago proves that.  
Ah well, I guess we're all due some leave anyway.

# 68th of Scion

Seraph's Landing.  
  
Nothing of note, really. Mostly making plans for leave, though apparently there's still a big push to come in the following days. Not surprising, really, the war here isn't won just yet.  
Lalowa also decided to see her daughter herself, which feels like a weight is lifted from my heart. I suppose I worry too much about things like that, but still. I'm hoping it'll do her good. Maybe I can get Freyj to go and visit the girl while we're out in the field. I'm sure Freyj will be good with kids.  
  
Also got a ruckus caused by some clown or another, but he was thrown out of camp soon enough.

# 69th of Scion

Seraph's Landing, though our stay here seems to be coming to a close. We're going to make ready for one final, the details of which will be settled tomorrow. Then, if all goes well, we hand the warfront to the Seraph, and go home, hopefully not saying our goodbyes to too many of our own.  
  
I took a couple of people out towards the Skritt cave, just to check if they'd done as instructed. Seems like they took the bait well enough, and put up several surprisingly solid looking supports. The Skritt seem to have a gift for cobbling together scraps of metal and wood, without it all falling apart. Most of the cave walls seems to have settled for now, and will hold up until they're undoubtedly dug up again by the over-eager Skritt. You'd have to post an engineer with a bag full of shinies here in perpetuity if you wanted to keep the place safe for good. Alas.  
I have a feeling we'll be going through their caves for our attacks soon enough. Didn't look like it'd be an easy fight either case, but there you go. Only thing we have to do now is give the Skritt the shinies we promised them.  
  
In camp, everything was relatively quiet. We have some sort of idiot of an adventurer walk up the south gate, asking to be let through. She was duely informed that this was a warzone, and I would need to know her intent and purpose before even considering her passing the northern pickets. Of course, being an idiotically obstinate human, she refused. She's allowed to stay in the town, because it is, after all, still a human town, but spirits, do these people bother me. Bumbling idiots who want to walk into our area of operations, and don't even have the base presence of mind to tell us what they're up to. If it was up to me, I'd have her sent straight back south, where she belongs. Fucking adventurers...  
  
Asides from that, I found out that medical had a big hole in their recordkeeping, which resulted in a number of issues that were almost too stupid to describe. First of all, Kaitark, who I mentioned some days ago as being in a state of some confusion, has no idea what happened to him, or how he was treated. I had to tell him Vahalt helped him, as mentioned, because apparently no-one thought it worth mentioning in the records he was treated for a magical hex. Or whatever it was.  
Second, Belmont woke up, after having been knocked out since the magical explosion in the White Mantle ruins. I know this, because I was there, but apparently no-one noted down the source of his injury, which left me with a group of medics unable to determine why Belmont was even in medical at all! To make matters worse, he's having a form of memory-loss. Seems like he can't for the life of him remember people or names, but he's aware he's in the Vigil, and that he was fighting White Mantle. It's something.  
  
And then you have the quarantine. So, not only did Andrews and Lalowa fail to make a notation that Sigra was sick and in quarantine, Carmine has apparently been ignoring the order put down to wear air-filter in medical, like a bellend, thus exposing a whole lot of people. Thankfully, it seems that Sigra's illness is not likely to be infectious, as we have had no other reported illnesses. She herself is in a state which resembles constant indigestion, with no sign of improving. Worrying; I hope it doesn't worsen. At least it seems the rest of us are not at immediate risk, despite all the efforts presented by the remainder of the Chapter to do the exact opposite of quarantining.  
  
I've had to write a letter to the officers *yet again*, though thankfully they seem to take my advice and suggestions seriously, which is gratifying. It is always good to feel like there is a good working relation between myself and our officers. Ensures we can get things done and corrected.  
  
Spirits preserve me! Sometimes it feels the Chapter is one of the biggest killing machines in the known world, and at other times I wonder how we've not all killed ourselves by sheer stupidity. It make me feel ill every time I realise that the only reason I'm alive is because we've been lucky. One of these days, someone is going to forget something important, ignore a warning, and kill me. I'll be a very angry corpse.  
  
Anyway, I've been continuing my other book, or rather booklet, and it is coming along nicely. It's nice to put my thoughts into paper, as if I'm instructing people in my own head. We'll see what it becomes, eh?

# 70th of Scion

Seraph's Landing.  
Tactical planning earlier today, gave us a set of somewhat coherent marching orders. It's going to be rough. About six camps in half as many days, most of them to be taken by storming them. The opening phases will begin tomorrow, when we'll attack the centaurs both from the north and from the south. The damn ponies have taken back Recovery camp, meaning we have to cross back across the river over a narrow bridge, where the centaurs will see us coming. We'll be laying down a smokescreen with the engineers to shield that advance, but it is by far one of the worst positions we have. The alternative was to cross the river by boat, meaning going downstream in a gorge exposed on three sides to the enemy, and then landing downhill from the enemy defense line. I don't know quite which one is worse. I guess we'll see how well we hold up tomorrow.  
While this happens, a group will capture a camp south of the Skritt caves. Thankfully, this one we can outflank easily enough, and the Seraph already have mortars trained on the camp's southern border. But that's just tomorrow.  
  
The days after, we'll be storming two clusters of the most dense centaur fortifications in these parts, all the way to the enemy's main war camp. To get there, we have to press through a place called the Cloven Hoof Pass. It's where the Skritt caves lead to. It looks like it will be hard fighting, and chaotic. Thankfully, the Seraph are our reserves, and will be pushing up the front as we advance, hopefully manning the camps we storm. A heavy spear-tip with a whole lot of soldiers holding the shaft. Here's hoping we can skewer the centaurs on it. I'll need to see if I can't get a good trophy in the last fights.  
  
In camp, however, we had another series of... baffling events. With the knowledge we'll be laying down smoke rounds, I have Small and Ravenwest go to the Seraph and barter for a spare box of smoke rounds, considering they use the same materiel as we do. Issued them with a payment slip for the purchase of a munitions box, with the instructions to purchase them from the liason at the camp south of here, and come to an agreement.  
Which they did, except that said agreement apparently involved attempts at seduction, and ended up with Ravenwest punching the man in the face when the idiot liason went in on the offer. Small helped, of course. To make matters worse, Maeva intercepted them before they could submit a report to me, and has taking a personal interest in resolving the matter. Needless to say, she is disappointed. Shit, I am disappointed too. I told them they had some leeway in negotiating for it, in case the liason proved difficult, but this is a tad far, and constitutes Ravenwest's second case of getting into fights with other soldiers! Thankfully no-one was serious injured, and we were able to smooth out things with the liason, which is good. Having a diplomatic crisis with our primary allies in the theater of war right before a big attack is not something we need.  
Admittedly, the liason is an idiot, but then so are Small and Ravenwest for even attempting to work that angle.  
  
Add to that the next colossal idiocy of Carmine failing to use his brains, trying to lecture me on how somehow my orders resulted in the altercation, and that I was trying to dodge responsability. Of course the sheer notion is ridiculous, as at the very moment he came out to make a fool of himself, I was actively handling the matter with the knight, in order to see it resolved on a charge of unbecoming conduct, knowing full well that Ravenwest is inches away from a demotion if it's not mitigated properly. But no, instead Carmine managed make it so much worse by illustrating, in front of the Knight no less, exactly how problematic his relationship with Ravenwest is for the continued discipline of the Chapter. For the second time, since he behaved in exactly the same fashion towards Lalowa when Ravenwest went off the handle in her previous case of brawling.  
Talking about setting an abysmal series of precedents.  
  
Well, Ravenwest can forget her title of ballistician as a result, and I'll have to consider scrapping her off the engineering roster outright because of this, if they don't simply take her off the roster outright. I've mentioned to the Knight that I will take responsibility for the situation, considering they were operating under my orders, but I doubt it'll matter much.  
Small, too, disappointed me, though she is lucky that she doesn't have a preceding disciplinary infraction or an overly-zealous idiot hovering over her shoulder.  
  
The tiny bit of good news is that Maeva has not yet issued corrective measures, so there's still a chance to alleviate the situation. I'll write tomorrow before the assault, and see if I cannot get them to accept issuing them disciplinary action at face value for the regulations they broke, and hopefully ignore the notion that Ravenwest's previous infraction with Lalowa would usually demand harsher correction. Because, let's be fair, if the liason has suggested any of those things to Kristen, she'd have probably tuned the man into a fancy pig-skin hat.  
Small, I'm less worried about, though she has probably delayed her promotion to Crusader by a season.  
  
Ah, the Ashen Chapter. Probably both the worst and the best Chapter in the entire Vigil, at the same time.

# 71st of Scion

Seraph's Landing.  
  
Well, the assaults began earlier today, as planned. Seems we achieved our objectives, kicking down the doors for the Seraph, and then letting them hold the line while we rotated back. Blade stormed Bridgewatch, Lance stormed Overwatch while the engineers dropped a smokescreen to cover Lance's advance. Didn't actually see any front line fighting myself, as I was directing fire from an artillery position. I was worried that it wouldn't work, but apparently the ponies have never dealt with this sort of tactics. That, or the Seraph are sloppier in the execution. Either way, we now have the enemy camps in Cloven Hoof Pass surrounded to the west and south, with little place to go.  
We'll see how they hold up tomorrow and the day after, but they're losing ground fast. Makes up for the time we spent in that cave, I think.  
  
Onto camp matters, well, it seems that despite my best efforts, Ravenwest was demoted and pulled off engineering, while Small has punitive duties lasting a full tour. So has Carmine, for insubordination. In addition, the officers announced the formation of a new magical department, and increased stress on camp discipline.  
I'm annoyed, but I can follow the logic in it, I'm sad to say. Unfortunately, this has made Small, Ravenwest and Carmine into examples, noting that the gloves come off now.  
As a result, I held a counselling session with Small, to try and help her learn from her mistakes. We made some progress, and at least identified some issues which were promptly addressed. Big ones were that Small didn't feel like she could have recourse to either her own superior (me) or the Seraph's when he proved unwilling to co-operate out of fear of disappointing. Or at least, out of a sense of not willing to come back without her mission not being accomplished. The other was a rather annoying willingness to break the rules on the principle that if they wouldn't have gotten caught, everything would've been alright. A disappointing statement, though one I hope she understand now is not correct; the issue with that, after all, is that when you do get caught, there are dire consequences.  
Secondary was that she's oddly driven to gain Ravenwest's approval. I have a feeling that if that wasn't the case, things might have turned out slightly differently. It might be worth highlighting to the troops that they have an implied duty to stop others from breaking regulations just as much as they need to uphold themselves to those rules.  
  
I'll also need to have a talk with Ravenwest, first chance I get.  
  
The good news is that we're now close to leave, something which will do me no ends of good.  
Reminds me, I'll need to get a letter out to post for Kristen, before I end up having to track her down in the middle of no-where just to spend some time with my own bloody wife.

# 72nd of Scion

Seraph's Landing.  
  
We've done it, we've taken Cloven Hoof Pass after a good bout of fighting. Biggest battle we've had this tour, spearheading the Seraph straight into the biggest cluster of centaur camps this side of the Reach. Hard fought too, even though the ponies did not put up nowhere as much resistance as you'd have expected. I'm pleased, in a way, as this means we'll be going home all the sooner. This tour, albeit short, has been driving me insane. All the repeated incidents... the White Mantle killing Payne which I only narrowly escaped from, Srorr running face first into an angry griffon, Vatorn being arrested and taken away on serious charges, the red cyrstal bomb in the tomb of an ancient prophet, the Skritt, Ravenwest's entire bloody debacle...  
I want to get out of here, and away from the Chapter for a while. Just, spend some time away from all these... things. I need time to think on things, process what's happening, and come to terms with it all. I mean, I still really haven't gotten to terms that Payne is dead, and we're already moving on to more and different drama.  
  
I talked to Ravenwest who, after I pressed her on it, suddenly confessed that some sort of moron messed around in her head, some time ago. And this, as it turns out, causes her to suffer extreme mood spikes.  
So, all the effort, all the mediation, time and energy we've been sinking into correcting Ravenwest's outburst is completely and totally pointless. Why? Because it's not an issue that can be corrected. Not by us anyway; of course if someone is magically fucked up to the point that they have no way control their anger, we can't encourage or coax them into working on it. Why she has never told us this rather exceptionally fundamental part of her psyche, I have no idea. Bear's claws, it explains these Torment-blasted outbursts, at least.  
I suppose the pinprick of light, for her at least, is that some Priory bookworm is trying to find a solution to the problem.  
  
Well, I suppose at least the counselling session was successful in finding the root of the problem, at least. But I'm now done with Ravenwest's and Carmine's shenanigans. Completely finished. The sheer stupidity, the selfishness. I have no words for it. We'll be doing what we can to contact this Priory muppet, and try and help her get this under control, but by Raven's feathers...  
  
Tomorrow we can finally kill off this damned centaur warlord, and I can go home and spend some time with people I don't want to drown in a shallow puddle.

# 73rd of Scion

Seraph's Landing, but not for long anymore. A few days, perhaps.  
  
We've won the campaign; finally managed to force a break to the last camp, and tear it down. Fought an impressive centaur shaman who called up enormous hands made out of stone to rip up from the ground and claw at us, and kept three hefty rock hounds the size of Dolyaks at his side. Unfortunately for him, though, we're not Seraph, and that sort of magical display just tells us what we're fighting. You don't get straight-up earth magic that often, except maybe if you think about destroyers, but without all the fire. Still, we ground him into a fine past. I nearly got the horsetail too, but apparently that's not allowed, and I had to give it back. Pfah! I got the mage's spearhead, though. Suppose it'll do. A boring tour in terms of trophies, I'll say that much. I hope, Kristen's hunting season passed better, or we'll have little to boast about in a few days.  
Got a night's watch for it too. Eh.

# 74th of Scion

Seraph's landing.  
  
Calm day. Just some talk about motivation and ideas, making ready for departure, and that sort of thing. Spoke with Sinclair for a bit, get a feel about the camp mood. Seems to agree that we can do some more work with the troops next tour. I mean, battlefield performance was fine, but camp discipline is all sorts of saggy and bloated. It's not horrendous just yet, but there are certainly improvements that can and should be made.  
  
Also spoke with that Kirashi Charr. They injured their arm, and were brooding over it. She's not usually responsive to social interaction, so there was no surprise in the reaction I got when I inquired about how she was dealing. Typical sort of soldier who sees a wound as a failure. I managed to trick them into self-improvement and reflection to spite me, though, saying she was a rubbish soldier if she was just going to sit around a fire. Hopefully, that'll get them to self-improve, even without hands-on guidance. Either way, I win. She makes improvements on her own, good. She doesn't, I can start making inroads in personal guidance, and I still win in the long term.  
You'd think they're smarter than that, but really, they're not. Tends to happen when soldiers have more pride than common sense, silly wankers.  
  
Oh, and I figured out yesterday that Kaitark's a spook. Or used to be one, that is. He volunteered the information of his own volition when pressed, so that's alright. We settled on not pressing the case. I, of course, had no choice but to inform an officer of the notion, but I did it in such a way as to make clear it was not going to be problematic. He's alright.  
  
Anyway, it's been a quiet, restful day, especially after sitting through yesterday's night watch. Slept a good part into the day to balance it out. I'll clean my kit and pack my gubbins for march in two days, and then spring a lovely inspection on the troops tomorrow morning. Get the latecomers to do laundry, so they don't go home with centaur-lice or something in their underwear.  
  
Then, we're off back to the keep, and hopefully back over onto a period of leave! War like this, I'm wondering how the rest of the world is doing. I have this strange feeling I'll hear something about White Mantle soon enough. Here's hoping how they were wiped out by the Shining Blade or somesuch.  
  
I know what I'm going to do first when I get back home, though, and that's trace my finger over the knotwork covering Kristen's shoulder until I know the patterns by heart.

# 75th of Scion

Seraph's Landing, hopefully for the last time.  
  
No hostilities, but spirits, my hope that this last day could pass in quiet was dashed yet again by a series of incidents. We started off well enough, had the soldiers turned out for inspection and laundry, which happened easily enough. A lot of people holding back some form of alcohol, though many have theirs as the result of legitimate issue, so it's not contraband. Not that it matters too much this late into the deployment, but there you go. I had latecomers and those that failed the inspection tasked to the laundry. Again, not too much issue there, except that people took to wearing their civilian clothing, because their uniform fatigues were damp. They were, of course, promptly shouted at and made to wear their uniforms. I might have been sympathetic if it wasn't Scion's season, the crest of summer, in Harathi. If the sun shines any brighter here, the grass will light on fire.  
They're lucky we didn't make them march through the Shiverpeaks in wet cloths.  
  
Then there's this odd case with Kaitark and Belmont getting caught out on a roof by Maeva, and then not identifying when challenged. Same stupid issue as with Drakemoor and Belmont occurred then, with Kaitark not being willing to tell who was with him on that bloody roof. For some reason, the camp was put on alert, and the Knight apparently threatened him with a charge of collusion with the enemy. A suitably hefty threat that only managed to cow Kaitark in thinking they were going to hang him or something. Eventually the Knight relented, and Kaitark was smart enough to just open his mouth. Both were set to half a season of labour duty.  
I spoke to Kaitark about the incident afterwards, and it seems the primary motivation for him not just turning in is that Kaitark was afraid of Maeva. It's hard not to gloat about that notion, considering I keep hearing people with command roles crow on how it is better to be feared, yada yada yada. Well then, here we have a case where being feared turned out to be an active detractor to camp discipline.  
  
It gets worse, though. Maeva, who is on her moon's cycle, by all accounts, has had an anger outburst earlier that managed to sting some of the troops. Apparently she's suffering from cramps, and is getting painkillers ascribed from medical to handle it. Unfortunately, when she came to request them from Zikk and Carmine, they didn't issue them. In addition, Kirashi did the wonderfully idiotic thing of suggesting to the Knight that she deal with it "like a real soldier". The Knight promptly threatened to throw her off the wall.  
I know this, because I later caught Small and Ravenwest talking about the Knight in a bad way. I put the dampener on that quick enough, but it's damned bad sign. If Maeva's anger causes her to lose the respect of her soldiers on one hand, or makes them too afraid to accept responsibility for their actions, that's a serious problem. Even worse, the reaction to being refused painkillers at first caused people to think she's got a substance abuse issue. Realm of Torment... I checked the medical records just to be sure, however, and Lalowa did prescribe her painkillers, both yesterday and today, with the explicit notation that supplemental doses should be allowed. I'm inclined to agree with the sentiment that if the Knight suffers cramps that prevent her from doing her duties, they should be medicated. On the other hand, it is fairly fundamental that she'll need to work on controlling her temper regardless.  
  
Which puts me in an awkward spot, since she is my superior. If anyone else got to this point, they'd be slapped on the wrist as a bare minimum, and the recruits and Crusaders aren't going to risk their skin and good name by writing in to the warmaster, for whatever good that might do them. So, I get the feeling I'll have to take care of this joyous duty. I suppose I'll just talk to the Knight first, appraise of her the issue and hope she doesn't take it as me challenging her command or something ridiculous. If that fails, I'll have to bring the matter up with Marcus, or even Alleshia herself whenever that damned woman comes back from where-ever she's being kept.  
  
It's really, really bad news when soldiers make statements like "I don't want to be like our leaders".  
What sort of an example are we setting if we're failing to motivate people to follow in our footsteps? I mean, isn't the core foundation of what we do to lead by example?  
It's a sad day indeed when our troops waver, and our officers are not respected.

# 76th of Scion

Ah, the stinging cold and sounds of Hoelbrak! It's good to be home, at least.  
We did the long march back to the Vigil Keep earlier today, after which we given some days of leave, as expected. Lalowa and I set off for Lion's Arch, and the Hoelbrak gate not too soon after. A bloody long day of walking, but I just got impatient about waiting to go home after all this. We bumped into Sinclair on the way, who paid me out a rather substantial amount of silver, on the count of letting me drink my own weight for the Skritt stunt.  
It's been a while since I've had this much money, I'll tell you that! I didn't expect him to actually turn out the dimes in full, but he's apparently got a pretty family vault of them somewhere, so he doesn't mind. Suits me fine!  
  
Lalowa and I arrived in Hoelbrak not too long after. Luck has it Kristen was in the city, back from hunting in the Timberlines. Squaring off with bull minotaurs, and the like. Daufi's grown an extra slab of belly, and still looks like he's got the intelligence of rock. Reef drake seems to handle the cold well enough, though, and Kristen's taking well enough care of the critter. It's good to see Kristen again; tours start dragging on when you have to look forwards to things like this, but I can't complain. They're always worth it.  
  
Lalowa went to see her daughter, something we left to her. It seemed to have done her well, though. We passed by Wulfbane, who was over in Wolf's lodge. I told Lalowa it might be an idea to bring the girl over to Wulfbane's steading, considering the amount of little ones on the prowl in that place. Wulfbane and Siggy's children, and Nauja's tods. I'm surprised Wulfbane's got time for anything at all that doesn't include dirty nappies.  
  
Anyway, we spent the remainder of the evening drinking in the boasting hall, jibing and joking between ourselves. It's a pity Small decided to go to the Reach instead of what we had planned. Ah well. It was good regardless. Even ran into that senile old Charr, Freezmaw. She cut off my hair with a sneaky cut while I was getting more ale, so I'm damned bald again. Or well, I should be, when I get rid of these bloody stray strands. Dunk my head into the Mourn next morning, and shave it all off again. Kristen can help me, if she isn't too hungover.  
  
After Wulfbane went back home, Kristen, Lalowa and I went to Hrothbeir's rest, and simply sat down with a bottle of Wyrmblood, to round off the ale from previous, until Kristen fell asleep. I spoke with Lalowa for a bit more, before I woke my drunk cat. My wife's a lightweight, woe is me! It doesn't matter. I love her anyway.  
  
Oh, before I end on that note and snuff the candle; I spoke to Maeva about the comments made yesterday, and got her to acknowledge the concerns. She's aware of the anger issues, and we've decided to try and work on them. Either way, I mentioned that Sinclair and I were perfectly willing and able to take over some tasks if it gets to the point that the Knight suffers temper spikes. It might not solve the problem yet, but at least it'll limit the exposure to the troops. That way, they don't have to deal with Maeva at her worst, which benefits both sides, as far as I'm concerned. I hope it has some effect.  
  
Back to matters at hand; Freyj is apparently still away hunting with Grace, though I feel it's becoming a somewhat long trip at this stage. Starting to wonder if the Priory didn't call them both back to work, and she simply didn't forgot to leave a note or something. I'll call on Usha tomorrow, see if she knows more.

# 77th of Scion

Hoelbrak. Sleeping off the headache, watching Kristen loaf around and brush up the pelts. Had food in bed; real food! I can't remember the last time I had black pudding. The Vigil needs better food, by Bear. All the same old for Kristen, though, almost would say the lass is too free for her own good! Nothing like half a season on sheet-iron biscuits to make you appreciate a good pork's blood sausage with moa eggs, fish and fresh bread, right from the oven. And beer! Spirits, lovely, pale white beer, like a lover's kiss, to clean the throat and wash away those little pieces of fat that get stuck behind your teeth. Add to that an actual lover's kiss, and you're not far off from my morning.  
  
The day has been one of laziness and idleness. I passed Usha's place later in the day, who was home, much to my surprise. We didn't speak too long, as she was on the verge of heading off again. Business has her tied up, shipping all manner of goods. She's been doling out the stuff by hand, with Fuse, in the different cities. Try to get folks a taste of a real drink, and then hoping that they'll come back for more. She's already sending regular Dolyaks out to a merchant in the Reach who apparently deals in delicacies. Turns out there's a crowd for bottles of liquid blackout. Usha mentioned something about some sort of disturbance out west to me, though, apparently serious enough to put some of her friends from '25 on notice. I'd almost think she was worried.  
  
Either case, I have another six days in paradise before having to pick up the sword again. I'm taking my time to write, to spend some much-needed time with Kristen, and just generally clear the head a bit of all the "Ashen" business while I can.  
  
I do still need to find Freyj. Though I suppose if she's out south, she could be six different types of "anywhere". Ah well. Worst case, I'll leave a not behind for her when I leave.

# 78th of Scion

Hoelbrak. Went out fishing in the foothills, early. Seems that no matter how the world turns, those forests and the rivers will never change. I can't imagine what would happen if a dragon suddenly ripped up out of the ground. Probably get pounced by six dozen norn warriors, hah. Still, it is nice to have a corner of peace and quiet, where even the Svanir don't make too much noise, and where the harmony of the spirits is so strong you feel it in every step. One of those few places where the still speak to you.  
Kristen's considering to make her way towards shamanism. She's strong with Leopard sure enough, but I don't know if she is ready yet to leave her arrows in her quiver, and use her words on those that would listen. Perhaps a few more years. Perhaps when the war is over. It would be good then, she can don the headdress before we go north, and bring the spirits back into the far 'peaks once the dragon has been rooted out. It'll be needed.  
  
Anyway, we cleaned today's catches, and then went to drink in Shelter's Rock. Started a boasting round with some of the many patrons, and ended up leading a whole group of them to Lake Mourn for a game of keg brawl. Spirits, that was a rumble if you've ever seen any. Still have the throwing arm! I don't even know who won, we were down to regular brawling soon enough. Got a good few bruises and skinned knuckles over from it, but by Bear, was that refreshing.  
  
And now Kristen will help me make salmon and crayfish in puff pastry. I have a recipe for a divine sweet mustard-dill sauce that is so delicious she'll never want to eat fish without it, ever again.  
I better get to it, the thought alone is making my mouth water.

# 79th of Scion

Hoelbrak! A quiet day, again, as it should be. Small came to visit, as she would, and we had a talk with Usha and Lalowa around the fire. Mostly small talk, that, though Usha managed to sell Small a crate of mead at a reasonable price, so I'll it a good meeting. Apparently Carmine and Ravenwest were around too, but we didn't see them. Not too big of a worry, mostly surprised those two aren't in Ascalon.  
  
Anyway, finally got some of the post through. Apparently they sent the letters to Harathi, only to arrive after we'd marched back, so it's all back-dated. First and foremost, Miremel is getting wed to that Sylvari. Tomorrow, in Lion's Arch! Well, I suppose I'll have to make an effort and get there then, it's only one portal away. Might bring Kristen, if she feels like it. Seems we've had weddings happen during our leave several times in a row. I suppose it's good, people still finding love in days like this.  
  
Another letter, from Kraxxi. A lot of good words, but also a snippet of rumour. Turns out that something big is happening north of Rata Novus. Some sort of explosion or other, with the White Mantle being involved. Given what I've been hearing and seeing, it's not to be ignored. If anything, it's put me on notice for the next few tours. I'm particularly hesitant about going back into Magus Falls, but spirits, if we must, then we'll do it. Just hope it's not another dragon. I don't think we're ready just yet.  
I'll write Kraxxi back after the wedding, get the post in through the Lion's Arch gate. Should cut slightly on the delivery time. Might even stay the night if Kristen's along, take the lass and Daufi to the nesting grounds on Southsun, smoke a cigar, make a passion fruit punch, and the lot.  
If anything, the prospect of going back to Maguuma has made sure I want to enjoy this leave as much as I can!

# 80th of Scion

Travelling day, to Lion's Arch and back. Went to witness Mire and Rosary's wedding, which was a good celebration. Very human thing, with a priest and everything. Odd thing is, most of the people attending were norn or Charr. Little bizarre, but I suppose it's an odd enough couple. Eclectic. Wulfbane and Sigrun were there, as you'd expect, as was the warmaster and Force. Also in attendance were Lalowa, Kaitark and Kirashi, though spirits alone know why. The last two specifically seemed to have been badly hungover. Not very respectful, if you ask me, but there you go. I think Force dragged them along. I lampshaded that I was going to strip their leave and gift them both to the newlyweds as a gift, which should at least put them on notice a little. As for our actual gift, we brought those pieces of Orrian coral I've had for a long while now. Carved them in all sorts of shapes. It's a nice material, like pearl, and seeped in old magic. I hope they appreciate it.  
  
The food and drink were good. Even had some surprise guests show up at the very end, like Azzis and Roeland. The real Azzis, that is, not the pretend one we had to arrest all the while back, and caused us so much of a headache. Anyway, aye, unexpected. Roeland seems to still be as tame as he usually is. Not that it matters much.  
Oh, and I got a letter through the warmaster, with a note that read "congratulations" and then had two gilded brooches in them. A late wedding gift, I assume, from a 'mutual friend' in the spooks. I'm starting to grow a small selection of those, these days, but I think I know which one it is. Only one I know of would have gone through the Warmaster, so yeah.  
  
Anyway, we're now back in Hoelbrak, nearing the last few days of leave. Always a damn pity when that comes to an end, though i can't complain. It's been good and quiet days. Restful.

# 81st of Scion

Urgh, headache.  
Drank too much. I think Kaitark and Azzis were here, lost in the woods, so to speak. Not much to add, they're perhaps the two most oddball Charr that could've shown up.  
Fuck, all Charr I know are bizarre.  
  
Don't feel like writing. I think Kristen's around somewhere.  
Still in Hoelbrak.  
  
Oh right, last day of leave tomorrow. Better celebrate! I need more beer.

# 82nd of Scion

Last day of leave, already.  
It's always too short. I end up gorging myself on anything I'll miss, and then pack way too early. I know I'll still have most of the day tomorrow, but everything is already neatly tied and curled up, ready to be hoisted up on the shoulders and then back to the Keep. Cleaned out a whole lot of trophies and gifts again, left them with Usha. Only place I have to store stuff. Kristen can't carry it all around, after all. Usha's starting to accrue an impressive collection of oddities as a result, with ornate weapons, carvings and other memento's just lined along the closed casks of her best brews. A little like a treasure vault.  
  
Kristen helped me pack, which was nice. She took note of my complaining about bad food, so we got some dried sausage, salted bacon and properly waxed cheese as some service extras. Oh, and strawberry and apple jam, in thick sealed jars. They won't make the hard tack any softer, but it'll damn well taste better. I'm honestly surprised why I didn't think of stocking some personal eating earlier, considering the way the army food's been sliding all over the ice towards a steep drop down a fjord. All down to spare forage. Wish I could pack Kristen along too, you don't find *that* comfort in the field. Eh, it doesn't matter, she'll be waiting when next leave passes.

# 83th of Scion

Vigil Keep. The home away from home.  
  
Got here early enough, everyone settled in. Few people returning to duty after absences, including the Warmaster, and Calder. Looks like we're pulling everyone together again for a while. We'll be doing training and drills for the next couple of days, get everyone back into shape, iron out some issues and make sure everyone's in the right mindset. With the news from Kraxxi, it might be we're looking at going back into the deep end before long. Here's hoping we've got time to get everyone up to standard, eh.  
  
Some small items. Small had her big grenade-lobbing gun finished and furnished, and we had it speed-tested in the field, before she gave it to Ravenwest. I've decided not to intervene on the matter, because for everything that's been going on, they're both reliable enough in their ordnance work. No doubt. Just hope that doesn't come back to bite me in the ass, but eh. I suppose we'll have to roll with the punches. Ravenwest also got engaged officially to Carmine, which I suppose is not surprising. Good for the two of them, I hope it doesn't cause any further spontaneous idiocy outbursts from the two of them. Last tour's nonesense has made me weary of having to deal with it.  
  
Ain't I a ray of sunshine today. Ah well. Time sleep, see what happens on the morrow.

# 84th of Scion

Vigil Keep. Settling back into soldiering life.  
Mostly watches, equipment checks, counting stocks and a lot of accounting for engineering.  
Spent most of the day writing down inventories, so I'm going to keep it short here.  
  
No word yet where we're going.

# 85th of Scion

Lion's Arch, Fort Marriner. Another one of those places that becomes so familiar it is almost like a second home. A large, spacey, second home, festooned with heavy cannons and bastions.  
We marched here earlier today, from the Keep. Mostly quiet. Did a patrol into the town afterwards. Seemed prudent, with the uptick in disorder in Kryta, perhaps some of it filtered down into Lion's Arch. Turned out to be a calm town, of course. Ever since they put Kiel in charge, Lion's Arch's actually been turning into a somewhat decent town. Only detained one girl, who looked like she was robbing people's houses. Small fry in a big pool. We handed her over to the Lions just as well, in case they feel the need to look into it. They might not, but it doesn't matter much to me. Just another day with a job done.  
  
Forgewood, Grimstone and Calder are back, alongside the Warmaster. So is Athelstan. It's weird, it feels like they've all been gone for much longer than they have. Calder must've only missed a tour, but it feels seasons since I spoke to him. Forgewood might as well have come back from a different lifetime. Do you think every tour changes us? I don't know. I'm not sure if I would recognise myself if I looked back even a year from now. Sometimes it feels as if every year under arms is worth five of them at home. Didn't I write something like this before? I can't remember.  
  
The people are still the same, though. Sure, half of everyone I know is dead or transferred out, but Ashen is always Ashen, no matter what sort of people you put unto it. A pack, of a sort, if you want to look to Wolf's Teachings. You notice it when we just stand there and talk. Not even intelligent talk, just whatever comes up. Crude jokes. Horrible puns. The same smirks. The same stupid half-laughs. Ashen's Ashen.  
We must be the weirdest Chapter in the Vigil.  
Sometimes I wonder if they sent me here as punishment when I re-enlisted. Some angry recruiter just lopping all the basket cases together, see what happens.  
Bah, that's just the paranoia.

Somewhere far away, Cleartide is laughing.

# 86th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
We're putting the strain on the troops, going to go through training for a good few days.  
We decided to put them into one of the more harrowing scenario's: group sparring, only armed with shields, and allowed to use circumstantial magic. One groups had to hold a flag on a bridge, while the other had to seize it. Two minutes preparatory time, and then go.  
Not surprisingly, the attack team lowered its head and bull-charged it. Not the best tactic, considering, but there you go. Unimaginative. In a real fight, casualties would've been high. Very high. Thankfully, this was only a spar, so, you know. In the end, it was a draw. Kaitark managed to chase the Sigra, who had the flag, off the bridge, and Cinderkeeper had to sprint to catch them. All in all, would've been a good exercise to use as a lesson to improve upon. It got marred when Grimstone decided to dig his talons into Small after she tried to blink him along. Had to yank him off her before he could do too much damage. Still. We almost go through an exercise without injuries. Almost! Command's dealing with Grimstone, for the remainder, though I have a feeling it won't be good. Marcus seemed disappointed.  
  
Follow-up was even more of a disaster, they Sinclair and Cinderkeeper ended up putting the boot down, and had the folks exhaust themselves. Old Blues collapsed, heat exhaustion. I cut it short before it became too ridiculous. I managed to salvage the entire situation by actually debriefing the lot, and prompting the troops to use the exercise as a springboard towards improvement. We'll be doing similar exercises again, where we'll monitor them for improvement. It won't be easy, but I'm sure they'll give us something to work with. Teach them some tactical thinking under pressure.  
I have good faith in them; they're good soldiers, after all, they just need to be guided and encouraged.  
  
Like this new recruit we have, Topples. Apparently a circus actor turned soldier, his head filled with utter nonesense and idealistic crap. But he really, really wants to become a Vigil soldier. He goes around totting a silly sword, using moves he invented himself while loudly yelling made-up names for them. Sounds like a good way to get yourself killed, right? Well, I've offered to teach him how to properly wield a sword. Here's hoping he retains the same energy for actual soldiering, and he'll turn alright. Torment, maybe he'll even turn out half-decent. Just have to give them all a chance.  
  
Well, anyway, more training tomorrow. Here's hoping I don't come back with more tales of woe!  
  
Oh, before I forget, I gave Sigra permission to head into the markets, for some ingredients or reagents as she calls them. Seemed stupid not to, considering where we are is likely the one place where you can find anything you might be looking for. It's for her elixirs, which I think somehow fall under my engineering budget? Chemical substances and such, right? Well anyway, I'll see what she brings in tomorrow. Hopefully not something ridiculous, like a Karka egg.

# 87th of Scion

Lion's Arch, weather clear, wind... whoa, I haven't done that in a while. Not since Orr. Weather markings, eh.  
Well, weather clear, wind mostly soft, occasional gust out west to north-west. There.  
  
Another training day, though a far better one than yesterday. As far I was concerned anyway. I had Mithra play second eye on some exercises. Did her well, I think. She's not adjusted completely into the First Crusader seat, so being able to follow my lead while still having her boots in a position of authority is a good way for her to get more comfortable.  
  
As for the exercises themselves, they went well. Very well, even. They surprised me by trying to solve the first one, supposed to be little more than a versus team brawl, with negotiation. I suspect this is because I encouraged them to think of other solutions yesterday, and encouraged them not to forget negotiation is sometimes an option. So, they managed to achieve the most complete draw possible, by simply exchanging their coloured marking rags, and calling it there. I was somewhat stumped. And since I firmly believe that if they can manage to outsmart the instructor, they win, I'll give them credit for it. I took my time to explain that doing so, however, meant their neither lost nor won, in perhaps the most literal of ways possible. Still, it gives me some hope.  
  
The second exercise was more straightforwards, VIP defense. Sel got to play the evil dragon lieutenant to the Elder Dragon of Unicorns, Bill. Her words. It went well enough, defense team in the advantage, as usual. Picked a bridge to hold, meaning the attack team didn't have any room to maneuver. Attack team actually had a pretty good plan, managed to separate Sel from the others with a magical wall. Lalowa then tried to leap to the other side in Wolf form, but got knocked sideways by Ravenwest and Wyman, into the swift-moving waters below. Mithra fished her out really quick, thankfully, or that might have been a potentially lethal error. In the end, Lalowa came off with only having inhaled some water, so she's all good.  
  
She got a lot worse from Sinclair, mind, who is apparently now her lover.  
Yeah.  
I know.  
  
Anyway, on to things that make sense again; the exercise went fine on my end, but apparently Sinclair and Lorma's group ran into trouble. Made the mistake of letting the troops roleplay out a hostage situations, which devolved into some sort of circus act. Well, what did you expect. Sinclair then apparently resorted to the age-old solution of boring them to death with a lecture about dragon minions. At least, that's what Lionhead tells me.  
  
I took Sigra, Lionhead and Nirra out into the town, sat down and hat some food under the guise of doing some restock work for Sigra. Which is true, except that Sigra already knows what she wants, and will go and get those supplies tomorrow. Again, still hoping it's not a Karka egg. The food was great, though, we ate fried squid, prawn and friend fish with lemon, while talking about different things. Seems the mood in the Chapter is getting slightly better, or at least, hasn't been torpedo'd by accident these last few days. All in all, good news.  
  
Small's stable, though I didn't visit today. Got a bit busy. I'll see her tomorrow.  
Also started on Topple's swordwork. The man's three different sorts of airhead, but at least he's a quick and passionate learner. I had him go through his paces and guards quick, and they seem to have stuck. Tomorrow we'll do strikes, and from there it's practice, practice, practice until he's ready for actual sparring.  
  
What else? Oh, right, how could I forget. Nirra said the big explosion out west has something to do with a Bloodstone. Lionhead seems to think we used a gun to shoot one, or at least, that's what I made out. I'm not so sure, none of that seems very positive, though all of it seems almost too silly to be true. Here's hoping Kraxxi's big explosion was just an airship going down in a freak accident or something, rather than anything involving a damn Bloodstone.

# 88th of Scion

Lion's Arch, no big exercise today, just the usual daytime shenanigans.  
  
I took Topples out for more swordplay, going into proper strikes. It has to be said, his bizarre habit of naming all his moves aside, the kid has a knack for the whole thing. He's certainly motivated, and absorbs the training like a sponge. Getting to actually practice his swordwork will only mean he's going to improve from here. I mean, he's still a beginner, but he's a strong beginner, even after only a handful of days. We'll see when we can slowly get him used to the strikes and guards, before I'll put on the armour and padding and let him take a few swings.  
  
Sigra went and got her goods, which then directly resulting in myself nearly getting chewed out by Maeva for it. Or I still will, not sure. Apparently making an exception was a case of insubordination versus the order to remain within the limits of the encampment. Seems to be suddenly abnormally rigid, since we were training folks outside the camp boundaries yesterday, and we were not given any reason to believe the camp limits where absolute borders. I mean, we've sent folks outside camp borders virtually every camp we've made, provided they had a First Crusader's permission. Considering I did give Sigra explicit permission and orders relating to the materials request, I don't see why it's suddenly no longer within my remit. Ah well, we'll see, I suppose.  
  
Kaitark had a little run-in with Sel's golemite, and then decided to try and pry the little thing open, despite me telling him not to. When I reprimanded him, he did the usual sassy thing of talking back. Eh. Made him think I'd given him a ridiculous work task for a few moments, just to press home who was in charge, before I let him off the hook. Besides, I've found that calling him "lemon" *really* gets on his nerves. So I do that now every time he manages to tick me off too much.  
  
Oh, and I spoke to Wyman. I noticed she kept greeting folks with norn sayings, like "Bear's strength" and the like, so I was curious. Granted, I was also just generally curious about a stoic but effective enough soldier who ends up standing in the most dramatic place she can find. Anyway, managed to get something out of her, which helps to give me a little bit of an idea. Raised in the Shiverpeaks, parents were apparently the sort for travel. Ended up in the Seraph, which explains some of the attitude. Stoic woman. I kind of like her. She and Kristen do the same "I-am-amused-by-your-fumbling" smirk.  
Makes me wish Kristen was around more, too. I'm sure Daufy'd be right at home in the tropicals here, and Olena could soar about in the port-wind, maybe get into a pecking match with those exceptionally ugly seagulls that keep shitting on the bloody parade ground! I'd wear my helmet all the time, if it didn't make my head feel like a boiled egg.  
  
I'm complaining. But yes, more woman of my dreams, less bird shit.

# 89th of Scion

Nothing to report today. Lion's Arch, all quiet. Went through all the supplies, and then checked in at the Aerodrome. Before long, I was helping out a stripping crew with removing deck plates, and by the time I realized how hungry I was, the day was gone. Thankfully didn't miss a shift, but you know.  
  
Good news is that I now get to bring in the gearheads for a look around without the folks being too twitchy about deck-tourists. Make use of that tomorrow.

# 90th of Scion

Lion's Arch, within the walls of Marriner.  
Again, one of those quiet and restful days where the wind is slow, the soldiers loaf around, until they're suddenly called to watch or some menial task. It's when the people are are their most lazy, in a way, safe inside the big Griffon's nest of Marriner's walls. Like a pair of golden eggs.  
  
I took some folks out into the Aerodrome earlier, as I said I would. Looked around the place, gave them a brief tour. I mean, it's nominally instructional, but it was as much a sightseeing tour as anything else. We even got onboard one of the vessels in dock. We were careful, so the crews didn't mind.  
It's always something familiar, and yet so far away. As if the time we were onboard the warships was different from the time we fought the ground battles. Girls like Mithra, Nirrae, even Kalla... I mean, they understand the ship well enough, but they can't really see what it in a fight. There's something terrifying about having no-where to run, and having no power about what is going to happen to you. Or at least, that's the way it feels. On a ship, the world is always so much smaller than it is on the ground.  
Anyway, they had a good enough time, and I got to be melancholic about a horrible, horrible period of time.  
  
Different news, Azzis is back around, again. For some reason, the weird Charr keeps popping up in places. Now, she's apparently looking for her sister, and found nothing else to do but wander into Marriner. I mean, I have nothing against Azzis, even after the entire body-double crisis that happened out in the bogs, but it did strike me as a little odd. I'll keep an eye out, on the off chance it's not just a coincidence.

# 1st of Colossus

Lion's Arch. Scion's end, and into the Colossus days that will see the cold settle in slowly but steadily.  
  
Another day of relative rest, though that's going to change tomorrow. Exercises need doing, see if they learned anything. Here's hoping they show us they're learning, slowly but steadily.  
As a result, today was mostly talking, laughing, teasing. Had a good laugh with Lionhead, Small, Mithra and Topples. The man's enthousiasm is infectious, though I feel a little bad for making fun of him while he all takes it so seriously. Lionhead managed to get him to accept "bang" as power-move. Of course, I had to turn it into a hip-thrust. So, yeah, when Topples goes around yelling "bang", and then hip-thrusting, that's where that came from. It's all good, though. Just... silly.  
  
Only two important things to note, and even then, important is a stretch. One, apparently more folks are getting their sleep disturbed by golemites. I didn't notice jack, but heavy sleeping is just part of me, so no wonder. Sinclair is all up in arms about them, so I hope I get to talk to Sel first. Damn it, I thought I asked her to stop Rustbucket from going around at night, for exactly that reason. Eh, we'll see how that turns out, I suppose.  
  
The other is that Azzis' sister turned up. It explains why I was getting that itch; and then it all came back to me. Azzis' sister *is* that Kiryn or however it's pronounced that paraded as Azzis out in that Sylvari village. Last we saw of them is that they were getting dragged off by a Legion officer for interrogation, after apparently defrauding equipment. Considering they're walking around, I suppose that was all resolved. Still, I don't trust the situation all that much. Azzis and here are apparently meeting up here, both on leave. Seems Azz is having issues fitting in with their warband. That's not surprising. From what I can remember, she's always had a hard time fitting in.  
I have to say, though, the entire situation rubs me the wrong way. I keep getting the feeling those two are up to no good. I'll have to keep a weary eye out. Can't do anything until they cause a ruckus, after all.  
  
Oh, and I have to report Kirashi for attacking Azzis on leave. Yeah. That's going to be fun.  
  
Ah, Kristen, you should be here.  
Teach these people something useful about self-reliance, cut them with the sharpness of your tongue, and give me a long, long kiss to remind me what I'm fighting for.

# 2nd of Colossus

Lion's Arch. A lot of training today. Took a group through a full set of readiness exercises, and they performed surprisingly well. It's good to see they're getting to grips with basic training principles they're not entirely familiar with, and still performing above expectations. Truth be told, I expected to be droning out a lot more about what they did wrong. To my pleasant surprise, I was mostly talking about what they did right!  
We'll see how they hold up tomorrow again.  
  
Asides from that, all is quiet.  
No, really.  
  
I suppose that won't last, eh?

# 3rd of Colossus

Lion's Arch. Another training day. Again, nothing exceptional on my end, except a fairly routine VIP escort exercise that went alright. The VIP managed to get "to safety" by sprinting across half the beach while her escort troops were beating down the attack troops. I mean, it's a technical pass, of not a moral one, if you know what I mean.  
  
Anyway, seems that Sinclair had some more troubles on his side, with Sigra causing a fuss during the exercise. They were doing the same readiness checks, and when the team got gassed inside the building they were clearing, she tried to get clear and ended up clashing with elements of the unit that wanted to stay put. She then stormed out. Worst part is that Sigra is correct in her action; once the probable angle of attack has been established and the unit's intent defined, clearing the area as soon and safely as possible is the correct course of action. Unfortunately, breaking unit cohesion and creating a scene to drive that point home isn't really the way to tackle the situation. Makes me wonder if Sinclair didn't heavy-hand the matter, instead of providing corrective instruction. Eh, I wasn't there, can't say. I might need to talk to Sigra when I have a chance, though. Guidance thing.  
Topples also keeps yelling.  
  
Other news, apparently we're getting an idea of our assignment tomorrow. Warmaster's own words. Good part is that whatever exploded out west? We're not going there. Or at least, that's what I've been told. The Warmaster couldn't say much about what exactly it was either, which only makes our mysterious explosion more mysterious. Typically, when I blow something up, it's fairly hard to miss.  
I suppose that if it was really dire, we'd have heard something less vague about by now, right?  
  
Anyway, still have training duties to perform tomorrow, and after that, I'll have a better idea of where we're going to end up. Torment, I might even let Kristen know discreetly, see if she can't leisurely saunter her way over to where-ever we're going, and cross our paths every now and again. Not too much mind, wouldn't want Maeva to get her panties in a bunch again, but here and there.  
  
Oh, yeah, and the engineering banter is getting out of control. Between Lionhead, Small and myself, we'll get ourselves discipline for being foul-mouthed if we don't watch it.

# 4th of Colossus

Lornar's Pass, right outside the Priory. We're out on a three-day exercise in fieldcraft, letting the folks set up their own camp, and secure their own resources. I'm currently huddled into a snow-trench, keeping comfortable enough as I am. Principle concern seems to be that people are not really prioritizing their shelters too much. They put up a large enough snow-wall around their campsite that will keep the wind out, but not the cold. I'll make a round when most everyone's bedding in, and make sure no-one is going to wake up with grey toes. Frostbite is a rather harsh lesson.  
  
Asides from that, everyone seems to be doing well. I've decided to stay in the camp, even though I could have sat down in the Priory. The cold's not a problem, and it allows me to keep an eye on things in here. Asides from the shelters, they seem to have most of it in hand.  
  
The view is good, too. We're looking right down Mistriven Gorge, and the mountain flanks are gorgeous. In the distance, you can see the Priory bridge span the gap, lit with braziers. When I was in the Priory, I looked around to see if maybe Freyj was here, though it seems I'm unlucky. I caught myself earlier, noting that I don't miss her much as I used to. I devote most of my melancholic musings to Kristen, these days.  
Not actually that surprising, I think. Freyj's all grown up and out of my hair. I suppose I'll see less and less of her as time goes on, while the opposite is true for Kristen. It makes me wish Kristen and I had more children, only so I could see them grow up all over again, and fill my heart with pride.  
  
Oh, in my ramblings, I almost forgot! Warmaster told us, we're going into Ascalon next. Treaty enforcement, Brand patrols, and just generally warding off the enemy where we find them. I'm not exactly excited about going to the brand, but I have to say I'm curious. It's one of the few places in Tyria I haven't been for any length of time, and I look forwards to seeing new lands. In seven days time, we'll be marching through to Ebonhawke from the Reach, and then we'll see what the situation is.  
  
Until then, though, I have a few more days of sneaky Shiverpeak vacation disguised as a training exercise to enjoy.

# 5th of Colossus

Lornar's Pass, still out in the snow.  
  
Everything's quiet enough, as it stands, in the little Ashen Commune the exercise has turned out to be. I'm pleased with the result, more or less, as it proves that our troops, even deprived of leadership, are capable enough to look after their own. If they do "well" without being under lead, they'll do bloody grand when they're under direction by experienced First Crusaders and officers.  
  
Only real news is a small number of curious Priory scholars that drop by now and then, coming to see the Vigil troops wandering around they yard. There's an old Charr scholar, Ariss, whom I met some time ago in Caer Shadowfain, in Orr. She visits, and seems to delight in talking to our folks, especially Calder, whom she knows. She keeps words with Lorma back at the Priory proper, too.  
It's a strangely peaceful place, this camp. The troops seem more relaxed than anything else, and they do good in keeping their stocks filled. Only the cold bothers some, but I think being in the shadow of the Priory halls helps keep the mood serene. Almost as if part of the big libraries extend over all the way here. I think I'll allow them a chance to look inside the building before we leave. Politely, of course, in a way that doesn't disturb the scholars.  
  
As for the remainder, well, I find myself with a surprising amount of time on my hands. I'm observing, but there's little to be remarked. A small error here and there that they learn on their own. Like that you need to pluck a moa before you gut it, not the other way around. So, I talk with the troops, get a feeling for the mood, and am generally won over to maudlin thoughts about home, my wife and my daughter. It's hard not to feel that, being so close to the snow. I mean, I am in my snow shelter again as I write, and I can almost feel the memories course through the ground, as if alive. I dream of little things. Of Freyj laughing at something Usha said. The way Kristen rolls her eyes when she pretends to pay attention to something while her mind wanders.  
It's good, though. It reminds me of what I love, and what I'm here for. It's good to know that I can be so far away, and still so close to home at the same time, you know?

# 6th of Colossus

Last day in Lornar's Pass. I left everyone to their devices, though, Sinclair had camp-watch.  
  
I got to see the Priory. Or at least, some of it. They have some incredible relics in deep storage, below the layers and layers of rocks. I didn't know the foundations ran this deep. There are more books than I've ever seen in one place, some of legends all-but forgotten, and tales of far away places. I can understand what brought Freyja here. I feel like I could spend seasons in here, reading, and forgetting how to soldier.  
Who knows, perhaps I would've made a pretty decent Priory scholar after all, eh?

# 7th of Colossus

Back in Lion's Arch.  
We marched back from our impromptu camping spot outside the Priory earlier today, and had a debrief. Highlighted some of the things that were less admirable about their camping efforts, like forgoing a command chain and lazying about a bit too much. I mean, it was good enough as far as basic camps go, so I'm happy, but not as happy as I could've been. No full military encampment the way we usually keep it. Blame it on a lack of clear rank-defined leaders, but I half expected people like Force or Calder to take some initiative. Pity they didn't.  
  
As it stands now, we're waiting for the march into Ascalon in a few days. No point in settling into the barracks too much, since we'll be marching out sooner rather than later. Wondering how Ascalon's going to turn out. A lot of people seem positive, to be fair, though a warning message about the Brand was posted to try and dampen that a little bit. Guess we'll find out soon enough.  
  
On other matters, I got another letter from Kraxxi, along with a data-crystal that has some notes on ley-line energy theory. Considering I got too close to the one running deep below here in Lion's Arch, she felt it relevant. I'll have to see if I can't have a look at it with Sel sooner or later. Doubt it'll make much sense, but who knows, eh? Maybe I've got a knack for Asuran technology-speak.  
  
Kaitark's also got promoted from Lemon to Lemonade, because his both a lemon and a small cube of sugar.  
Don't question is, just nod and accept the fate bestowed upon you by the cruel logic of your fellow soldiers.  
That, and it still manages to tick him off. Y'know, I should probably make sure that's not developing into a more persistent issue now I think about it. I'll do that at one point, while I also write out some letters back to Kraxxi and Kristen.

# 8th of Colossus

Everything's quiet.  
Still in Lion's Arch. I didn't sleep too well, so I'm tired. I didn't get to writing Kraxxi, or even Kristen. I know that's lazy of me, in a way. I'll do it when my head feels clearer. I don't know, today just didn't do well. After I'd gone through the stockage, checked the engineering supplies for the departure to Ascalon and set down with my own kit, I was spent. I didn't even get to have a swim in the water.

# 9th of Colossus

Lion's Arch.  
A few days until we're off into the deep end of Ascalon, and all the needed tests and checks are up as a result. A mundane kit-check today, which mostly just takes a lot of time. I was quick enough to get ahead in the line, so it was over fairly quickly and painlessly. Odds are will get medical checks too, before we're carried off into the scorched dirt of Ascalon.  
  
I'm looking forwards to it, really. How the land looks, now, so many years after the Searing. I mean, I've been to Diessa once or twice, but that's the extent of it. I think it might be beautiful. It has to be, in a way, since the humans and Charr have been fighting over it for nigh-on two hundreds years before the treaty. I wonder what the contested trophy looks like.  
And the Brand, of course. That'll be a treat, in the same way Arah was. Dragons manage to do this thing, where their corruption re-makes things in their own, beautiful way. I sometimes wonder if it's just me, seeing beauty in things where I shouldn't.  
Actually, I'll ask Freyj. And Kristen. Maybe they'll see it too.  
  
Oh, I also passed on Kraxxi's data crystal to Sel for analysis. I trust the blue-haired Asura to a surprising degree, so I'm looking forwards to what she'll find out.

# 10th of Colossus

Lion's Arch.  
As predicted, medical check-ups. Nothing out of the usual there, just more waiting and getting poked out.  
Tomorrow is departure day. Off to another stretch peacekeeping in Ascalon, which I have a feeling ends up meaning dealing with whatever hardcore bands of separatists and renegades that still hide around, cleaning out Ghosts that happen to be in our way, and dealing with Goldies and Branded too. It'll be an adventure, that's for sure. I also heard that there are Ogres around. Haven't seen any of those in years.  
  
In different news, Sel had a look at Kraxxi's crystal, and found out the slightly chilling notion that long-term ley-line exposure isn't exactly healthy for you. That makes me worry, even though I haven't really felt ill at all. We've been dealing with a lot of magic, and I can remember seeing open ley-lines rippling through areas in the Maguuma. Hell, that one place near the Chak was positively irradiating the place. So, I don't know what to think. Am I danger? Torment, I don't even know how I would know, and Sel doesn't seem much the wiser.  
I'll let Marcus know, if only to just keep him in the loop. And Klixxa, too. She's running that magical operation department the Chapter set up, and she's an Asura. Between Sel, Klix, Marcus and Kraxxi, I'm sure they'll figure it out, right?

# 11th of Colossus

Ebonhawke.  
We marched through the big gates not too long ago, finally seeing this piece of Ascalon I've heard so much about. At first, the impression is not very favourable. The houses are small and ugly, built in rows that seem to spiral around the center.  
  
We got the rough end, too. We arrived, and are getting bunked into a cramped Ebon Vanguard house that seems to have been built haphazardly. It's all narrow corridor and low doorframes. Well, for me anyway. Almost smacked my head into a support beam once or twice.  
The walls and quarries, however, are worth a mention. These big dams outside the Reach? Well, Ebonhawke's walls are like stacking several of those on top of eachother, and then adding rows of extra fortifications along the lips. They must have dug up half a mountain to build those walls; no wonder the houses are so small, when the walls are that high! Weird people, Ascalonians. After their first Great Wall, you'd think they'd have figured out that the Charr would've gotten past these ones too, eventually.  
  
Either way, it's not a charming place. We got dragged into a skirmish on the first bloody day, too. Someone tried to set off a bomb, and then jumped us when we tried to secure the site. Battle in the streets lasting a couple of minutes followed, though we managed to repulse them well enough. Apparently, there was also a prison break on the other side of the town, at the same time. I'm thinking they noticed us moving into the city, panicked, thinking we'd crackdown on them, and then the separatists set into motion something prematurely. Distraction bombing in the market, and then bust out some high-profile scumbag? Who knows. Either case, I think that backfired for them, as we took them apart nicely. Only Holm got a light wound from it, partly because Ravenwest pointed out the market as a potential ambush site before we got there. Result was Claridge was already keeping a barrier in the back of her head, and when they jumped us, we were fully shielded.  
The rest of it went quickly. Troops did well, I am pleased. It's always good when they let themselves be wielded like a sword, and then they strike true.  
  
So, yes, eventful start of our peacekeeping tour. I'm starting to see how hard this is. I mean, out in central Tyria and the capitals, everyone has mostly gotten over the more petty racial stereotypes. Out here, all the way iun the countryside? Resentment runs hot and deep. It seems we'll be rooting out separatists and renegades out of their hiding places for a while. Or at least try to. Ebon Vanguard captain, who also is called Willhem, for some reason, is already working on figuring out what happened to us earlier. Me? I'm mostly tired. More exertion than planned, and the climate is not yet so cold that it is comfortable.  
  
And another thing, apparently there's a rumour about that Ravenwest was on the wrong side of the firing line during the treaty. Some folks were worried that might turn against them. I told Marcus straight up that even if it was true, I saw Ravenwest kill half a dozen of the separatists earlier today. I mean, I have started to doubt a large number of things about Ravenwest since I heard about that thing in her head, but not her loyalty to what we do. If only because she's smart enough to know that'd be self-destructive.  
Anyway, I talked to Marcus about it, didn't seem to be a problem. Anyway, I'd have to squash that sort of rumour on principle. Bad for morale to think of one of your own as being an enemy, eh?  
  
Ah well.  
As Kaila would say:  
ASCALOOOOOOOOOOOOON

# 12th of Colossus

Ebonhawke.  
  
Quiet day, in contrast to yesterday. Seems that after their setback, the separatists have quieted down again a fair bit. Only traffic we've seen are Vanguard people we share the guardhouse with. They seem alright, just asked us to pull the Charr off of guard duty. I agree. After standing guard with Cinderkeeper for a moment, it kept feeling like we were seconds away from being shot in the head by a sharpshooter or something. Glad I have a thick helmet.  
  
First Crusaders also got a free pass to have a meal and a drink over in the local tavern. Interesting concession, considering I'd probably start checking if there were any bombs placed under my seat before I'd try and sit down. It's strange, even out at the encampment, I've not often felt so... besieged. Maybe in Caer Sahodwfain, or in the Brink. But here? Torment, this place is supposedly 'pacified'. Seems more like a civil war in disguise than just some insurgency, if you ask me.  
  
Also, apparently one of the reasons we're all here is because there's suspicion the White Mantle crazies that bugged us in Kessex and Harathi intent to move on disrupting the treaty. So it's not "just" peacekeeping. Well, I'd be irked, except I'm looking forwards to showing those bastards up for what they did. I hope they're out here, and that we find them. I'll be wearing armour this time.  
  
Ah yes; corsets. Apparently they're like a belt for your body that makes your waist look thinner and your breasts larger. I'm curious, might need to see if I can't bring one over. I'm sure I can trick Kristen into trying it, just for the laughs of it.

# 13th of Colossus

Ebonhawke.  
Things are heating up a bit. A patrol spotted a rift outside the city gates, spewing out red-looking crystalline beings that sound a whole lot like they are bloodstone elementals. We went to double-check it, but only found a few blundering ogres around the place, trying to attack the Ebon Vanguard post there. They were repulsed quickly enough. Turns out there's more than a few highly territorial Kraals around the area.  
No rifts or portals, though, which is better than having an enormous hole in reality sitting out there.  
If we're lucky, it was just a freak anomaly, and even then, it spells bad news for the world if that's happening. If we're not lucky, it's something malicious we don't understand yet.  
  
Either case, it's put me on notice even more than we already were. Not just renegades, but White Mantle and unexplained magical manifestations. I suppose it might've something to do with the Foefire. Either way, I don't know what to expect, and that scares me a little. Doesn't feel very safe. Just got to work on not showing that to everyone else, I suppose.

# 14th of Scion

Ebonhawke.  
Held training today, how to deal with large opponents. Following a lecture by Marcus on the nature of Ogres. Nailed them down in theory, but it's a fair bit different in person. Granted, I'm almost as big as a healthy Ogre laddie, though they're slightly more hefty in the shoulders than me. Still, Ogres is all about watching for that one critter you forgot to kill to suddenly pop up and bite you somewhere soft and exposed. And then the oaf wanders over and smashes half of a tree into your head until you're some sort of meat-based food spread.  
  
I got to walk a new recruit called Penbroke through some paces. She's good, but not quite so good that she gave me an inordinate amount of trouble. Managed to figure out a few kinks in the fighting style, and give them some pointers on how to handle it next. Only oddity is they tried to roll mid-fight. Tss. That sort of stuff gets you killed.  
  
Same Penbroke is the one I teased earlier, when she made some sort of weird remark about sleeping with an Elder Dragon. Well, turns out the girl was a prostitute before all of this, so she didn't quite take it the way it was intended when we made jokes about that. We talked about it, though. I mean, I don't really care what they used to do, as long as they're fighting with us now. Made sure she knew that too. No point on making the girl feel bad on account of something stupid like that. Torment, we have folks with worse pasts than that, after all.  
  
Ebonhawke. Turned out to be a rather cramped little city.

# 15th of Colossus

Ebonhawke.  
  
Quiet today. I took the folks out on a patrol in which I had them recite basic principles, and go over some material from yesterday. I mean, just to keep them busy, partly, but also to give Penbroke a chance to pick up something.  
Also let them take ten at the local pub. Just establish presence a bit, while still keeping an eye out. Doesn't hurt to let the people here know we're around in a friendly manner.  
  
Got a package in the post, from Kraxxi. Nothing solid on the ley-lines yet, though she's sent me a piece of chalk-like stone that has some residual magic in it. Thing buzzes and crackles a bit, and moves around on its own when you put on the floor. She sent me more stuff, too. Some water from the Auric Basin, and the fabled font of Maguuma. Water's said to have powerful healing powers. Also a piece of exotic-looking wood that I get to whittle away at, and, here it comes, a raptor egg. Not one of the big ones, but those small vicious ones that dart around in packs. I don't know if it survived the journey without cooling off too much, but I've decided to wrap it in a thick cloth, and put it a chicken coop here. I'll carry it around on myself when we leave, see if anything happens.  
Not sure what I'd do with it, though. Maybe give it to Kaila. She's said something about wanting to keep a pet earlier.  
  
That's that. Folks are behaving so far, and there haven't yet been anymore really major incidents. I picked up on some small disciplinary infractions here and there, but nothing worrying. Kaila's apparently being looked at by someone, and they're planning to try and fix the mesmer-juju in her head sooner or later. She seemed rather anxious about the entire thing, and make it seem worse than I suspect it probably is. Well, I hope so, anyway.  
  
I miss Kristen quite a bit. She'd have hated Ebonhawke, but the hills and forests outside the gates look magnificent, and I don't doubt she'd have enjoyed venturing out there. Well, I suppose she has, since she's been in Ascalon before. It's an interesting landscape, the colour of old leaves you find in the forests where it never snows, and plains the colour of rust and dried grass. Or dried blood. I suppose that's another thing these grasslands are soaked with.  
Well, anyway, I am awaiting the orders to leave the city, and venture deeper away into the Ascalonian countryside.  
  
No news from the mystery rift or the White Mantle. Just Ogres on the outskirts and the threat of separatists having over our heads.

# 16th of Colossus

Ebonhawke.  
  
We went out today, but not far. East-gate, towards the big Ogre Kraal. Since they've been attacking the Vanguard repeatedly, they start falling into our interest bracket. It's a really big Kraal, and they've been eating people. Or at least, that's what it looks like. We found a blazing fire outside their encampment, along with scattered bones. Some human, a few bigger than that. Looks like they boiled the meat off of them. Well, a tribe of maneater-ogres being aggressive is bad news, but it does make me feel a little better about the knowledge that we're probably going to end up attacking their Kraal directly and drive them off, sooner than later. They're attacking the city and killing people. Doesn't make me feel much better about it all, but I know what I have to do.  
  
The rest of the evening was fairly quiet. Apparently Lance took apart some Ogres off north, and they got rewarded a drinking rations for it. Somehow, Lionhead managed to turn that into getting a few mugs of ale into her hand. Naturally, I took advantage of that. It was pretty good, too.  
  
We had a rundown girl wander into the guardhouse, starving and looking for work. We took her in for a bit, set her next to the fire and at least fed them a meal. Marcus said she might stick around and enlist, given how we do pay folks that list with us. They were tacit, mostly. Badly burned in the face, which makes me wonder how that happened, of course. I didn't think to ask.  
We'll see if they hang around tomorrow.

# 17th of Colossus

Ebonhawke.  
  
Hard day today. We marched out west, surrounded an Ogre Kraal in Widlin Narrows, and then proceeded to kill everyone in it. I mean, I know they were attacking the Vanguard, and possibly eating folks, but... well, I don't take pride in what I did today. To be fully honest, I feel a little sick. Shaken. My mind tells me we did what was needed, but my heart knows it wasn't right. I don't know.  
We killed the chieftain, and then cornered his mate. We tried to reason with them, but they attacked us, and we killed them all in response. When we marched out, the village was just littered with corpses.  
  
Then, when we got back, something strange happened. I got put in as temporary second for Blade, which means Lorma's been taken off the Senior lists. I'm not sure why that's happened, she was doing well enough in the field. I don't feel like I can just go up and ask them about it either. I mean, I don't mind taking the extra duties, I'm just mystified as how that's suddenly turned around.  
  
On top of that, we had a very confused Charr wander into the guardhouse. Well, wander, he was held up at the gate and questioned by Demorique, who was unusually diligent in his work. I suppose we have to give him some credit. Anyway, the Charr's called Rexzimus, and isn't obviously injured, but suffers from some memory loss. We're suspecting a mesmer tampering with his brain, because he's getting fragments of it all back. He keeps going on about a battle, a Vigil uniform and how he's lost sight of his sire. I decided to let him inside at least until he feels better, and some his memory returns.  
  
I'm also trying to come up for ideas for this raptor egg. I've been keeping it in my pack, close to my back so it stays warm, and at night, I wrap it in a foot-wrap and keep it in the sheets, but I'm not sure that's what I'm supposed to do. Spirits, I can't even remember if raptors incubate their eggs at all. Or how long. Torment, the thing might not even be fertilized, and I'll be running around with a rotten egg for a few days.

# 18th of Colossus

Ebonhawke.  
We wiped out another Kraal today. A big one. Tore it down, and burnt the remains. I don't know, it was necessary, apparently. I mean, of course it was. I know it was. They were eating people. We found bodily remains of folks that got captured and butchered for food. Still, I don't really enjoy driving them all off. They'll be going north, Marcus told me, so I guess that's something. At least now we destroyed their big Kraal, we won't have to fight them too often again. It's like killing Grawl again. Just primitives who don't know what their ways brings them. And of course, if they prick us often enough, we'll come around and burn their Kraals. I know it's what we needed to do.  
  
Chapter's also holding a Mad King's day event in a few days. I have a nifty enough idea for a costume that I'll have to work on tomorrow. Not today, though. I didn't feel like doing much of anything except get a drink and then lie down and try and forget exactly how many Ogres we butchered today.  
  
Kristen, sometimes I am really, really glad you're not here. Not because I think it's dangerous, but because I'm afraid you'd tell me I wasn't doing the right thing anymore. Or perhaps because I'm afraid you wouldn't understand my doubts. That'd scare me.  
I just need some sleep.

# 19th of Colossus

Ebonhawke.  
Another bomb went off. We helped clear the debris, and some of the dead bodies. Looks like the separatists tacked together a high velocity explosive, and then poured some nails into the mix. Wasn't good. Tried not to look at the dead too much and focus on the work. Sweep the place for secondaries, try to figure out something about the actual bomb. Nothing useful to anyone, really, but something that helps me focus my attention on something that I can solve.  
  
We all went to the pub afterwards, including the warmaster, and started drinking some of it away. It was pleasant, distracting. It's good coming together a little bit, and sharing a moment after a day of bad work. Takes the edge off a little. I don't know about these past few days. It's hardest when you're alone, and have cogs whirring and spinning away in your head, wondering if what we're doing is right, and standing still too long here and there. Ebonhawke's a pained place. The sort of town where everyone is used to seeing dead children thrown up on a cart.  
They're right when they say we can't understand how they think. I don't think it's worth it, though. A place like this? It corrupts the spirit. They'd have been better off tearing down the walls and letting the Charr have it. There's nothing worth fighting for, and yet these people bomb each other over a few winding streets, crooked cobblestones and a curtain wall that I strongly suspect cost more blood to build than it ever saved.  
  
Hmph!  
Yeah. And then you see an Ebon Vanguard recruit, stammering with the shock of their first encounter, finally realising that "peacekeeping' means carrying the bodies of dead children over to carts, so they can be dumped into a mass grave, while some priest asks for a long-departed god to give a damn.  
  
Bad thoughts. The tavern thing was nice. I wish I had more and stronger ale. A good bout of heavy drinking would've helped today.

# 20th of Colossus

Ebonhawke.  
Quiet.  
  
Spent a lot of the day thinking, making sense of things.  
I'm not sure if it helped.

# 21st of Colossus

Ebonhawke.  
  
A quit day. Yesterday's reflection helped calm the mind a little, work through some things that rubbed me wrong. Nothing like self-reflection to sober up the mood a bit. But then, we're here because of greater things than individual lives. Ascalon's like a badly healing wound. Still raw and ugly around the edges. Man-eating ogres. Terror bombings born out of ancient hatred. Not exactly the stuff of legends, but at least we try and stay on the right side of it all. We're doing it for a good cause. And I know how much that sounds like an excuse, even as I write it down, but we really are. We're trying to mend a wound that's 249 years old. I suppose it's ironic that we're killing for peace.  
Though on the flip-side, at least we're not those people killing for more war.  
  
I took the folks out on a small random patrol, more to keep ourselves busy than anything. Took them past the blast-marked curtain walls, and that little gate that's supposed to lead south into the Crystal Desert and Elona. The sobering thought is that we could be ordered to march through that gate into some of the most hostile territories in Tyria at a moment's notice. I wonder if we'd be ready for that.  
  
A few business items; I had Sigra and Sel manufacture a telescoping tripod on Klixxa's request. She needs it for some sort of recording device. It might be about Kaila's mind-thing, or maybe about that rift we saw, not sure. Klixxa's been busy a lot, apparently. I guess the increase in wild magic means any department dealing with magical anomalies is going to have their hands full. She also said something about ley-line exposure was less likely to make my nose fall off, but rather may mean I can't get any more children. Or worse, they'll come out with extra eyes or something. That'd make me sad.  
I hope it's not true.  
  
I also had to call up an old turret we apparently kept in locked stock in Marriner. It's one of those things Sigra worked on, way back when we were both in Orr. But, since Sigra took a blow to the head, and lost almost all her papers in the meantime, it's the only working copy. I'm going to try and call it up, maybe help Sigra reverse engineer the thing. Shouldn't be exceptionally hard, since she made the damned thing to begin with.  
  
What else? Oh yeah, tomorrow is the Mad King's day party. That'll be interesting I suppose.  
  
Oh, and my raptor egg! I put it in my back, sure the thing went cold and dead, but then I took it out, and it felt warm on itself. I was thinking it was like one of the big raptors, who sit on their eggs to hatch them, but if it's cold-hatching, the critter inside might be more akin to a drake than a raptor. I know from the ice drakes in the foothills that they just lay their eggs in a cave, and they hatch from the ambient temperature. I'm going to wrap this little eggy into a few of my footwraps, and keep it in my fieldpack. Who knows, maybe it'll spawn life as of yet, eh?

# 22nd of Colossus

Okay! I am struggling with both having much too much alcohol in my blood, and having half of it flushed out with adrenaline. Now I'm mostly just nauseous and waiting for it all to settle. I tried lying down, but everything started spinning so quickly I thought I was going to hurl.  
  
Ebonhawke, Mad King's day. So, uh, we had the fancy dress party. I brought a Seraph suit made out of thick cardboard to which I attached some copper plating, before I had the thing painted in the correct colours. We had some pretty great from everyone else too. Lionhead was in an entirely too revealing outfit meant to be Kasmeer Meade. Ravenwest had something grotesque and bright purple that was meant to be Kralkatorik, complete with horns and everything. Carmine, the star of the show, came as Prince Rurik. Oh, and Klixxa! Klixxa decided to come as Maeva, which might have been just about the most offensive and hilarious thing I've seen. There was a contest, too. I got second, and won an especially crafted silver medal for it. Carmine got the gold, and Force, who was a wizard that could make ale disappear, got bronze. Mithy got witlessly drunk off of nectar, and I ended up drinking too much. I think I took a piss against a tree, right in front of everyone.  
  
Yeah, and then, just as it was all about to wind down, and I was looking forwards to falling over into a bed while merrily drunk, one of those thrice-damned rifts opened right outside the inn we were in. Luckily, nothing came out, because I doubt a Chapter armed with toy weapons and cardboard armour was going to make much of a dent in anything. Of course, that evaporated the mood pretty quickly, and left most of us feeling pretty damn frayed. At least, that's how I feel right now.  
The rift came back again, while I was right on top of it. That didn't help either. Klixxa asked me some questions that makes me think she thinks it might be affecting me. Making me ill. I don't know. It's hard to tell what's the alcohol and what's a potentially catastrophic magical overload. I feel sick either way. Makes me afraid that things are happening that I'll regret later. I don't want to disappoint Kristen by dying weak and frail, while my teeth fall out. Not when there is still so much I want to do.  
  
But yes, the rifts. I'm now in the inn, not for the party, but because we're quartered here for the day, see if the rift comes back a third time. It's bad news anyway. Rifts appearing in a city as closely packed as this, it'll only add to the loss of life. What's worse is that if they're appearing because magic is seeping into the world, there's very little we can do about them. We can't destroy them, we can't stop the from appearing. Only thing we're capable of is to try and stop anyone from getting killed if and when they appear, and then only if we're close enough to respond to them to begin with.  
Rifts... if they start popping out bloodstone elementals, it's going to kill a lot of people. I wonder why they're all appearing here, too. Maybe there's a ley-line? Maybe it's because it's close to the Desert Gate? Maybe it's a plot by White Mantle, trying to tear apart the treaty in some complicated ploy?  
  
I'm drunk, and tired. I'm going to lie down.

# 23rd of Colossus

No-one came running to wake me in the night, so I think we didn't see any more rifts. Slept well, though. I woke up a few times, but I had a pitcher of water kept ready next to the bed, and I drank all of it. Helped, hangover in the morning was fairly light. I had to spit out some bile that was eating a hole in my stomach, but that's about. Others were worse for wear.  
  
We finally left Ebonhawke, and marched down the road, north, into the countryside. There's a hill there in which the Charr and Vanguard have set up a large tent, the site of the treaty negotiations. They've been ongoing for years now, with no real end in sight. The separatists and the renegades keep throwing spanners into the works. Everything here is a target for someone. Pickets get picked off, supplies fouled or stolen... I had the engineers put on notice and check the encampment for any foul play at least twice a day. Even so, I suspect we'll see something go wrong, sooner or later.  
  
I like it better out here. It's no less lethal, but there are trees and amber-coloured plains that have all the colours of autumn, something we don't see much in the Shiverpeaks. It's pretty, in a way. Very rocky. There are many hills and rocky formations, which contrasts a lot with the open plains of Kryta. They don't even come close to comparing with the cold mountains, of course, but few things can. We even passed the edge of the brand. It's nearby enough that you can see a feint haze hanging over it, like a bruised aurora borealis.  
  
The Charr and Vanguard camps are different. Charr are on the other side of the hill, set up in an armoured cordon and an outlying minefield. Big transport tanks too, and a troop supplement that could fight a small invasion. If Ebonhawke wasn't as deeply fortified, it might even have threatened the settlement. Torment, that might even be intentional. The Vanguard folks are more spread out. Clusters of tents and now semi-permanent watch towers dotting the perimeter. They're least well-protected from the insurgents, but they're out in force just as much as the Charr. No wonder the Vanguard delegation in Ebonhawke itself is anemic at best, half their army is out here at the summit.  
Well, if the White Mantle are trying anything, this is the place. I suppose we'll know.  
  
Missing Kristen a fair bit.  
Never thought I'd start feeling lonely surrounded by three armies, but there you go. Just feels further away from home than I've ever been before, even though I know that doesn't make too much sense. Ascalon's right over the mountain ridges. And still, because all of this is new to me, it feels like I might as well be in Cantha.

# 24th of Colossus

Horrid day. Where do I start?  
So, a rift opened right above the encampment, flooded the place with big crystalline elementals, some the size of Orrian abominations. We fought hard until the rift collapsed, but it put us all on notice. Marcus and Maeva were both out for the count afterwards, with the latter going completely haywire. She's got shards of the red crystal in her body, which apparently pumped her full of wild magic. It was so bad that I thought she was going to end up corrupted, and we'd put her down. Calder and Kaitark seemed to agree with the notion that it was dangerous, and the engineers bagged down the tent in which she's kept in case she *explodes*. That's how insane it is. I keep seeing that one crazy cultist in Harathi pull out that red gem, and then detonating like it was an explosive four times the size. I don't want to know what those shards can do to a body.  
It's bad enough we're reasonably afraid that one of our officers might be about to pop like firecracker because of them.  
  
Sinclair and I took patrols around the perimeter, but that didn't help much. We found more rifts, one in a Charr camp just across the ridge from here, and another out over the open road. More of those red crystalline entities moping about, too. Lorma told me they'd found four or five of those blasted rents in reality during scouting operations. Bear's arse and Torment thrice-cursed, but this isn't safe. These rifts are opening right on top of us, and flooding us. They put two of our knights down for the count, and threw us in enough disarray to suspend a day's worth of operations. What's worse, we have absolutely zero idea what's causing them. Do they just appear here? Is it all over Tyria? Spirits, it might even be a directed attack by some cultist wizard, and we'd never find out.  
  
To make it all worse, that's not even the weirdest thing that happened today. During the incursion, Sacra got hit by a crystalline shard, straight through the heart, as it happened. Except the damn Charr walked off, because apparently the bloody soldier has been dead for *thirity years*. So, Tzahr, who do you think we should do with the Risen Charr in our midst? Well, thanks for asking Tzahr, my first instinct is to *light it the fuck on fire.* Raven's feathers, I thought they were playing a prank at first, but apparently Mirka new, and tried to hide it. Sacra herself claims she bound herself to some trinket or other, and then became undead, whatever that means in this case.  
I had hoped the warmaster and Marcus could deal with it, except they've resorted to bickering and catatonic wall-staring while Maeva is recovering. So now we have an undead Charr lich sitting in a tent, not twenty feet from me.  
  
I hate this place.  
  
Oh, and Kaitark got drunk, ran into my tent, and demanded I arrested him before he collapsed on the floor. Looks like someone punched him in the maw too.  
I've decided that, in the grand scheme of cosmic bloody chaos that's happening all around, I'm going to put the drunk-charr-with-potential-assault on hold until I've slept a few hours. Then I'll start by seeing how far I can jam an armoured boot down Kaitark's throat before he starts making sense.  
  
Kristen, honey, I love you, and the thought of you is keeping me ~~from trying to kill everyone~~ sane. I hope you're having a great and bountiful hunt, somewhere far away from where I am now.

# 25th of Colossus

Another day, another series of worrying events.  
First off, status report is needed: Maeva is fine, for now. Sacra Mordus the Zombie of the Ashen Chapter, is allowed to walk free until further notice, and most people seem to be somewhat okay with that. I guess I'll just try to bury that idea in the back of my mind, and never touch it again. Mirka is still in trouble for covering it up, but that seems to have become mostly secondary.  
Warmaster and Marcus are back to somewhat their normal functioning, thank the spirits.  
Kaitark. Okay. So, he did a stupid, and got Calder to smack him with his stick, after which he proceeded to steal some drink from the delegation stores, got sloshed, and then turned himself in.  
When questioned why, it all came spilling out. Turns out the bastard's been cramming six dozen worries into his head and left them to niggle until it became too much, and he cracked. That's the drinking part. Part of that is a growing annoyance at Marcus' general antipathy, Lorma and Calder being Lorma and Calder, plus the entire fiasco from yesterday, plus again being Vatorn's confidant. So, yes, cracked under pressure. I'm annoyed by it, mostly because he apparently didn't think the First Crusaders could help with that sort of thing, when it's pretty much in our job description. Either case, I'll be doing an effort to take off some things there, including talking to Vatorn one of these days. I already talked to Alleshia and Marcus, who seemed to at least acknowledge what happened, even though I have a feeling Marcus will do his thing again and end up dismissing it as non-problematic because he doesn't experience it as problematic. Which of course is completely asanine, and the reason why Kaitark ends up being frustrated no ends by him. So let's hope that doesn't happen.  
In some ways, it would have actually been easier if it had been Maeva, since she's more receptive to troop feedback.  
Anyway, I wrote him for a number of charges and attributed an appropriate punitive measure without pressing the issue too much. I'd rather address the causes than the symptoms.  
  
As for today's duties, they were quite thrilling. We were sent out to assist some Vanguard camp out near a forest, being raided by separatists. Small fry, to be fair. We eventually found their little hideout and cleaned it out. That wasn't the exciting bit. We spotted a huge branded siege devourer, the size of a tank. Magnificent, in a way, and probably one of the most lethal things I've ever killed. We spotted it, and decided to track it. Threat like that, could wipe out that encampment like it was nothing. We had to venture into the brand for a bit, and that was weird too. It's almost like Orr, except instead of seaweed and fish bones, everything's turned crystalline. There's foliage that has turned to glass, and the ground itself is swollen with frozen bubbles of cracked tar, the dirt itself turning into crystal slivers. Everything pulses with energy, including the air itself. The brand hangs like a shroud. At the edge, the land transforms in the space of a few meters, as if you're walking through a portal that stretches around the entire scar. It's breathtaking and deeply horrifying all at once.  
And in that landscape, we attacked a siege devourer. Killed it, too, though Force got his leg buckled the wrong and had to be carried back home. It's a good tale, that. I can't wait to tell Kristen about it's chittering mandibles, and the way the crystals dotted the carapace, like glass ridges on mountains of chitin. Pity you can't really take trophies from the Brand. It would've made for a mighty gift! Instead, I've picked some small flowers from the near the camp, and put them between my journal's pages for drying. They're small things, but I like doing something like that for her. An act of small devotion.  
  
I'm getting sidetracked anyway. It's been a long day. Between my duties and Kaitark's entire shenanigans, I can't even worry about a whole host of other things. No new rifts today, though I hear Lance got to check a lot of them out. I don't know if they found anything of use, mind. At least there hasn't opened another one on top of us. Still, the feeling of insecurity lingers. It's not helped by the nagging worries I have about our own personal lich, Mordus.  
Torment, I'm surprised Kaitark is the only one's who's cracked.  
  
Small sliver of good news, though. My raptor egg's feeling warmer than it was before, and I can see something in there when I hold it up to the light. I'm still not sure what to do if it actually hatches. Maybe bring it back to Kristen? I don't know, maybe Daufi'd just chomp it like the big dump drake he is. Or worse, Olena'd swoop it up.  
I'll see, I suppose.

# 26th of Colossus

So, Maeva did explode. Or at least, she had an energy outburst of some kind that might have been beneficial, and didn't kill her, so... yeah, I have no idea either.  
  
I spoke to Mordus at some length, see if there was any real malice in there. Not really. She seems to understand that turning undead through... whatever twisted magic was not a good idea, and she's been trying to undo it.  
The reason why she doesn't look like an Orrian pile of mummified guts is some sort of preservation spell, which does answer some of my questions. I'm not sure what to think, to be honest. I mean, if I didn't know, I wouldn't have noticed anything off.  
  
Torment, I wish we would all go back to slaying dragons, and leave all of this nonesense out of it.

# 27th of Colossus

Summit.  
  
Another rift appeared today, same place as the one that ended up burying us in elementals. This one, though, just hung there and collapsed again. Lucky, I suppose. Klixxa put up her data-thingy, and is taking readings, for whatever it's worth. I'm mostly happy that at least they seem to be appearing in the same spots, so they're not utterly random. Makes me think of these navigation markers the Asura use to mark out roads along ley-lines, right? Maybe these rifts are opening in specific places because there's magic streams converging around them?  
I remember seeing those bared ley-lines in the Magus Falls. Especially that final siege, when we attacked those towers. The landscape was cracked open, and the mines were visible to the naked eye, like rivers of pulsing energy, all feeding down to the dragon's lair.  
What a strange place that was, for those scant few days we camped there. Like Arah a few years before.  
  
Now we're sitting in Ascalon, in what would've been an otherwise pleasant wilderness, scarred by the marks of deep war. It's not the way I imagined it. The forests aren't green, but the drab browns, oranges and muted yellows that you find everywhere here. A thick moss grows and clings to the many rock formations and hillocks that divide the landscape. The Brand is visible to the naked eye, even from a distance, an angry purple throb low over the horizon. When you get closer, it is like seeing the air itself corrupt, shard-like clouds of polluted gas darkening the sky.  
I hear that further north, it'll grow thick with old humans ruins; the leftovers of the Searing. But, this is far south, and there are no ghosts here. Except the ones we brought ourselves, I suppose.  
  
The camp has been mostly calm, asides from the freak rift appearance. I suppose it's telling that we're responding to a period of upheaval by bunkering down again. Still, it revealed a heap of problems that need fixing. Kaitark's spent. Ravenwest's still walking around with her head all turned around, restricted on light duties until some Priory book comes and sorts her out. Bloodletter's walking around with a sword over her head, now command knows she falsified reports. Mordus is an undead lich, a fact none of us know how to parse. Mad King's days indeed. It's almost like the Ashen's become the Lunatic Court for a few days. It'll even out, one way or another.  
  
My raptor egg seems happy, at least. I've nestled it in the back of my tent, wrapped in an old boot I fished up from near the lake. Tending to it reminds me in the weirdest way of taking care of Freyj when she was very, very small. Everything has to happen with slow movements and care. Luckily, the egg doesn't wail nearly as bad as a healthy norn babe does, and it doesn't need its nappy changed.  
That makes me think again. The ley-lines, the exposure to magic, everything. I really hope that when Klixxa said it would mean I'd never have healthy children again isn't true. I'd like Kristen and I to have some, one day, when the war's over and we've settled into building a grand lodge hung with trophies.  
I don't want to build a lodge that'll stay empty when I die.

# 29th of Colossus

Skipped a day.  
Because the patrol I was on got hit by a suicide bomber.  
Mithra's in medical, so am I and Maxson. I'm not too bad.  
Head hurts a lot, and my chest feels like a Jotun stepped on it while I was asleep.  
  
Nothing won't keep me out of the field long, I think, but I'm going to take it easy for today.  
Wait until the headache sort of stops throbbing. Medics think I might have a concussion. Might.  
  
Pretty damn loud affair, bombs. Fellow was waiting at the edge of camp, followed us when we marched in back from patrol, and then blew himself up. Wasn't a big bomb, or we'd be off much worse. Idiot.  
  
Looked at some notes. Sigra's apparently ran off, no idea where. That's worrying.  
Sel needs my permission for a field test. I need to remember that. Trying to get Sigra's turret to work again.  
I saw the notes on our personal lich, seems the Warmaster's made a choice and decided to let her go. Mixed feelings there.  
Oh, and a highly, *highly* classified report came through from the Priory. I won't repeat it here, but...  
Torment.

# 30th of Colossus

Summit.  
Headache's faded more or less, so that's good. Lucky, because today ended up being one of those very, very long days. All of it was operations too, so my feet and back heart, and I've got a layer of dried sweat clinging to my body from where the padding hung. I'm happy for having that cooling crystal keeping at least a flush of cold in my chestpiece or I'd have turned into a puddle formerly known as First Crusader Tzahr Davdisson long, long before.  
  
Anyway, after the bombing attack the day before yesterday, we headed east to a big Charr fort called Deathblade's Watch. As we got there, it was being raided by separatist forces. Since the attack left many of us angered, we decided to pursue the lot, and chased them into some nearby caverns. Seems they were holed up pretty tight in there, had traps and mesmer illusions hampering the advance. It took us more than an hour to dig down into the core of it. I realised they were trying to delay us, and we swooped around, looking for other exits. Managed to bottle them in completely. We advanced steadily after that, until we cleared the last traps. Managed to hit them from two sides, no survivors. Hard attack, though. Maeva, Lalowa and Klixxa were bodily injured and Bloodletter ran into a hex trap. No deaths, thankfully, but it was close.  
The hideout itself was not overly impressive or well stocked, though they had a large number of Charr prisoners locked in cages. They were not well. Tortured. We set some of them free, but only three of them were alive. Rioleth and I got them to Fangfury while the others extracted, even though we both considered just putting them down. It was... disturbing. They were more like husks than anything else.  
  
I know why, too. I found bloodstone shards, and White Mantle imagery on one of the dead separatists. One that tried to run, but ran afoul of Forgewood and Vatorn. Well, it certainly puts everything in a different light. I know we were considering that the White Mantle scum were trying to break apart the treaty, but to have it confirmed is something else. With what's happening west, this could explain why the rifts are here.  
Torment, there even popped a rift up outside the bandit caves while we were trying to get the wounded out. We managed to skirt around it, but it smells awfully suspicious.  
I'm glad we killed them, though. Vindication.  
  
Different new... Mordus left, after the Warmaster decision. I'm torn between relief and guilt at that.  
I wonder if there's any place left in the world for someone such as them. I think that all they did was really destroy their own life by meddling with things they shouldn't. The question is, of course, if they can be redeemed at all. I'm not sure about the answer there.

# 31st of Colossus

Summit camp.  
Did a patrol near the brand today, and it was the most uneventful outing we've done this tour. Figures that the one time we're actually ordered into that hellscape, we encounter nothing more threatening than a few stray branded beasts milling around near the edges.  
It's a sight to behold, though. I've said it before, but spirits, it's like stepping into another world. Like having the Realm of Torment lying open and bare to the rest of the world. I compared to Orr some times before, but it's different. The Dragonbrand is much more twisted. Orr was simple decay, but this is pure corruption. In fact, I'd say the corruption is so thorough, it is almost pure in itself, however paradoxical that might seem.  
Wearing the gas-masks into it all doesn't help much either. Just ends up making everything feel claustrophobic.  
  
Other news;  
Ravenwest's treatment got tied up in some sort of knot due to bad communication between command and Ravenwest herself. Command had apparently been waiting for this Mistweave man after meeting up with him to continue the treatment, but then Ravenwest said that Maeva told her that wasn't going to happen. Or something like that. I skipped a rung and just went straight to the warmaster, and she says we're still going to resolve Ravenwest's magic-in-the-brain problem, so there's that. Now all we need is for Ravenwest to get Mistweave to come back over and talk directly to the Warmaster.  
If that fails, our Occult team will also make an effort to look into it.  
As much sympathy as I have for Ravenwest's situation, it's been dragging on for a while now, and it needs to be resolved. Ravenwest's stuck in a tiny tent, not allowed to fight alongside us because of her condition, and we have to keep sustaining a soldier with exceptionally special needs and a bad temper to boot.  
If anything, I wish we'd have resolved this half a season ago. The Warmaster agrees, and seems quite exasperated that there was an apparent impasse for about as long as Ox is patient, with no good reason but mixed signals.  
Bah!  
  
Oh, and Sigra is either AWOL, MIA or dead. Don't know which, except she went missing some days ago. I took note the first time, but was apparently the only one, because no inquiry was started until after I got out of medical from that suicide bomber. I checked if anyone had seen her lately, but that turned out to be a bust. Bed's cold, and half her wargear's still present, leading me to suspect the worst. Force brought up that she might have run afoul of one the rifts. If that's the case, well... I don't even know where to start looking in that case. I can only hope she's still alive, and found a way to get to relative safety. If not, well, the trail's cold. Even if we start looking now, I doubt we'll find anything that's not already been washed away thanks to our delayed action.  
Stupid. I should have paid more damn attention.  
I secretly hope she just went AWOL, so we can just slap a stupidity-imprisonment on it, but at least she's not bloody dead. Don't be dead.  
  
I'm starting to think the entire place is cursed several times over. Not the summit, but just whole of Ascalon. Searing, Foefire, Brand, and now these damned rifts? People disappearing? White Mantle cultists posing as rebels?  
Ox and Bear grant me strength, but I'm starting to think all of Tyria's shit has been drifting into this corner of the world for the last two-hundred years. No wonder it's all brown.  
Ugh. Just realised that probably means I'm one of the dung-flies.  
Don't let them ever tell you it's all glory!  
  
Lalowa's still in medical, with infections in her wounds.  
Not good either. She got bit by a highly toxic spider, and apparently we're just waiting to see what the immune system cranks out. Mentally, I've prepared what I need to do if she'd pass.  
First is to talk to Sinclair about Aska. If he doesn't take her in, Kristen and I might. Or see if we can't bring her to Wulfbane's lodge. I hope it doesn't come to that; I've had to do too many kindnesses to dead friends these last six years. Ox watch over her, and give her the strength to live.  
  
Kristen; love you, sweet. Far away, far away, but never really far away.  
Don't you get hurt while I'm out here either, or I'll bundle you in my pack and carry you off to war!

# 32nd of Colossus

Summit.  
  
A lot happened today, and I'm tired, so I'll just go through it. For posterity, I suppose.  
  
We marched north, more caves. We were supposed to move in against the renegades, so that's what we did. They were dug-in well enough, but nothing we thought we hadn't seen before. Chapter marched up to it, secure the only exit, and then a task force went in to clean it out. Turns out that didn't go exactly as planned. Some sort of Charr fanatic ripped into the assault team, left the Warmaster and Sinclair unconscious, wounded Claridge, and killed Topples. One Charr did that. We got called in, started to evacuate the wounded. There was another Charr, badly tortured, locked in a cage. So delirious they thought I was going to kill them.  
I had to break the door off that damn cage, and I couldn't. So I asked Bear for strength, and she answered. I've not felt the raw strength of a spirit form for... years, but it was there. I became the bear. Ripped the door straight off the hinges, and then it was gone.  
  
Too damn late, too. The Charr's alive, or at least, I think he is. I carried him all the way to camp, but we were laden with wounded. I was favoured by bear today, and it is a sad day, because Topples died. I feel guilty. Not because I wasn't there, or because I should have saved him, but because I know, somewhere, that he didn't master the sword well enough to go up against the worst the renegades have to offer. And that's what he did.  
I wrote in my book, the one I've been writing on what it means to be a First Crusader, that failing to train your soldiers properly is like depriving them of the right to live. And that's what it feels like. Hollow. I wonder if another few rounds on the training dummy would've made the difference. No, rather, I wonder *how many more* would have made a difference, and if I could've given him those few extra if only I'd have given more care.  
We're burning him in two days. I've been asked to make a feast to his memory.  
I'm not sure if I could find anything exotic enough to truly represent what sort of a person Topples was. The way he was so intensely focused on what he did, how he named his weapons the silliest of names, and gave every strike and guard he learned their own name. Hail to the Fallen!  
  
Lalowa is doing better, thank Ox, even with Sinclair now back out in medical with exhaustion. Sigra is still missing. I had half-hoped we'd pick up her trace, maybe find her in either the separatist or renegade camps, but no luck. Something in my chest tugs at me, willing for me to start searching, not willing to just accept the fact that I have no idea where she has gone. If she went through that rift, she could be anywhere in this world, or anywhere in Torment-knows how many others. Not our only woes. Medical is severely over-worked, meaning primarily that Kaitark is severely overworked. And he's not dealing with the stress well. I helped him treat today's influx, going as far as to apply stitches to Claridge's wounds, and stripping and cleaning the Warmaster's armour. Something left a large amount of foul-smelling ectoplasmic residue behind on the armour, but more on that later.  
Kaitark's overworked, even with my help. Mirka got smacked on the head because of running into a mesmer trap, Lalowa's poisoned, Mithra got bombed, and so on. So the recruit is running triple shifts. Added to that that Vatorn's misbehaving again, and ripping open stitches while doing scouting, it isn't helping. I sent Kaitark to sleep again, but that only imploded after Vatorn disturbed him and they started shouting.  
If Lemon keeps going like this, he's going to burnout hard, and we'll have no medics at all. I've already readied a letter to command, asking to allow me to help out. I'm not a fully trained medic, but spirits, I can bind a wound and apply first response treatment to most simple wounds. It's better than nothing, and hopefully gets some much-needed pressure off of Kaitark. Or at least, stop him from killing someone because he simply cracked.  
  
Talking about cracks, I need to take care myself. I'm taking on more work again.  
Tomorrow, I need to hold a rollcall, and arrest a certain Asura called Ishaha. She apparently stole the bucket of stinking ghost plasma I scraped off the warmaster's armour, for reasons I cannot possibly fathom. Maeva's given a detain order, so yeah. If they turn out with the rest, we'll charge them with theft, and see if she's got anything to say.  
No rest for the wicked.  
  
Oh, yes, of course, before I completely forget the one bit of good news!  
My raptor egg hatched, and yeah... it's a raptor. Small still, but quite spry. I took an old cooking pot and stretched a veil of mail over it as a cage-thing, but it's mostly behaving. I've fed it beef jerky, which it's eating, though I think you really need to give them something better. I need to do that feast, which gives me an excuse to forage. I'll see if I can't get some good offal for it to dig in, so it can start growing.  
Kaila's been looking after it while I've been on patrol, and the critter delight her. She's been keeping her own baby squirrel, which apparently fell from a tree. I just hope she doesn't put both of them together, I have a feeling the raptor will just try and eat it. Not sure what to do with it long-term yet. Pets need a name right?

# 33rd of Colossus

Summit.  
I went hunting for forage today, came back with four moa and a couple of river skale from that little bind near us. It's all for the funeral meal I've been asked to make. It won't be as bright and colourful as he was, but I hope it'll help everyone remember him in a brighter light than these bleak days let shine. It feels good to be back to making a decent meal, though. The work helps focus the mind. It's a lot of work. So much, in fact, that I've had to prepare thoroughly today, or I wouldn't have managed to finish it tomorrow. My stomach growled, too, in anticipation of the delicious food I can already picture in my mind. Mutton and oats haleem, with nuts and gravy, cut with sheep's shoulder. Shredded skale with sesame and black sauce. Moa in beer batter, deep fried in lard, with oil spiced with native chili.  
Sometimes I miss being a baker. I should cook for Kristen more.  
Hah, make little honey cakes.  
  
All was quiet in camp, asides from a spat between Lalowa, Sinclair and Vatorn. The last had been teasing the other two, which caused Lalowa to get in such a state of excitement that she collapsed. That's the second time Vatorn's caused someone who should be resting to go off the rails in short order. I hope this isn't going to be a trend. I can do well without an inciter making everything more difficult than it is. I might need to bring the recruit in for counselling, though I don't particularly look forwards to that.  
  
In better news, Prydwen's turned up and rejoined the Chapter. Seems like they're sending back all manner of former troops. First Bjorn, now Pryd. Next we'll have bloody Kath, Veth and Sana appear out of thin air.  
I don't mind too much, truth be told, Prydwen does well in medical, and we need extra hands there now. Keep Kaitark from turning into a mashed potato.  
  
The raptor ate well today, I kept a good bit of moa gubbins aside for it. Dug in like you wouldn't believe. Critters looks more steady now, too, and I'm starting to feel bad for keeping it in it's pot-cage. I might consider letting it out in a few days time. I mean, worst it'll do is run off and try to fend for it's own, right?  
Still haven't decided on a name.

# 34rd of Colossus

Summit.  
Day's end. The food went well, I think, everyone ate, and most folks seemed to like it.  
I'm tired myself. Took a good lot out of me cooking this all up, and the funeral didn't help. We gave Topples a decent enough send-off, at least. I'm trying not to dwell too much on it. Another name to remember and recite when old tales are told, ales is drunk, and the senses grow soft and gold.  
  
I'm going to sleep myself now, and not dwell too much on today.  
  
83. Johnny Topples, slain in battle.

# 35th of Colossus

Summit.  
Engineering work today. I took a few of them out to a Charr encampment, went over basics again. I'm disappointed by the lack of clear retention, to be fair, though most of that seems to be because they know the practice, just not the formal theory. Still, it's a disappointment that they weren't able to clearly distinguish detonating and deflagrating explosives. What's worse, the fortification analysis that followed was simply not carried out to the extent asked. I gave them twenty minutes to look around. They took maybe three, and then game me some half-assed notes anyone could have deduced. It wasn't even supposed to be a difficult exercise, but the sheer lack of enthousiasm irks me.  
  
Bah, maybe it's just everything happening around us getting in their heads. It's been bothering me just as well.  
Well, at least the raptor is growing well.

# 36th of Colossus

Another quiet day. I got a letter from Kraxxi again, though, with a suspiciously large bag of candy attached.  
Nothing new, though know I know what's happening out west, that's not very encouraging either. They've had some Inquest issues, and apparently they stole some data, including my body scan. I'm not too pleased with that notion, but since I've mostly been feeling fine, I have decided not to dwell on it. I'm still quietly hoping that soaking up all that magic from the ley-lines is not as bad it seems. Truth be told, after that ley-line, with the meditation and the curious fire that is now just part of me, I knew something had changed.  
Bear and Ox will help me endure. Bear's strength was with me when I needed it, after all.  
  
That reminds me, I need to check up on that Charr prisoner we rescued from those renegades. I haven't thought to check back, even though he must've been in there for a few days now.  
Spirits, the Warmaster put up a notice, too. Apparently the warrior-charr that gave them so much trouble was wielding a new sort of magic they've set to calling 'mistweaving' at current. Drawing on the magic of the Mists. Not surprising. It seems the whole world is in the process of ripping itself apart. The White Mantle blow up a Bloodstone, rifts open all over Tyria, and now there are monstrous Charr ripping our soldiers apart with mist-magic. Unusual times. Oh, yeah, right, Bloodstone. We got a report from the Priory some time ago, explaining what all the fuss out in the west was. Turns out, White Mantle super-charged one of the ancient Bloodstones, and then set it to detonate. The General herself was out there to see how bad the damage is.  
So, yeah, finding White Mantle out here, and those rifts? It's not a coincidence. They're planning something; probably something we want to stop.  
  
Mouth of Torment, sometimes I grow so weary.  
We're out here to fight the Branded, but all of our time and energy has gone towards rebels and fanatics, stopping us from fighting the enemy that really matters, killing good people. In a few days, we march into the Brand. I'm deeply worried; we should've been at our best. Instead, we're already battered, and about to go into one of the most dangerous places in all of Tyria. I fear for the amount of pyres that will need to be built before this is all over.

# 37th of Colossus

We went to the brand today. Surprisingly, little happened again, asides from another tussle with some very strange creatures. I don't know what the brand does to them, but they come out curious and warped, but with some clear forms still distinguishable. I mean, half he time, we're killing off things that look disturbingly like Charr, or Devourers.  
This time it was some sort of long-dead griffon brought back to crystalline life.  
Lance, on the other hand, apparently struck out at another Siege Devourer. Might even be the same one we killed a handful of days back. If that's the case, I've been sloppy. Need to remember to burn corrupted, even when you think they're dead.  
  
Things have been nicer here now. No big rifts appearing in the last few days, which I figure is a good sign, right?  
I have to say, Ascalon's rich autumnal colours have soon started to lose their charm. Now it all just looks drab and brown. What a weird country.  
I'd rather have the Shiverpeaks back.

# 38th of Colossus

Summit.  
We deployed into the Brand again today, went to check up on a mine the Legions are keeping running, despite the hazards. It's on the other side of the Brand from camp, so we had to cross a good bit through it. Ran into opposition almost immediately, with a swarm of lesser branded and another one of those hulking siege devourers roaming around the southern edge, near a badly-wrecked Sentinel outpost. There was a portal opening too, banishing any pretense that they might have finally stopped appearing. We were ready this time, though, and minced our way through the weird red elementals and the branded swarms easily.  
The mine itself is curious. The outer gates themselves are warped and twisted by the evil, with parts coming away and simply hovering in place, propped up with magic alone. Deeper into the ground, the Charr have dug out a methodical quarry, though the entire place is flooded knee-deep in foul, brackish water. Despite that, I was surprised to see thick vines and roots bury down through the rock and actually thrive, away from the corruption outside. I mean, structurally, that's an issue, like ivy digging into the mortar between bricks, but not one they'll notice soon. For one, the Charr are pretty efficient workers, and on the other hand, I doubt this mine will exist for another ten years or so.  
We had another brief venture out into the surrounding badlands, helping the Sentinels with driving back some more rabid branded monsters. They're not hard to kill, but they strike quick and suddenly, and they could easily have overwhelmed us if we hadn't been on guard. The grounds around the mine are pockmarked with enormous bubbles forming in the ground, where the metals in the rich earth boiled up and then hardened into slag. They're hard as iron, even though they look like they're suppose to burst like boils. Some are so big you could carve a hole in the side of them, and use it as a house! Curious indeed.  
  
We returned to camp shortly thereafter with little issue. I'm glad to be out of there. Having to wear the protective mask clogs everything, making the corrupted landscape even more alien. With the muffled noise, heavy breathing and the narrowed field of view, it is claustrophobic and vaguely dreamlike.  
  
We also keep getting reinforced. Two new Sylvari troops joined us, a gril called Vahenir that has a reef drake from the same breed as Daufi, and a purple-shaded lad I just call Zigzag. His real name is something close to it, but the nickname's stuck as soon as he introduced himself. They've both seen minor action in Caledon before, but nothing on the scale of a Vigil war. Good enough potting ground, if you ask me.  
Zigzag also had a curious magazine with him, with Small plastered half-naked across the front.  
Hah.  
Yeah. Maeva found out, and merely seemed amused, though Ravenwest apparently took issue with it. I personally find it mildly amusing. I didn't know they make those sort of books. I might pick one up and bring it over for Kristen, just to have something to laugh about.  
  
What else? Oh, yeah, apparently Rajani passed through camp, with yet another name change going on. Moonclaw or something. I can't remember exactly, but she left on bad terms with us, but now is apparently officially discharged from the Vigil, and back in Legion service. We didn't speak.  
  
And finally, I had the presence of mind to check on our rescuee from the attack on the renegade camp.  
Mostly still delirious; he keeps thinking we're enemies, and they're keeping him somewhat sedated. Not sure what we can do about it, though, asides from treating them and handing them off to the Legions.  
I was never really aware of the amount of Charr and Vanguard that seem to keep dying out here. I mean, I knew the Ascalonian issue was rough, but Torment, this still feels like a meatgrinder. Luckily, after our attacks against the renegade and Separatist camps, most of the insurgency issues have sort of stopped. I don't know if that's because we've cowed them into regrouping, or if we've actually managed to root one out for a turn.  
I suppose I can prepare for the worst, but hope for the best.

# 39th of Colossus

Summit camp.  
Another day out in the Brand. Deepest we've gone in yet, all the way to some research post on the other side of a lake set in the middle of the area. Surprisingly calm on our end. It's an interesting place, and I'm impressed by the hardiness of the Sentinels to stay out here all this time. Sel and I were set to work touching off some capacitors set along the road, which caused lightning elementals to coalesce. Sel dispersed them with a brust of her flamethrower pretty easily. Apparently the Charr and Priory researchers up at this post are looking into the effects of concentrated magic on the branded. These capacitors leeched magic out of the air, until we released it again, likely causing the elementals to form. They're also taking groundwater readings. Since I've seen those vines in the mine yesterday, it makes me wonder how much of the ground deeper below the surface is still healthy. An interesting day in the field, at least. It still feels like I'm on an entirely different world, dipping into that corrupted wound in the land.  
What's more, the researched said that Branded are attracted to strong sources of magic, and that they're all surging south. That would explain those devourer swarms we've been seeing on the south edge, at least, though I'm worried about what they're surging towards. Ebonhawke? The Desert Gate?  
  
No news from the west. I haven't written Kristen in a long time, and I haven't responded to Kraxxi yet. No word from Freyja either. I miss my wife and my daughter terribly, really, and I feel bad for not being able to hear how they are doing. Freyj's still out hunting with that girl of hers, and Kristen is no doubt off into the wilds herself, finding news ways to test her skill. I wonder if my letters would even find them?  
  
Other news, today Zigzag managed to set off Mithra with talk of being a dragon minion. As in, they as a species being borne from Mordremoth's will. The lass took it much worse than I had expected, and had to be calmed down. It bothers me that she allows words to cut her so deeply. For one, because they are true; the Pale Tree is a part of Mordremoth, and, blunt as it is, they are part of it. You call a bear's cub a bear cub, after all. And more, because she feels it means anything at all whether or not she is, when she has already proven by standing here that it doesn't matter. Folks become what they become through their deeds, not what they were born as. The Sylvari of all people should know this! They drop from trees, almost all equal, and yet there are those who do good and who do evil. It is like looking at a babe, and saying it will be beset by evil because it was born with green eyes! Bah.  
  
I'm getting old and cranky, and ever more melancholic.  
Perhaps I should consider asking Kristen if it is time to settle down for a few years yet.  
  
Of course, I'd almost forget it, too.  
One of Ravenwest's fellow ex-slaves from those Sicarius cultists wandered into camp today. He was a bit difficult about giving up his weapon, but not overly. Seemed polite, so I let him talk for a while. Turns out he tried to defend the horrible deeds those cultists have done, which set of Ravenwest in a rage. They chased the fellow off. I mostly feel sorry for him. Never such a tragedy as the slave who comes to love the lash, after all. I think we'll issue an arrest warrant out of safety; can't really have a stranger with cultist-sympathies run rampant without check, though he hope he'll be wise enough to steer clear, and perhaps find a better life somewhere.

# 40th of Colossus

Summit.  
A quiet day, which suits me fine. Had some time to smoke a pipe at leisure, though I need to be careful with the tobacco. I have only very little, and the temptation is there to just puff through it. Best savour it by being sparse!  
So, yes, nothing passed today, asides from idle talk. Vatorn has a sister, whom apparently traveled here through Ebonhawke on business with her kin. She checked through the perimeter and seemed responsible enough. Sinclair had a talk with her about something or other, though I haven't yet asked him what about. I might do so later, or I might forget. That reminds me, I need to bring Vatorn in for some counselling. Not sure what good it'll do, but still. I caught him and Sel out practicing lockpicking out in the central supply tent, of all places. If there's any place where you shouldn't be trying to look like you're picking locks, it's going to be in the supplies. Sometimes I wonder how we've not had more people die because of sheer lack of forethought. I guess we're more blessed than we seem.  
  
I wrote Kraxxi and Kristen today, as I said I would. Kraxxi's letter was a mite difficult, and I tried to hint at what might have been happening out west, without being so stupid to just jot it all down on a letter. I mean, if she's smart and thinks it through, maybe she'll get it. Otherwise, I've spent a good thirty minutes writing out nonesense. Time will tell.  
  
Other things; the Charr prisoner we saved is still delirious. At this rate, we'll just have to cut our losses and leave him in Legion care. Not point dragging him around with us like some sort of prisoner.  
I also have morning exercise with the new Sylvari, Vahenir. See what they know and can, and how that can all be improved. Here's hoping that turns out better than it did with Topples, may his Gods keep his soul well.

# 41st of Colossus

Summit.  
Took Vahenir through some paces. The swordwork is sloppy, but she knows her way around a bow well enough. Was hoping it'd be the other way around, really, for obvious reasons. Ah well, at least I know where to start. We'll just make sure they can defend themselves, before we go on to anything else.  
  
The rest of the day passed in quiet rest.  
I like it well enough here when it's quiet, you know.

# 42nd of Colossus

Still in the summit, though we're about to move off into Blazeridge relatively soon, by the looks of it. A few days, I think was said.  
  
Things are still calm from my side. So calm, in fact, I had time to just lie back in the grass for a while, and pretend I was somewhere else entirely. Spoke to Small a bit too, who seems to be getting a little bit on the lonely side. Well, I suppose I can look back to leave for those kind of things. Thinking about, we have lost a good degree of folks over the years, including more than a few norn lasses. Kadlin, Marthe, Sjöfn, Sana, and on and on. Wonder what happened to Sjöfn, last I knew was after the Claw, and she was badly injured. I worry now that she might have been killed or fatally injured, and we just all forgot. Spirits, I hope not. I should try and find out, really.  
  
But yes, the today was restful enough for melancholic memories to surface.  
Good sign, I think for the region. Makes me feel like we actually make a major difference for a change. Ah well. We'll see if the lands north get any better. And if they don't, how we'll make them.

# 43rd of Colossus

Last day of quiet rest here in the Summit. I took a patrol down back to Ebonhawke, make sure the entire region was just as quiet as it is up here, and wasn't disappointed. We passed by the Vanguard, politely informed them the Chapter was about to march north into Blazeridge, so they know we're no longer operating in their territories.  
I allowed the folks to go about and get some things from the market too, before we finally set off.  
Prydwén ended up making delicious toffees.  
  
Before that, I spent the morning working with Vahenir and her drake, Lexx. Meaty fellow. They're well-adjusted to each other, really, but sloppy in the execution. The drake can lunge and even execute more complex little tactics, but it lacks flails a bit. More practice and coaching from it's master will solve that, however. All in all, I'm not displeased with where we're at. It'll take steady exercise to improve, however.  
  
Anyway, today was good. Camp-fire talk was interesting. Zigzag's quite the rogue for being a Sylvari. Stark contrast with the others we've had, except maybe Celdric, but then he was a basket case. Not sure that's comparable.  
More and more folks getting back on their feet from their injuries too.  
Except Belmont, who got bitten by something during scouting, and rushed to medical. A minor injury, I'd think, but he didn't look too good. I hope he wasn't bit by anything venomous, like Lalowa was some days back. Thankfully the medics were close on hand.  
  
Lazying around camp makes me tire quick, though, for some reason. I'm looking forwards to hear back from Kraxxi or Kristen on my letters, though, hopefully before we move camp tomorrow. It always takes longer for the post to get here the further we move away.

# 44th of Colossus

Spirits of the Wild, witness this day, because it has been a long and strange one, wrought with unexpected turns, surprises both pleasant and unnerving, and an energy that will be difficult to convey on paper.  
  
I have a son.  
His name is Reuzen, as he is called by his mother, who is my friend Hrist. This I was told today by letter, some moments after dawn, after I had packed and readied my kit for the march into Blazeridge. She mentioned it off-handed, that two seasons back she'd given birth to a young boy, who, if the days aligned, would've been conceived that one evening in Marriner, when I had just came back from Souhtun, more than a year and a half ago.  
To say I was surprised is an understatement. I mean, to hear that sort of news always strikes deeply, and I was at the same time angry that she didn't think to write me sooner, happy to hear that I might have sired another child, and afraid of what that all would mean for Kristen and I.  
I wrote to command about it, and got a response back before noon, giving me ten days of leave to go and make sense of the situation.  
  
So, through the roads in Ebonhawke, and then the portals, I arrived in Hoelbrak near dusk.  
Kristen was in Leopard lodge, though I was vaguely surprised she wasn't out hunting. I am happy I found her this easily, because I was dreading have to carry around that block of ice in my chest for any duration. Make no mistake, I deeply, fiercely, love Kristen, and my anxiety that this could tear us apart was worse than anything I've ever felt. But, thankfully, my beautiful huntress has decided to take upon herself the mantle of Leopard's shaman; or at least, the very first steps on that road. So, I found her easily. With my heart in my throat, I explained to her Hrist's letter, and the evening that had passed the year before. I told her that if this boy was my child, I would want to be a good father, but I also didn't want it to come between her and me. I am eternally grateful for Leopard's wisdom, because she understood, and we were soon back to our normal talk and jests.  
I must have cheated fate itself somewhere to be so lucky with my Kristen; I've known women that would've rather shot you full of arrow, club you over the head, and throw you down an ice gulley than stand and hear how their man fathered a child with another woman. But, may she forever walk in Leopard's graces, she nodded and smiled, on account that it wasn't an act of unfaithfulness, but just one of those things that passes in life. I would've kissed her right there, if I wasn't still anxious she'd set the Leopard she's rearing as part of her shaman's induction on me.  
  
Hah! I, Tzahr, splitter of mountains, leadbelcher, tremble and shake before the wrath of a beautiful woman. Let that be a lesson to everyone, eh? No, I will repeat it again, that woman lives in my heart, like the griffons roost in the most lofty mountain peaks, and I must be the most favoured and most lucky man to have ever drawn breath to call her my true equal and wife.  
  
But I will sink away in praise, and forgot to tell the evening's tale!  
So, with the ice of fear thawing from my veins, Kristen and I set off to Raven's Lodge, to find Hrist and this boy. She was there, as I knew she was. In her letter, in which she told me that she'd borne my son, she mentioned that she's finally found her long-lost sister, Hildr. Though, by some cruel twist of fate, Hildr was none other than the Sjöfn I fought alongside with in the Chapter. It seems that the blow to her head, which I witnessed happening in Frostgorge, has robbed her of much of her memory. I find it odd that I never noticed the resemblance between the two. But I digress.  
Hrist was in Raven's Lodge, as she too is taking her steps on the road towards becoming a shaman. She was both surprised to see me, and not exceptionally surprised when she considered the thought anew. She took us to a lodge, where she keeps the boy. And spirits, is he the spitting image of his father. There is no doubt. Two seasons old, and already built as if he has Jotun's blood coursing through his veins! He will become a mountain of a man in due time, that much is clear already. Who knows, maybe he'll even grow as tall as me?  
I cannot describe the feeling of adoration and love that I feel for this son of mine. It's as if I had forgotten, after Freyj, how much I can love such a small being, and then found this well of my deepest affections completely renewed. My son! Reuzen Tzahrsson!  
The boy is well-looked after, though Hrist doesn't watch him all on herself. Sjöfn, or Hildr, as it is, helps when Hrist is learning Raven's teachings. I've already written Freyj about the news, no doubt she will come rushing down from wherever she is to loudly declaim the future legends of her half-brother as soon as she finds out. And frankly, I can't think of a better or more caring sister for the boy than my daughter.  
  
And Kristen, of course, who was visibly moved by it too. I could see the child tugging at her heartstrings, and moving something deep and motherly inside her. She'll grow the love the boy, of that I'm sure. It only make me love her more, and hope that one day, the two of us will hold a child that is ours. And spirits, when that child comes, he will have a family worth of song! If Kristen and I build our lodge, it will grow to become a busy place. Freyj and her blossom were always welcome, but now Hrist, who will always be the mother of one of my sons, and Hildr are all part of the family too. It increases by bounds and leaps. In twenty years, my kin and their families will be enough to merit their own table in Knut's Great Lodge, hah!  
  
Spirits, I am exhausted, but it is the euphoric, honeyed exhaustion of a day that ended in jubilation. After the child had fallen asleep, no doubt equally tired by my doting, we drank ales in celebration, my son's two mothers and I, until my throat went hoarse with singing praises. I might have missed the chance to sing praises to his birth, but I made up for it with all the energy I could muster. Well, not quite all the energy...  
  
Ten days. I have ten days to forge an unbreakable bond with my son, before I am expected back in Blazeridge.  
Only ten days. I already cannot wait to carve wooden soldiers out of good winter pine, or to take the boy with me onto the ice of Lake Mourn, or... or... or... another million things that a father would do if he was gifted life's greatest treasure. But that is for tomorrow. Now, I'm going to sleep, with Kristen in my arms, and sink away into pleasant and glowing adoration.

# 45th of Colossus

Bliss!  
I awoke and was mystified where I was for a second, until my mind caught up with everything that's been going on. I have to say, the hangover was unable to ruin the morning. I went to pick up the laddie earliest. He was already awake, of course, and thankfully didn't seem as frightened by me anymore. It's natural I suppose, we are still strangers to each other. I hope that'll change quickly.  
The cold was fierce outside, and I was afraid the first winter would bite him a bit too deep in the bone, but he cried none. Just looked in joy at the falling snowflakes. Kristen went out to tend to the lodge, and see to her companion animals, so I decided to the little Giant out to Hrothbeir's Rest with a basket of food for both me and the laddie. I swaddled him up in skins and everything, but he worked his way free quick enough, and was babbling away to the snow as it was alive soon enough. He got so excited by the snow cherries he damn well filled his nappie in the middle of breakfast, and I had to wrap a napkin around him like Grawl's loincloth! Hah. I should've remembered to bring clean ones. Still, the cold muffled the smell, and I'm not so easily brought off my appetites regardless.  
I took to the ice with him afterwards, and I must've spent a good hour just skidding him around across the frozen lake, much to his delight.  
I think he liked me much better afterwards.  
  
Of course, so much excitement tired out both of us before long, so it should not come as any surprise that Kristen and Hrist found us both asleep in a corner of the lodge not long after dusk. For my part, all I can say is that the day passed too quickly.  
  
For another matter, I am falling in love with Kristen anew every time I see her now. It is difficult to describe, but there is an elation in my heart that reminds me much of when we shared our first quiet moments, all seeming so long ago. There was always passion, but it waxed and waned; now, it blazes anew! It feels good to be so alive. The child is a gift, not just to me, but to Kristen too. And of course, to Hrist, who will always walk her own path.  
  
It's a curious thing. Hrist is a pretty enough woman, and I don't regret the evening I bedded her; it was pleasingly raw and physical, and there's no denying I enjoyed the act. But now, I look at her and it feels strange to consider feeling lust for her again. Not because she has changed, she's still strong, young and a beauty, but because I simply no longer feel the urge. I make love to my wife when it pleases me, or her, and I take all of my enjoyment from those moments. I desire nothing else, from anyone.  
And for Hrist, I am sure she sees me as something strange too. She finds her pleasure in going where she pleases, and who spends the evening between her legs is treated with no more levity than what she will eat in the evening. The contrast between us is so stark you could use it as a sword in war! And it suits me fine. The boy's my son, Kristen is my wife, Hrist is his mother, and Freyj his sister. That's not even counting his aunts. Spirits, Usha will laugh.  
So, Reuzen has all the freedom of choice! He'll grow up in a colourful world, whatever the case, and I cannot wait to see what sort of man he'll eventually become.

# 46th of Colossus

Hoelbrak, the third day of my ten days of leave, and another day well spent.  
  
I was not the first to call on my laddie today, as Sjöfn was there first. She greeted me by name, and I briefly thought the damage done was too severe. But then I found out she only knew it because Hrist told her, and she remembers very little. And, because the ever-looming threat of her memories trying to surface hangs over her head, she is not moved much to mingling. I know her well enough, like anyone who has shared a field camp and several battlefields, a bond of battle normally hard to break, but I am just a stranger to her. She sees to the boy because she has no older memory of him, so it is more restful. I understand well enough, though I feel saddened by the idea. She suffered her wounds on a glorious enough battle, it is only right she should remember her own battles. Who knows, perhaps I'll find some time to tell her off her past deeds. Even if her memory does not return when I do, she might value who she was. I also gave her the vial of Maguuma water I got from Kraxxi some letters back. I know the tales of the Font of Maguuma; healing water is rare today, but if any place in this world would have rivers that run with such blessed waters, it would be Auric Basin. Who knows, perhaps it will help her heal.  
  
That asides, the day belonged mostly to the little Jotunling and I; after yesterday, I had the bright idea to take him out into the Foothills, so I did just that. It lies down the mountains, and the wind is less biting there, the evergreens standing in a shade of deep green that heralds the snows that lies up-slope in the mountains' hearts. I am glad to say the boy is now at perfect ease being carried by me. And I packed extra nappies, though that did not seem to have been needed. We passed by the many shrines, and I explained each of the great spirit's lessons to the boy. He doesn't understand, but he knows, reaching out to place a curious hand on the totems as I held him up to it. You can tell his parentage well, though, for it was at Raven's and Bear's shrine that he smiled most, and where the guardian animals were kindest and curious. Ravens flocked and watched as I read out some of Raven's riddles, and when I set him down in between the bears in the Grawlenfjord, they looked after him as if he was one of theirs. It was the most curious thing.  
We lingered long, because he had much fun sitting at the shallow water, and crawling around on the muddy banks. I washed him after, because he was so streaked with mud even the Grawl grub-keepers on the other side ooked at him. Still, I was not worried. I am sure that any unkind thoughts they had were banished by my sitting nearby with my scabbard across the knees. On the way home, I bought some spirit's pine from the forest here to carve charms and toys out. It's said that the passing spirits leave their trace on the older trees.  
We were back some time before sundown, so I left the Jotunling with Sjöfn and Hirst's friend, Helga, who care much for the boy. Besides, he was more tired than I am, even with the gift of youth. Then again, it's been a while since I wrestled with bears in the mud, so perhaps the effort is not comparable.  
  
The evening I spent with Kristen in Leopard's lodge. She's learning much wisdom from the speaker and her meditations carry great merit. She carries Leopard's boons well, and I have no doubt she will guide our people well upon their chosen path. I spoke to her about Bear's favour too, and how I had felt the spirit's true touch again after many years of waning. I have no heart to become a shaman though. I find better piety in the field of battle anyway.  
But, I can't say that the thought of heading north for lodge-building has not crossed my mind. If Kristen becomes shaman, it may be time to consider it in earnest.

# 47th of Colossus

Hoelbrak.  
It's been another good day, though I have come to know things that have soured the taste in my mouth.  
I took the Jotunling, on a whim, to Wolf's Lodge, to visit Lalowa's daughter, Aska. She's a wee bit older than the laddie, of course, but that doesn't matter too much at that age. I talked to the shamans, and they knew soon enough who I was looking for. Once I said I was in Lalowa's pack, and came simply to visit, they were happy enough to point out the girl to me. I think I scared her at first, but she seemed to know who I was when I mentioned my name. She was curious after her mother, and why I was here. I explained to her, as best as I could to a six-year old girl, that I was here for the Jotunling, and that I thought it would be kind to visit her with the boy. She's a strong enough girl for being quite so young, though I find it a pity that she is cloistered away here. Children like her should be running down slopes of snow, climbing trees, and learning how to draw a bow.  
I was angry a bit at Lalowa for that, until I let the two children play for a bit and asked the shamans some questions borne out of curiosity, the answers to which cast a dark shadow over my mood for the rest of the evening. I understand Lalowa's anguish now, and the pain it must bring her to look at her own daughter.  
  
It sickens and drives me to rage, and I am tempted to wreak vengeance and havoc on the thrice-cursed Svanir in the girl's name, for no other benefit than to sooth my own anger over the matter. Poor woman, I can't imagine what she must have gone through. I am awed by her fortitude and tenacity of spirit. When I return to the Chapter, I will need to talk to her.  
  
But, I digress into dark thoughts.  
Aska's a treasure all on herself. I might ask Helga and Hildr to bring Reuzen over more often, it'll be good for the both of them. They played for a fair bit, the lass making silly faces and explaining dutifully Wolf's lessons to the babbling boy, who seemed to be moved to mirth by it all, his little head not understand the words yet. Still, the wisdom of children is legendary and pure, so who knows what the boy could or couldn't hear?  
I promised Aska I would come back before I returned to the Chapter, so I will. The ale in Wolf's lodge is just as good as anywhere else, after all, and I am moved to kindness towards the girl, in light of what happened.  
  
The evening was calm enough, as it were, though I kept the Jotunling with me and Kristen this time. I hope Kristen will grow on him over time just as well. She may not be his mother, but she's my love, so I hope she can learn to love all my children. Here's hoping the laddie sleeps soundly and steadily; tomorrow, I'm going to take him to Lion's Arch, and go sailing.

# 48th of Colossus

The night passed well, with the little one sleeping soundly enough, until he woke early with the sun's first rays, and cried us all from our beds. Kristen was more grumpy than I was, I think, given she is not so used to be calling up from her comforts at dawn's light as I am. I suppose the Chapter has hardened me both against bawling babes and early mornings, eh?  
  
It's no big deal. Once he was fed and cleaned, he was content enough again. I smeared his face and arms with oil not too long after, to protect him from the sun's rays. It's almost winter's season, but the Lion's Arch sun is still cruel to a snow-child's fair skin, after all, and I wouldn't want him to get sun-burnt for lack of me paying attention.  
Then, swaddled and oiled so he looked like a sweetmeat, I put the big raisin in a wicker basket, and carried him off through the gate into Lion's Arch proper.  
  
It was a good day for sailing; even inside the arms of the bay, the wind was strong to set foaming heads upon shallow waves, and further out to sea the weather was such that a good sailor could have made most of the trip to Rata Sum under a day. I paid a visit to the Lionguard, and convinced them on the merit of my rank and good name with the Vigil people in Marriner, and no small bribe, to let them rent me a small skiff for a day with a lateen rig. It's the short of ship usually crewed by two, but I am too big to have much room for another, and I remember sailing well enough from when I was at sea to steer a small ship with little issue. At I propped the Jotunling up near the bow, where I could reach him easily, but where he could look all around him, but later I took him in my lap while I steered. Not before, of course, inflating my waterskin into a buoy and tying it to his basket, in case the wind betrayed us. I know babes are natural swimmers, but I've been through once calamity on the open seas too many to rely on my skill alone.  
As it passed, the weather was firm and fair, and the spirits of Wind and Sea were easily overcome. I sailed us past Claw Island, waving to the glittering Lionguard in their gilded armours and tricorn hats as we passed. And when we were half an hour past that, I lowered the lateen and let us drift while we ate from the pack I brought with me, before I brought us back around and sailed us into the Lion's Arch portage again.  
  
Ah, and then the boy had his first encounter with a golden shell-strewn beach. I wish I was so young that mere sand was such a delight to me. Though I probably would not have tried eating it just yet. Asides from that, and the short bout of bawling that followed as I tried to get the most of it out of his mouth and eyes, he was perfectly happy. We built a sandcastle. Well, I built a sandcastle, and the boy tore it down with the efficiency of a Charr Iron warband!  
Kristen joined us later, some time after the height of noon had passed, and found us both puttering about in the sand. She had some choice and teasing words about who of us both was the real child, too, hah! I can be a man-child along my baby boy for another five days, and not even she can stop me! Not that she would anyway, delightful woman that she is. We later passed below the Deverol Gardens, and were lucky enough to fund a natural pool left behind by the tide. The water got trapped in a hollow in the rock, and the sun had warmed it steadily for much of the day. It took some convincing, but I eventually got Kristen in, after I'd dipped in with the little one. He drifted around on his back, paddling away with easy, only occasionally dipping below the waterline. When he got tired, as he should after a long day, I propped his basket to the side and let him sleep, giving Kristen and me a moment to ourselves too.  
  
I was almost sad to go back to Hoelbrak afterwards.

# 49th of Colossus

Sixth day.  
Hoelbrak, quiet again, after yesterday's excitement. I left the little Jotunling to recover from the excitement, only passing through in the morning and the noon to visit him. I brought him the knitted bear Claridge gave Kristen and I for our bonding; the boy was lacking in an animal companion to keep him warm in the nights. And, for all her occasional flaws, I could not think of a more devout and devoted guardian to invoke for the boy than Crusader Alessa Claridge. If the stuffed bear imparts even a fraction of that woman's steel-plated, indomitable, willpower on the boy, he is safe from every calamity known to man.  
I also finished carving the first toy soldiers from the wood; his very own Vigil Chapter to call his own, all sanded and polished with rough stones so that they have no sharp edges or treasonous splinters to hurt him. I still have many more to finish, but he has the first three now, a Charr warrior, an Asura and norn huntress with her wolf. He was so happy, he promptly tried to put each of them in his mouth. Thankfully I was not so stupid to make them small enough to swallow.  
  
I am left with a deeply contended heart. I spent much of the midday and early afternoon with Kristen, the hours passing too quickly. Sometimes I curse the passing of time, and wish I could spend all of eternity with the people that dwell so near to my heart they are all but a part of me. I have written it again, again and again, and still I am left amazed each day how deeply I feel the love that catches me unawares, and makes me feel so much lighter than my gut has any right to feel. I am already regretting the day I will leave, which approaches soon. It will be two days worth of travel, so not tomorrow or the day after, but then.  
  
Which reminds me of the most chance and surprisingly pleasant encounters; I saw Xeyia today. Well, it was Xeyia, though she now calls herself Irma. Claims that the old name holds too many memories with an ash taste that she would rather leave behind. It is like poor Sigra, when she ceased being Geartwister.  
She was well; looked well, too. Much of her face, which was so badly burned in the Maguuma, has healed better, and she allowed red spirit markings to be set upon her skin. She looks more like my kin than she does a human now, and somehow it suits her manners better. I didn't recognise her at first, in all honesty, if not for the lack of shoes, which she still refuses to wear. Her soles must be thicker than Dolyak's fur at this stage. It was good, though we hadn't seen in... nigh on a year now? More? We spoke well enough, and exchanged news. Some of it bad; like Drakemoor's death. On her side, it seems her uncle, Valiff, who was very old, has passed since from sickness. It is always a blow when an elder dies.  
It seems she's been on the wander again, not sure where she will head. Luck has it, she will remain in Hoelbrak some time more, so I will see if I can't find her again tomorrow, and show her my son. ~~Xeyia~~ Irma is a special enough woman at the best of times, but she is near as well a friend.  
But that will be towards the evening, I think, since that is when she told me I could find her in the boasting halls.  
  
I think before that, I will take the boy back to see little Aska again. My heart still bleeds for the little girl; I almost wish she was my own, so I could find better ways of comforting her. Of course, if that was the case, then there would not have been any reason for pain to begin with. And, since the boy had much joy when he was in the Wolf's lodge the other day, it is a good way to spend the noon.

# 50th of Colossus

The seventh day. Spirits, but they pass too quickly. Only tomorrow remains to form a bond with my little boy that woulds take years to forge otherwise. The dragons stand between me and my children once more, and the choice between duty to the Vigil and my son's future is weighed heavily against by my desire to stay here and be a good father to my son. I have decided that, by my oath, I shall finish this tour with the Vigil, and then see how well my son still knows me when I come back. Then I will make a choice, weighing my heart against my sword. It is a thread of doubt and conflict that troubles these otherwise blissful days; and I blame myself for letting it sour these sacred moments.  
  
I was at the boy early today again, before Helga had even woken to feed him. I did so with much ease, the memories of how to look after infants this old coming back like old friends. I remember learning it with much more grief when Freyja was only two seasons old, keeping the babe near me always while I learnt to knead, and glaze thin dough with egg-wash. With Reuzen it is quieter, more deliberate, but no less loving than it was those long twenty years ago.  
As I wrote yesterday, we went to see little Aska at Wolf's lodge, as soon as the hour was more agreeable. She was happy enough to see us return, with all the questions and curiosity of her age, clapping her hands together with glee as I set down the Jotunling with her, and told what we had done the days before. Reuzen found his own joy in the girl's mirth, and rendered both children happier for it. Of course, with such an avid audience, I quickly fell to telling other stories and tales. She knew the oldest and wisest legends already, no doubt from the wise elders that keep her, but her eyes grew like saucers when I spoke of the wars in Orr and Magus Falls. If in another ten years time, she joins the Vigil, I will claim credit for it in no small part, hah! I was so lost in the tales, it was only Reuzen's bawling at his soiled nappy that brought me back to the present. I changed him quickly enough, with the help of an elder who was kind enough to lend me her wise hands and heated some water to wash him in.  
I let the two children play for a while after while I shared a long pipe and a thumb of tobacco with the elder, who told me her name Livja Star-Tracker, so called because she can read the stars like the Jotun of old could, and never gets lost as long as she can see the sky. The secrets are inscribed on the old runestones that can still be found, stones whose knowledge had become known to this elder through means of ardent study and peering up at the sky during the clearest of nights. She carried with her a pouch of pebbles, each marked with a sigil, which she laid out for me in the rough wood floor, representing the sky above. I wished I had made notes as she pointed out to me the Great Spirit constellations that hang above our head. I remembered some of what I saw well enough from my sailing days with an astrolabe, but there were many constellations I had never even heard about. Of course, as is with elders who have lived so long, she grew tired at length, scooped up her stones, and bid me good travels.  
In the meantime, having kept at least half an eye on the playing children by the fire, it struck me Aska had taken particular liking to one of Reuzen's wooden soldiers. Of course, it was the norn huntress with the wolf carved into the base, that must've been much nearer to her heart. I decided to let her keep the toy of course, since the Jotunling is too young anyway to lament the loss. The child's happy smile repaid the kindness a million times over.  
  
Anyway, not too long after the elder went to rest, I took the boy to the boasting hall and sat there for a while until ~~Xey~~ Irma passed by. She was very kind to the boy, and sat with us for a good while. We spoke about Hrist, Kristen and myself. It was Irma that made me decide that I should consider to stay after this tour, or perhaps request to be taken down to half-duty, somewhere I can still do good, without robbing the boy of his father. I'll see.  
We also spoke at some length of what passed with Irma during that time between when we last saw each other in the Maguuma and now. Much to her credit, it seems Irma did not sit still for long, venturing into Magus Falls again, as deep as Auric Basin. There, she and a band of fellow travelers amongs whom Dhianni, crossed blades with a twisted and warped Exalted they stumbled across. As she tells it, the battle lasted for many days, until Dhianni thought of using a fallen's Exalted body as a shield, and protected them from the worst of the magic, before they finally managed to slay it. And good that they did, with such an important charge as a dragon's egg, I can only hope the Exalted hold Tarir as securely as they can, and shield it from all harm. If that egg is to change the course of the war, it has to hatch, after all.  
But I digress; Irma told her tale well enough. It seems that afterwards, her band fell apart, her uncle, whom I managed before, dying at bad time. So, now she is on her own again, considering what to do and where to go next. I offered the thought that the Vigil was still open, but it seems Irma, while changed, did not change so much as to suddenly become an exemplary soldier. Xeyia never was, and neither is Irma so it seems. But, she considers perhaps teaching weapons, which I think is a good idea. If she passes to Kryta, I am sure there are nobles willing to be taught weapons by an experienced fighter. Whether or not Irma will kill them first for their insolence is something entirely different. Then again, she and Kathleen got along well enough, so who knows?  
We had to cut the talk short there, because it was getting late, and the Jotuling was starting to fall asleep on my arm. I bid her good travels, and returned the boy home.  
  
Kristen was waiting for me after, and I told much of what had transpired today. I am not looking forwards to spending my nights alone in my tent again in a few days, but thank the spirits I still have two nights of warmth and gentle womanly snoring and stirring ahead of me before I'll need to pack up. Once more, I wish I could take my sweet, sweet Kristen with me when that times comes.

# 51st of Colossus

My last full day of this very special leave that has warmed my heart so much, and brought me so much closer to this small being that is my beautiful, glorious, little boy. They were beautiful, full, loving days, where I could not turn around a corner without feeling my heart swell. Family. My family.  
  
The day itself happened quiet enough at first, sleeping in long with Kristen in my arms, until I finally let her go long enough for her to trot off to Leopard's Lodge again, accompanied by her trail of companion animals. Daufi has gotten the fat and bloat of a maturing drake hanging off his frame, while Olena remains the most even-tempered of the bunch. The pocket raptor, which she has set to roam free, does not stray far from its nest, and hunts for vermin along the Lodge floors. The hunters and shamans know it is Kristen's now, so they leave it be for the most part. On it's own, it can do little but snap at stray fingers here and there, and no norn who lays claim to any aspect of animal mastery would willingly admit their annoyance at being nipped in the finger by a creature so small it might be mistaken for a small cat! But I digress; Kristen's starting to accrue the creatures like any great hunter that can look into an animal's soul, and feel their own spirit connect with it. They in turn are free and unbound much like their mistress; Olena flies off when she so desires, and Daufi lounges in the spare sun for hours, as if he were still in Southsun, only tied to Kristen through their mutual bond.  
Hm. I suppose if one was an in a wry set of mind, they could say I simply the most prominent and hairy of my wife's many pets.  
  
I picked up the boy and decided to pass the day in Leopard's Lodge as well, watching Kristen go about her communing with the lad on my knee, and an ale in my hand. She is answering petitioner's questions now, alongside Valharantha, Leopad's Speaker, sometimes looking to their offerings while the Speaker interprets Leopard's voice. The Speaker answers most, Kristen listening and learning as much as she is speaking herself. Her words are wise, though, Leopard speaks well through her. I doubted first if Kristen would care much about leaving her quiver at home, and taking to the shrine's care, but I should have known better. All the grace she has in the hunt now lie on her shoulders where-ever she goes. She was always the wiser of us both. Who knows, maybe she can even become apprentice to Havroun Svena in due time, and take up that most blessed duty.  
  
It was sat like this, lost in the admiration of my love that I was ambushed. With a great yell, a large strength jumped me from behind, and nearly sent me tumbling from my seat into the fireplace. The sudden onslaught almost knocked the Jotunling from my hands. Certainly, it sent him bawling with sudden fright, as his bear was flung from his little hands, landing, thankfully, just short from the fire. Such was the tumult that I thought I was being attacked! Of course, all was forgiven soon after, as it turned out that in my moment of unguarded admiration, my own daughter Freyja and her love Grace had managed to sneak up on me. Freyj, overcome with joy, had jumped straight unto my back to embrace me. I was as surprised when she then snatched Reuzen from my grasp, spun him around before kissing the bewildered infant on the top of his little head and giving him such a tight and loving hug I was afraid for a second she had squeezed him flat!  
By the time I had risen to my feet, all was well and quiet enough, and the lad stopped crying not too long after, though not for lack of trying on Freyja's part. The girl is like a blizzard howling over you when her blood is up, that's for sure.  
  
They looked well, both Grace and her. I learned that they have been travelling together in the south since Kristen and I bonded, and have seen and done many things they can be proud to have to their names. Freyj's leg still bears the recent scar of a deep cut across the thigh that forces her gait to be stiff and awkward. We don't know yet if it will get better, but I dare say she was lucky. I know enough of the body to know that if it had cut any deeper, my girl would have leaked her life out of her with every heartbeat. They went far, on foot from Lion's Arch, all the way into Orr, staying long to study all those beautiful and ruins that so filled with history. I must admit I am surprised by the Grace girl; I did not honestly think she had either the patience of a mountain nor the fortitude of an Ox, both of which I have no doubt were demanded of her by someone as headstrong as my daughter. But here they both stand, glowing with that deep and burning admiration for one another; it is the same admiration and love that grips me when I look at Kristen. It wasn't quite there when I last saw them, but now they carry it plain and openly. Good! Freyj wears love well, after all, passions guiding her.  
She did so well enough with the Jotunling, too! Brought him an atrociously ugly stuffed toy to sit in company alongside Claridge-Bear. Spirits, but rarely have I witnessed someone celebrate a sibling so loudly and joyously. She cheered, yelled and roared! Grace tells me that when they heard the news, in my letter, Freyja clambered to the top of the great conch at Caer Shadowfain and greeted the rising sun with her brother's name shouted across the gilded sands that lie around it. She kept hold of the boy too, unwilling to give him back after the boy stopped crying, cooing over him. The laddie was disheartened well enough by her sudden appearance and the energy in her movements, but I have a feeling he will get to know her better quickly in the next days. Freyj and Grace will both stay in Hoelbrak for some time, both to recover from the journey, and to help Usha with the Wintersday brews which should be coming along soon. I haven't seen my sister yet, irritatingly, because she has been in the Citadel with Fuse for the last season or so. Or that is what I was told by brewer tending the kegs. If that's the case, Freyj's help will be needed. Odd, it's not like Usha to miss a Wintersday casking.  
Anyway, that means Freyj, Grace, Kristen, Hildr, Helga and Hrist in Hoelbrak to watch over the boy. He has no idea how blessed he is, I wager, hah. I just hope Grace stops Freyj from getting too boisterous with the infant, he's a big lad, but he's only six seasons.  
  
After I managed to pry Reuzen away from Freyj's grip long enough to bring the lad back to his bed for the evening, we drank to my last evening in Hoelbrak. Kristen joined us once the Speaker let her go, and the night turned to drunken singing, yelling and boasting soon enough. I've taken a moment to write my journal now, with a mug ale sat in front of me, surrounded by cheer and good humour. Kristen's looking over my shoulder, making sure I only say the best things about her. Yes you, don't look innocent, I know your peeking. I love you.  
To her credit, Grace is managed Freyj well. The lass started taking drinking challenges against all comers to celebrate meeting her half-brother, and she's neck-deep in a keg of mead, already swaying. I have half a mind to join her, but I think Kristen just shot me a glance that means she won't be robbed of her last night by my being too drunk to walk straight.  
Ah, what we do for women!

# 52nd of Colossus

Dear spirits, everything is spinning. I'm trying to focus really hard on writing now, and it feels like I'm being pulled into a deep hole, even though I am sitting perfectly still. I'll hurry it along, before I do fall over for sheer inebriation.  
  
I woke thoroughly hungover today, sprawled across the bed in Leopard's Lodge Kristen and I lay occasional claim to, with parts of my armour and clothing left in piles around us. Kristen wasn't much better. I can't well remember exactly how much we drank yesterday, but it was a good evening. Freyj was stood on top of a table with her pouldrons tied across her head like horns while she drank straight from the keg. Kristen and I helped Grace drag the lass back before we staggered to bed ourselves.  
  
Unfortunately, for lack of placing a jug of water next to the bed, my hangover was such that I missed some hours of the travel. I slept in past dawn, and had to say my goodbyes with a knotted brow and a hammering head. I kissed Kristen and Freyj goodbye, asked Bear to watch over Reuzen, and then set off back towards the Ascalon. The gates took longer than usual, with the Asura gate folks taking undue time to inspect off my kit. As a result of my later-than-planned departure and the hold-up, I was only in Ebonhawke proper by the later afternoon. I could've pushed through and gotten to Blazeridge the same day, but I had no stomach for travelling unknown roads after the dark. Especially not such a hostile country as this. Rather, I rented a room in the Ebonhawke inn where we celebrated the Mad King's day some days past; they had good food, and their rooms are not very expensive.  
  
I ran into Darin too! It seems Neewy finally decided to bring their child onto the earth, and I heard the good news that his daughter Vanessa Darkbow is hale and hearty. Given I'm still on leave, and carried with me enough silver to last some drinks and to pay off the gates, we found nothing better to do but to set to celebratory drinking. Which is why the room is spinning. I'm pretty sure I've drank through a whole season's pay is just about nine days.  
It was good!  
  
Spirits, I forgot, they're going to wake me up in the morning at first light for the march north. Urgh.  
I'll go set a jog of water ready to clear the worst of the head-pain that will inevitably come galloping in the night's passage.  
Now, sleep.

# 53rd of Colossus

Well that was just weird.  
  
Anyway, let me start from the top.  
I left Ebonhawke in the morning, after the blasted staff woke me too early for the hangover I had. At least they made it better by providing me with an excellent breakfast directly afterwards; someone got them an excellent consignment of venison in the hunt, and their cook's prepared it almost to perfection.  
Either case, I marched for most of the morning before I arrived in the Blazeridge camp, where they promptly put me at Blade squad's lead, and sent me back to patrol the road to the Summit. That went easily enough, just some harpies bothering a Vanguard camp and another one of those stray rifts hanging over a meadows. Not an active one, so we just watched it collapse in on itself, completed our march tour, and headed back. There was a Priory woman over near the Summit, so they've taken notice of the tears in reality at least.  
  
Camp's alright, we're out on a fortified hillock in a stretch of Ogre territory. It's an Ebon Vanguard position, so it's in relatively good, if primitive, shape. Ogres seems to be present around here a lot, leading to skirmishes with them. Oh, and they found Sigra! Thank Raven, I was close to finally giving up the woman as dead, and then I returned to hear they rescued her from a separatist holdout. Alleshia told me they made her eat bloodstone dust, which has rendered her mute. Thankfully, when I went to visit, she did not seem so bad. She was smiling when I asked her questions, so it's something. I hope she recovers speedily and steadily. That woman has lived through so much, she could make a good name of it, if she wanted it. Orr, Magus Falls, captured by Dredge and by Separatists? Tenacious in surviving, her.  
  
Blade's also got a new Charr, goes by the name of Steel. Blood Legion to the bone, and thinks like one too. He gave a good first impression, but seems like the sort of fighter we'll get to scolding for breaking formation too often. He didn't today, but we only barely engaged any enemies, so it was difficult to say. Still, after Geran, I'm inclined to be cautious about Charr hotheads. We'll see if he tempers or not.  
  
In other news, Kaila's been signed back to the engineers. She was being grumpy, but that loosened up a little bit as time went on. She's drawing up the full supply inventory for the engineers. We set to cracking some jokes around the fire, all in good nature, and getting steadily more rowdy as the day went on. Apparently Lionhead has a four year old son called Leif, by a father that's passed away. Yeah. Someone actually did it. We were laughing and making horrible jokes about it, when Bee suddenly darts part carrying around Maeva's boot. Meava then proceeded to seize up Bea, and first pinch her butt, before transitioning right out to slapping the girl with her armoured gauntlets across the backside, telling her to "say uncle". We just sort of watched, perplexed by the entire ongoing.  
Eventually she did cry 'uncle', and was finally released from... her torture? Mating ritual? I have no idea.  
I made the mistake of making a tasteless joke at the end that sounded much better in my head than it did out in the open, and fell flat. Ah well, I cut my losses and decided to call it a night.  
  
It's... err... good to be back, I think?

# 54th of Colossus

Foewatch, same as before. Only learned the name today.  
It's been a long enough day, and I'll tell you why. We were sat around the campfire earlier, when Vatorn heard fighting over the palisade. When we investigated, we spotted a big band of Blood Legion Charr heavies movies down through the gully that runs alongside the camp. It's walled in both sides by steep drops, and almost becomes canyon-like in certain places. There's a fast-moving but very shallow river running through it. The Charr were wading through it, up to their ankles, and in a skirmish of sorts. We came to their aid, of course, just in time to be taken under fire from down the gully by what turned out to be a separatist fire team. The Bloods stood their ground, and got peppered, while I directed us into cover. Still the legion folks are heavily armoured, and when they rallied they charged down the separatists. I took the front along with them, while Sinclair directed ranged fire onto the enemy from a higher position they seized on my command. Attack splintered the separatists well enough.  
They rounded up a few survivors which I think they were sure they were just going to put down. I spoke up to spare them, but didn't expect it to matter much. To my surprise, however, the Legionnaire yielded the prisoners to my custody instead. We were in the process of rounding them up when a whole bloody Ogre tribes roars up from the forest's edge. We were swarmed instantly, and cut off from the Charr. Took some heavy fighting before we could link up. Never formed a fighting square with a Blood legion band before, but spirits, they can fight. We held out like this, even though some of the Charr started dropping at a good pace. Eventually, when the stalemate had lasted long enough, the chieftain of the Ogre tribe appeared and offered to settle the battle in personal combat, whereupon he fought with two of the Blood legion volunteers. Thankfully, the Bloods know their craft well, and they reaped the chief's life after a short but brutal battle.  
After that, it was over quick. We secured the remaining prisoners, most of which had died in the melee with the ogres, and marched them off. To their credit, the prisoners fought on our side, and many sold their hides dearly.  
We took no wounded, but the Blood troops, who were with many more, suffered more serious injuries. Their legionnaire asked for the sanctuary of our camp, which I decided to grant them. Hospitality demands that sort of thing. So, we know have a good twenty very gnarly Charr in camp. They're Blood legion to the bone, so it's all rough and brusque. Still, the evening passed without actual incident between the Legion troops and the Chapter, despite some of our humans trying their best.  
  
Roeland is with them, apparently. He's decided to join up with the bloody Blood legion of all things, along with his friend Leto. He looks weird in legion armour, but I suppose it's a home of sorts, right? He asked to see Force, but I think the latter pulled a long picket. If he misses him, for whatever reason, I'll ask Force to send the lad a letter. I need to talk to Force about his cubs anyway, I don't even know their bloody names. Bah!  
  
Most of the evening was a bit of an odd one, actually. Carmine talked to me about letting Ravenwest pull her full weight in engineering, which I was planning on doing anyway. As long as she doesn't pull any stunts, she can do her share of work just as before. Far as I'm aware, Marcus has been fiddling around with head a bit, or something, and she's back on full duty, so... no reason not to put her back in the action. She's already working on compiling a work inventory of Chapter's field armoury, so that's good.  
  
Kaitark and Vatorn are being difficult again. I've called them both on counselling again, probably start with Kaitark, then talk to Vatorn. Wish I didn't need to, but if they want to be difficult, I'm going to have to be difficult too. I'll have to find some time in my day one of following. Oh, yeah, and we're moving camp again on the... 58th I think it was, deeper into Ascalon. I have to say, fighting side by side with a Blood Warband was a surprise that does make me respect the sheer shock of the Blood legion troops a lot more than I did before. Surprising, really.  
  
What else? Oh yeah, Kaitark wants a dart gun for medical. I'll need to pencil that in, either make one from a flamethrower's pressure tank, or have one purchased directly by supplies. Might have to fiddle with the dart, too. I'll see. Not really a priority.  
  
Regardless, today's work has left me exhausted. Getting swamped by Ogres wasn't something I expected to happen today. At least I'll sleep well.

# 55th of Colossus

Foewatch.  
  
Everything is calm. The Blood Legion troops marched off come morning, as they promised, with no major incidents having taken place overnight. Did some exercise with Vahenir; there's improvement, certainly. Her drake has gotten better at tackling the opponents, and her swordwork is more fluent. Still a lot of room for practice and improvement, but the base is there to build upon. Thankfully, the archery doesn't need much coaching. Wardens tend to draw arrows naturally.  
Klixxa came by to talk about my health afterwards. With all the anomalous magic popping out all over the place, I suppose it's prudent. For all the repeated frights I get when I think about it, I still feel fine and fit. I told Klixxa as much. Only thing that really changed since I got zapped by that ley-line is that my inner fire burns easier and more freely when I'm in the heat of battle. She seemed satisfied enough with the answer. Also wrote Kraxxi afterwards, told her about my little boy back home now. I hope he's doing well without his da to show him the world, and that Freyja hasn't accidentally mashed him into a fine past through the virtue of sisterly love and care, eh?  
  
I spent most of the day on long watch, outside the camp walls, looking over the gully where the Ogres attacked us yesterday. The bodies of the fallen have long since been dragged clear; I think the Ogres came for their dead. Just some viscera and lost body parts being gnawed on by carrion eaters, dragged clear of the water. Thankfully the waters stream fast and low, washing the blood off into earth with their current. I doubt it's the first blood this river has seen, not the last. I'm mostly happy I didn't have to shed any of mine for it. There is so much to live for now. I hope I see my boy grow up to stand shoulder to shoulder with his father. I hope to see Kristen wearing the Leopard's dress with her own son or daughter on her arm, inside a lodge where I can hunt beasts until I am old and grey enough to fall off a cliff in the midst of a hunt and be at peace with it.  
  
Anyway, I got back to camp when my watch was over, and they sent a Vanguard to relieve me. Seems that during that time, Penbroke managed to have her hunting bird snatched out of the air by some idiot archer. She then apparently set to using some strange form of magic by using her own blood as a catalyst. It healed the bird, but it caused a bit of a stir. I checked in with her later, and she claims it's some old magic she learned from a hermit called Gaius. Apparently a man that took her in, out in the Brisban bush. She showed me some sigils and drawings. They strike me as being magical runes of some kind, but I wouldn't know a signet from a Jotun's way-carving, so that doesn't say much. I've a mind to send it to Freyja and Grace. They've got better minds for old magical things than I do, and it invites Freyja to write her old man in that peculiar way she does it. Always speaks out the words as she is writing, without actually thinking. As if she is talking to the paper, and her hand simply makes the motions.  
But I'm getting sidetracked. Pennbroke's magic is a curious one, she kept calling it Wild Magic, whatever that's supposed to mean. Seemed pretty distraught too, about making a mistake against some rule this Gaius person taught her. I didn't see the issue much, considering she simply went to help her companion animal as best as she could. Eh.  
  
Also spoke, at length, to Vatorn and Kaitark, as I said I would.  
Tiresome. Kaitark was predictable, he just boiled over and stopped having time for the human. Vatorn's selfish and thick as a piece of Lion's Arch concrete. Gist of it really. No idea if he'll improve or not, but he hasn't since he enlisted, and I'm running out of patience. The fact that I don't like his petulant little hide also doesn't help, but at least I'm wise enough to feign patience here and there, even when mine has run out.  
These people don't appreciate how much effort goes into them.  
  
Ah well, now at least I've talked to them. The rest is in their hands, I suppose, leaving me to observe.  
Think I'll do some exercises tomorrow. The troops are getting lax, so we'll call them up on a good old formalities drill. See if they remember the rules.

# 56th of Colossus

Still in Foewatch; just two days away from marching on.  
All is quiet, just the usual chattering around. Ravenwest finished writing up the full inventory, saving me some trouble. Of course, I went through and had a quick count again, because it's my responsibility. It all checked out though, so she's done her work well.  
We got a new recruit march in, pretty late into the evening. Big fellow, got papers from Keep. He's stern enough, I'm curious to see how he does in the field. He didn't join us, though. Guess the march was long.  
  
Well, anyway, asides from some talk around fire, however, everything remained calm as the sea on a windless day.  
  
Oh. I realised I forgot to do the exercises I had planned. Hm.

# 57th of Colossus

Last day in Foewatch, before we're off to our next post on the battle lines. It seems we're clearing up territorial disputes, rooting out tribes of Ogres that have become too quarrelsome, and smoking our renegades and separatist lairs so some calm can return to us. I'm still divided over the necessity of slaying Ogres, but they are so ferocious and unrelenting that I've come to slowly consider that we might have little other choice. The man-eaters near Ebonhawke, and now the aggressively territorial tribes that seek expansion are threats that seem to have little room for compromise. It's like the dredge; if they will not share the land in peace, and try to take it by force, we have to resist, and assert our strength as decisively as we can. Despite all of what I just said, it still makes my heart bleed that we sometimes have to respond to such a stupid thing as tenacious stupidity with the sword.  
  
Regardless, we'll move deeper inland soon, no doubt. We took a moment to go out foraging down into the river, and found a relaxing little bend where the water was deep enough to wet the feet. We shot some salamander drake too, for food. Took most of the evening to prepare, but it's packed away and should serve the Chapter for a few days of good roast before it'll start going off. Better than the tinned stuff anyway.  
It was pleasant, too. I think I actually kind of liked that little pocket of Ascalon. Only weird thing was that we found a lit campfire near the shore, whose tender or tenders seemed to have fled as we approached. No idea who or why either. Might have been some travelers anxious to cross paths with armoured soldiers, which doesn't really sooth my worries. Still, we weren't ambushed by separatists like that Charr column was some days ago, so all is well.  
  
On the morrow, I'm going to give some sword instruction to Vahenir and Zikk. For some reason, I keep confusing the first with Nirrae. I suppose them both being green and Sylvari might have something to do with it, but still. It's stupid, and annoy myself with it, nevermind looking like a fool in front of the troops. Anyway, Zikk and Vahenir will do some sword training, even though they're not really evenly matched for size, or probably skill. Sometimes I wish I could chance size, so I could teach them all to fight equally well. Ahh... Well, I'll have to make do with the body I was given!  
  
Now, before I sleep, I've made an offering to Bear, with some good cuts of Drake meat. I'll burn it, and hope Bear will see the bounty of my hunt as worthy, and extend her strong paws to watch and protect my baby boy and the people in Hoelbrak caring for him. Give him the strength to live in safety and grow strong and big until his arms and legs are strong enough to wield an axe! There isn't a day that passes where I don't wish to hold you again, little Jotungling. I hope you know this and forgive me for not being there to show you.

# 58th of Colossus

The Last Whiskey Bar (not an actual bar).  
We've moved camp across west, to the crossroads that lead all the way back to the Black Citadel. It's a bit supply nexus, guarded by small Charr post. We went across the brand at Steeleye Span, an impressive cannon-festooned fortification built like a blockade across the worst of the corruption. It was an impressive enough outpost, and you can still see it sit downslope from the watch-tower. The Brand itself is within spitting distance, running within inches of the eastern wall. It howls and crackles, and sometimes you can see something big and terrible swoop over. Dragon lieutenants. Not sure if there is only one, or if there are many, but it is a sight to behold, alright. It also makes so much palpable the threat of the region. Within the sighs of Steelspan, however, I doubt the beast or beasts will dare come down. Those gun batteries match the broadside of a large Pact airship. I don't doubt they'd reduce a dragon to ash if it was stupid enough to hover too close.  
The rest of the camp is curious but mostly unremarkable. They've sunk a large portion of it below ground into some sort of pit they use for sport. I understand that this used to be a whiskey bar or something, but now it's mostly a Legion post now, that doubles as a brawling pit. Most of the approaches are secure, part of chains of Legion strong-points you can find all around the Brand.  
  
Duties today were fairly light, just observed the defense state, which only needed us to set some distant pickets to have eyes on the approaches. That was about the extent of that. I dug into the supplies and set to prepare the drake meat we got yesterday, mixed it into a sweet corn and noodle broth I made from the supply stocks. Finally felt like some real food, instead of eating that tinned stuff. It was good, caused a little bit of the mess feeling we used to have when we had more regular cooking. Still have enough drake left for more than a couple of meals, too, so I think I'll do the same tomorrow. Cook up something nice.  
  
Before we left, I set up Zikk and Vahenir as I said I would. Turned out alright. They're both a little out of whack, though Zikk knows what he's doing more so than Vahenir. The size is a major issue. I'll have them run through some movement sets tomorrow, hopefully get them used to moving a little more securely. Ah, always the slow lessons...  
  
I'm running out of good pipe weed too. I still have a cigar locked away somewhere for when we do demolitions missions, but I like the good old long-pipe for around the fire. I wonder if the Charr have good pipe weed for me, might see if I can't get the Quartermasters to find some for me in exchange for a ration ticket. That, or I'll have to crumble cigar leaves again, which never as good as something well-scented and groomed for the taste.  
  
Everything's been quiet for the remainder. Surprisingly so, even.

# 59th of Colossus

The Last Whiskey Bar.  
  
Operations in Steeleye Span today. Hefty day. Full Chapter went down for support operations, allowing the Sentinels to pull out some troops and rotate new ones in without missing a link in the chain. It was supposed to be a rather calm routine operation, but that turned out rather differently. We set to do some routine maintenance work, with the Lance squad under Mithra's command looking over us. That went well enough, asides from some relatively minor attacks. I sent Sel and Lionhead into the wall structures with flamethrowers to clean out the devourers that nestle there.  
We ended up going out into the Brand itself, investigating some sort of big coil Blade spotted on the horizon. We went to look, but it wasn't clear what it was supposed to be. It was active, though, sparking with energy, right nearby an old Ascalonian ruin crawling with ghosts. The Branded and the Ghosts of the Foefire have little love for eachother, and they were embroiled in combat. Something tells me this coil either kept the Branded clear, like those capacitors did further south, or it does the opposite, and it deliberately lures branded onto the ghosts, where they'll destroy each other readily enough. Either case, on the road back we saw a blood Shatterer fly over, and suddenly curve down to spew bloody brand-fire all over parts of Steeleye Span. We had to rush back quickly, and thankfully made it back into the citadel's cover before the dragon could make a second pass. Even so, it's a miracle no-one was hurt.  
The flying bastard manage to burn some holes in the outer walls, and as if summoned by their master, Branded started swarming in through the fissures. We managed to hold the center well enough, but our exits were cut off by that Shatterer circling overhead. Thankfully, I didn't forget what I wrote down the other day, and ordered Ravenwest to assist me on the Span's cannons. A few well-aimed shells forced the flying crystal bastard to disengage and fly off. It tried to strafe us a few time, but I eventually managed to force it to break off its attack altogether. The Span's engineers rushed out and patched the holes in the walls with thick sheet-metal, after which it seemed to clear up a little. Eventually we were able to march back to our little camp, with no major injuries asides from Sinclair who seemed to have suffered acute magical exhaustion again.  
  
The entire thing shook Mithra a fair bit, I think. This was her first serious field command, and she was a little slow on the draw. Meant Sinclair and I were doing most of the work, which is fine, right up until the time when we're not there. I suspect she'll get better with experience, but still. Of course, I was encouraging and supportive as needed, since the last thing we need to do now is nurture any self-doubts they have. Be that as it may, the lass might simply not be cut from the right sort of wood to hold field commands. I suppose we'll see how that evolves over the days, with my hopes being higher than my expectations. I resent command a little for putting her in a spot like that in the first place; sink or swim tactics will play on the girl's self-esteem if she doesn't make the grade. Ah well. A guiding hand is something I can offer, and if not that, at least a pat on the back and a tin of tea.  
Speaking of tea, we had a good meal again today, went through more of the drake meat today. Sigra even came out to sit with us and eat; I'm glad she's doing well enough to walk a little now. I've meant to visit medical more often, but the bustle of the day prevents me too often. It was a pleasant enough meal either way, that makes me miss the days when we could do this every day. Ah well.  
  
Speaking of every day, Zikk and Vahenir's practice continued, though less well than usual. I think I'll skip a day and let them practice on their own. Spirits, might even give them a chance to sleep in, rather than being woken up at dawn, the way I like it. Seleea also requested to do the standard qualification test for Ballistician they've sent me some days ago. She's the second, after Lionhead, both have passed. I'll be sending out the notes to command later, make sure they get due qualifications sooner rather than later.  
  
I also spoke at some length with Ravenwest, at her own request. She wanted counselling, but it was more just an extended social chat. Talked about motivations, fitting in, and so on. Apparently she's not entirely secure of her fit in the Chapter and the Engineers. All that's been going on has isolated her a little, I think, which is something I can do little about. Torment, I get little enough time to speak to everyone I should be speaking to, let alone allowing me time to make friends for other people. I might need to bring up the topic with Lionhead and Seleea, though, since they've apparently been treating Ravenwest with less the respect a fellow soldier of theirs should be accorded. Or at least, that's what I've been hearing. I'll see what I do about it. Good news is that she's talking to Vatorn a bit, so they both get some energy out of it. Oh, yes, about Vatorn; he apparently managed to dump a load of water from a spell unto a Legion Charr here. He was then stupid enough to mention it to my face, which I mediated directly by finding out what happened, and making sure him and Vahenir, who was helping him, were noted down for seven, days of dish-washing work. A mostly symbolic punishment, since we've only got fresh forage for one day more before we're back to tins. I suppose I might set out a foraging detachment out west then...  
But I'm getting sidetracked here.  
Ravenwest needs some more attention, because Raven forbid I have autonomous and fully functional soldiers that don't need personal attention. That's overly harsh, but sometimes I feel like I'm some sort of shepard, rather than a soldier. Point in case, Ravenwest said I match her idea of a father pretty closely. Mithra's said that before as well. These days, I'm not so sure how it makes me feel. Guilty, I suppose, that I'm considering staying home from next tour on. I mean, who will look after all these folks if I don't?  
I don't know.  
  
Spirits, the day in the Brand has tired me out, and the entire contemplation of my role within the Chapter doesn't help to lighten my mind. I think I'll sleep in myself, let one of the others handle reveille for a change.

# 60th of Colossus

Last Whiskey Bar. Overheads here are sporadic, with the Brand so close by. It makes taking accurate readings of the weather hard. Mostly, however, Ascalon has that mild temperate climate that should normally grow lush forests of broad green leaves, cold and wet winters where snow may fall, but rarely ever lies for long. But out here, it's hard to see that country. The tracks are ground down to muddy gravel by the supply caravans and the troops that pass through the checkpoint. The trees are all ochres and reds, dusted and watered with blood. This close to the Brand, the otherwise stout and proud watchtowers of nature's spirit have long since fallen to Charr axe. Those rare survivors are as much senintels over the Brand as the heavily armoured Charr troops that we see every day are.  
  
Operations today were lengthy; we were sent all the way south back to the Setinel research station we visited some time back, near the Branded lake. The same place where Seleea and I went around fiddling with the capacitors that keep the place somewhat clear of Branded. Well, apparently they found something of note that they required help with. Turned out to be a somewhat collapsed passage down a long-abandoned mine. Looked like it was seconds away from just collapsing on top of us. We must've disturbed something simply by coming in, as the place was swarming with Branded Devourers within seconds of us making our way inside. Not a few either, but dozens, maybe even hundreds of the damn beings. We managed to square up and fight our way out just as a Siege Devourer pulled itself clear of whatever hell-pit it crawled from. The critters burrowed and surged with such violence that the passage started collapsing. Luckily, thanks to same clever thinking from our guardians and Vatorn, we got out in one piece, the access behind us collapsing. A short but hectic encounter, at that. We marched all the way back north afterwards, the larger part of it through the Brand.  
I have to say, I did not expect to be spending as much time in the actual corruption as we are. The threat is palpable, and the need to wear full gas-hoods for protection is killing me. Too hot, and I keep feeling like I'm getting strangled. It's almost impossible to take deep breaths. Down in the tunnels, at one point, I could only see where I was going thanks to the fire I kept throwing out ahead of me, burning through the Devourers. Stuff of nightmares. Just muffled darkness with a roiling mass of crystalline chitin ahead of you, of which a single stray scratch can mean you turn into a mindless monster. It takes conscious effort to block it out when you're in the thick of it, but spirits, when I think of it now... It's madness. The Sentinels have a wretched task, but you can't fault their stubborn courage.  
  
It makes me wonder, too, if we can someday heal this land. Our late Marshal, may his memory be kept alive by the tales we'll tell of his valour, cleansed Orr. Who knows one day we'll undo the Brand's corruption, and bring a little more peace to this tortured land. I wonder if the forests would turn green again.  
  
Asides from that, I've decided to give Seleea and Lionhead seven days each to head up Engineering, see who qualifies best as second. They both want the job, so, it's up to them to prove it to me. What's more, I want to see if they mesh well with the team. I hope that gives them some incentive to also indirectly work towards making Small and Ravenwest fit in better, rather than the somewhat aloof and detached part they are now. I'm not too sure about Small either; she seems rather to be inclined in being anywhere else than here, and has the initiative of a baked brick. At least Ravenwest gives me the impression of wanting to do things, regardless if she's a perfect fit with the team or not. Ah well. At least Seleea and Lionhead have both passed their Ballistician qualification tests, so I can safely let them work without having to worry about them missing a beat in basic competencies. Here's hoping this entire exercise will end up drawing the corps together, rather than splitting us apart into little cliques.  
Might need to start looking at inducting new recruits, though, we're getting a little anemic. With the Ballistician grades, quality's gone up, but our quantity's going down.  
  
What else? I made food again today, but I might have gone a little heavy on the garlic. Pretty sure we all stink now. Drake's gone, so if we want decent food, we'll have to send out foraging groups. Canyon west here leads out into the Ashford Plains, which is supposed to be one of the calmer areas. Here's hoping there's some good game abounds, because I'm loath to return to tinned rations.  
  
The new norn, Haakon, apparently caused a fuss with command. Not sure what about, but it was the sort of tug-of-war between them and him that makes me think it's about being unused to putting the group over the individual. You have some of those, norn who never take enough of Wolf's teachings, and can't see the bigger picture. Spirits, it's usually a vice perpetrated by ardent, but not very wise, Leopard followers. He'll see the light. Or he'll fail to adjust and fluke out. Either way.  
Makes me miss Kristen. Shaman is always handy at a time like this, especially if that shaman is also a disgustingly beautiful blonde-haired woman who happens to be my wife. Ah... I hope she does well with her trials, and we can do some hunting for a few small days over next leave. Just the two of us, before I turn my eyes back to Freyja and Reuzen. Or, who knows, maybe I'll stay, and we can have as much time as we want to make up those many, many lost days.  
  
I don't know yet. The agony of choice!  
But I'm getting anxious too early. There's no doubt still many fights to be had before I'll have to finally decide. That Shatterer that keeps flying overhead, if it even is the same one, will have to be dealt with too. I wouldn't be surprised if we're committed to that action again; it's what we do. I'm unsure if I should write Kristen about it not, however. It's almost a habit now, but since we're bonded, no longer needed for our continued bond. Everyone who knows us understands that Kristen is the flame in my heart, sometimes literally, when I call it forth in battle to burn my enemies. She is in every swing of my sword, and I am in the flight of every arrow she looses, after all.

# 61st of Colossus

Where to start for today.  
I got a letter from Usha, sent from Hoelbrak, explaining her long absence. Turns out she and Fuse went ahead and had cubs to themselves. Something I can hardly begrudge them, and a reason for celebration under normal circumstances. Two of them, Snow and Tzahr. I can't belief she named one after me either, though I suppose Usha is my sworn sister, Charr or not, and I am their uncle now. News as that might be, it is overshadowed by bad news. Usha and Fuse had a falling out shortly after the little ones were brought into the world. From what I could understand, Fuse and his sire had arranged for the cubs to be taken back into the Fahrar eventually, rather than live their life out in banishment as both their parents have. This behind Usha's back, who took it badly, and apparently injured her mate before returning to Hoelbrak.  
I praise the Spirits that they allowed for Freyja to be there, because she did not seem to be in such a state as to leave me without worry. Thankfully Freyja seems to have cushioned her where needed, and they're now in the middle of bottling the Wintersday brews. She expects Fuse to come back eventually, at which point I suspect Usha will reconcile with him, or Freyja will tear the old Charr's horns out with her bare hands. Either case, it is a troubling development that would have disquieted my heart and mind much.  
  
But that was not the worst of it. Usha wrote later that, having no stomach for secrets anymore, she felt like it was time to confess hers. Spirits, the damn woman has been working for the Order behind my bloody nose ever since Zhaitan fell! She feigned retirement after the dragon died, but it was all a lie. A cover story. The brewery, too, was just a front for her to conduct her business though! And I believed her, like the blind idiot I am. She knew about Sana too. Spirits, she must've known all along, and never said anything, even when... Gah.  
I feel so betrayed in my trust. She made a fool of me. I believed Usha to be a shrewd but honest brewer, not a provisioner of arms and equipment! Did Freyj know? Am I simply so blind and stupid that my entire family has mocked me while they ply their secret trade right below my very nose? I called this Charr my sister because she might as well have been, but in this moment where she most praises the love she gets from me as my kin, she confesses she has repaid my brotherly affection with lies and deceit. It hurts, and I struggle to make sense whether or not I loath her for it, or can find it in my heart to forgive her. Usha Snowbanished, kin, your honesty cuts me deeper than any sword.  
  
Kristen too. Usha wrote me telling that Kristen had also been part of the Order. At least she admits it, Usha writing with Kristen's voice that she will explain everything to me in due time. Usha urges me to remember that Kristen forgave me a child already, with Reuzen, but it does little to cushion the blow. I struggled long with the idea whether or not I could trust her again after... this. I've never held secrets from the people I loved, I never stopped to think they might keep them from me. It's as Usha writes, I am too honest for my own good.  
  
Of course, I was fuming with barely contained anger. I've not been this enraged by any news since Southsun. My heart turned to ice first, before it was set alight by the ferocity of the anger and shame that came after. It blazed so hotly it struck sparks from my knuckles. It was almost too much to bear, not to lash out at people and hurt them. So I went hunting instead. Alone. A stupid, stupid thing to do in hindsight, but it is my doom to always look back with a level head at the follies I've committed when there runs fire in my blood.  
I went to shoot moa, which went well, until a bout of vexation caught me while I was loading the gun. The notion was so fierce in despicable self-pity that my very fingers burned through the bloody paper cartridge, and the powder burst in my hand, leaving me with scorched and bleeding fingers. The damage is not so great that I can't write, but the is a constant throb much deeper in my hand, accompanied by a much sharper sting when I move too quickly or suddenly. Stupid. Dangerous, too. I decided to stow the gun for the time being, and called upon Bear instead. She answered readily, and for a brief moment I was at peace, feeling earth below my paws, the wind across my fur. I turned my anger to the hunt, rending asunder several of the moa birds before even Bear retracted her favour, casting me back in that tired and injured form I still hold. I should have remembered Bear values strength and ferocity, but mindless rage is as much an insult to her as it is to anyone. I see that now, after having communed with her in silence, before I set to writing. But earlier today, all of my wisdom failed me, and I forgot the most base of Bear's teachings. She spoke to me today, when I asked her why she had left me, reminding me that my ferocity must always be mine, and never the other way around.  
  
I wish I had known sooner. I came back from the hunt, not understanding why Bear had left me, angry and injured. Prydwén and Kaitark saw to my injuries. I explained to them that what had happened was a misfire, because that's what I believed it to be. I was still too angry and vexed to accept that I might have caused this to happen through pure agitation, rather than some rare mechanical misfire. Kaitark saw what I couldn't see, of course, as his kind is wont to do, and he pressured me into answering what was wrong. I responded badly. I said bad things. To him, but mostly to Prydwén. I lashed out at her in a way that shames me too much to write down, and I regretted doing so instantly.  
With Lalowa too. In a moment of folly, while talking about her girl Aska, I felt the need to let honesty win, and told her that I had asked the shamans about the girl's father. I shouldn't have. Lalowa's anger was visible, and I have probably ripped open old wounds that might have otherwise been in the process of healing. In doing so, I might even have done worse for little Aska through my own idiocy.  
  
I knew soon enough that I'd done stupid things, unworthy of myself and of those around me both. I made a wreath for Prydwén out of flowers I picked by the wayside, and offered it to her as a sign of contrition. Genuine as the dawn. We reconciled, thankfully, and she said something for which I will be long grateful. I told her of some of my fears, with Kristen, and with Usha, and she responded with one of Venatri's wisdoms. "Never leave a wrong to ripen into evil or sorrow." It struck me like a hammer ringing the anvil, and opened my eyes how I was letting doubt and anger fester and turn me against the things I love so dearly. As Bear gives me strength in my arms, it was like having your eyes opened.  
I resolved there and then not to allow my doubts and my anger to destroy the love I hold for Usha and for Kristen. I love them both; Usha has been my most stalwart and dear friend, and Kristen is a woman I fundamentally, deeply adore. A few old lies willingly surrendered weigh like a feather against that. I just wish I'd have seen this sooner, rather than let fury and evil thoughts reign for even half a day. So easily are stout hearts corrupted.  
And not everything is healed yet either. I owe Lalowa an apology as well, and Kaitark. And when I return home, I will have to talk long with my wife and my sister.  
  
I am exhausted. Spent. The day was a blizzard of emotions, many of which prove that I am a lesser man that many might think me to be. Today, I was not an example, but rather a shameful shade of what I aspire to be to everyone around me. As I said before, it is my eternal torment to grieve over the wrongs I have done in folly, mere moments after I have committed them.  
  
But, with the guidance of Ventari's ancient wisdoms, and Bear's voice, I will make amends.

# 62nd of Colossus

Last Whiskey Bar.  
  
Hand stings a lot. Didn't sleep too well. Kept tossing and turning, the mind churning away and thinking and re-thinking the same ideas over and over. It's settled my resolve to talk to Kristen and Usha, but it did rob me some much needed rest. I didn't leave my tent much today, just needed time to sleep, to think, and to level out all these thoughts that ripple through my mind.  
I laid a wreath for Lalowa, which she accepted, so that's another burden lifted from my mind.  
  
But yes, a day in seclusion. I only passed outside near the end, only to find out that apparently Kraxxi's made her way here from Rata Novus. She's been in conference with Klixxa, and is here to do something about the magic we've all been absorbing. Her research with the Chak means she's got an idea to try and 'filter' magic, like light through a prism, into spectrums. If it works, she'll be able to see if there's any harmful magic present that we can't cleanse. I'll go in for study tomorrow, then. Can't do much with a bust hand anyway.  
  
Spirits, I'm tired. I wish I was home, so I could finally say any of the thousand words I've been running through my head since yesterday. I hold imaginary talks with Kristen and Usha, trying to find ways to speak to them, and then getting lost in questions and questions and question. All of which I cannot answer. Sometimes anger surges back, and I seize up, fighting to stop it from just washing over me. It is easy let doubt transform into rage, even when I know it's based only on my own worries and griefs. I so wish to have them settled. I wish Kristen was here, so I could hold her, and she could just tell me these things, even those I don't want to hear. Just to settle my troubled mind. I am convinced I do her injustice by doubting her, but the niggling worry remains. That uncertainty that will not be answered until I see her again, face to face.

# 63rd of Colossus

Last Whiskey Bar.  
  
Calm today. Seleea took out a detachment for field testing; she cobbled one of Sigra's turrets together and had the thing tested in the Brand. A relatively uneventful trip, unless you like watching a small turret pop shots are branded rock dogs and devourers here and there.  
Not the most inspired of days. I made some green curry with the moa I caught a few days ago. The bad hand got a little in my way, but it's mostly stopped stinging too much. Just a dull sort of pain. The food was good, too. Rioleth helped me making it, and we spoke quite a bit over it. Talked about the letter from Usha too, and what I should do with it. It helps to talk about it a little, just to vent some of the frustration I've been feeling. The urge is strong to head home right now, or to write a letter back, but I'd only just end staring at the paper.  
  
At least Freyja wrote me, in response to my sending her Penbroke's odd drawings. At least everything seems quieted down at home, so whatever passed between Usha and Fuse hasn't yet managed to disturb the order of things. Thankfully. I'm tired still. Sleeping still doesn't come as easy, and I remain distracted and preoccupied. It's hard to focus on things that seem so, insignificant compared to the constant gears that grind away in my head. People talk to my face, and I don't even notice them saying a word. I need to pay more attention. I need to work through this, and talk to Kristen. I need to settle these waves that are crashing down on my heart.  
  
The Branded managed to dent the great gate leading out to the brand, but with Kraxxi's help, I managed to patch it easily enough. We're using the welder more than I expected, soon we'll be out of welding gas, and I'll need to requisition another canister of the stuff to be sent up the supply chain.  
We'll see. It doesn't really feel all that important anyway.  
  
I'm going to try and sleep. I'm so tired.

# 64th of Colossus

Another mostly quiet day, which is fitting, since we're pitching camp tomorrow.  
So calm, in fact, that very little happened asides from a lovely mess I prepared using the oven. I rolled some moa into oatmeal and grated cheese, and then bake them slowly. Served with mashed Skale eggs and tack. What's even better, supply got their hands on some actual, fresh, fruit! I cut that up quick and made it into fruit salad.  
  
My hand's better now, and most of the worst pain's faded away. It's still sore, but I'm pretty sure it nothing I can't handle if I'm careful with putting my gauntlet on. I'll pass by medical again, have it checked out completely again, in the hope they won't make too much of a fuss.  
  
Spoke with Maeva too, and Kraxxi. Turns out Maeva's been having nightmares since she got pricked by those bloodstone shards. Soon as I found out, I had Kraxxi run up and talk to her, because I have a strong feeling that that injury and those nightmares are related. It explains why she's been looking so rough though, the dreams are apparently bad enough to actually stop her from getting a decent night's sleep in. Worrying, to say the least. What's worse, Kraxxi's taken a scan of her body and confirmed there's a whole lot of haywire magic somewhere where there wasn't any before, and there's very little that she can do to help it settle. So Maeva's going to continue suffering through things for now, having to rely on the occasional dose of medicine to give her some rest.  
Of course that's not tenable long term. I'm both professionally worried that she won't be able to carry out her duties, and personally, because I simply don't like anyone looking so bloody worn out. I made that clear enough.  
Oh, and apparently the whole thing with Small wasn't what it looked like, and they're just friends. From what she told me, I think Maeva's suffering from being locked in the ivory tower of command responsibility, which always makes interacting with the folks... seem harder. I hope she takes my advice and isn't afraid to just mingle with the troops a little.  
  
I'm still tired, but I've finally gotten some good rest in yesterday. Kristen and Usha still occupy my mind whenever it doesn't find anything else to keep it company, but I'm less anxious and more impatient now. I still have to guard against the occasional bout if agitation, but the fire doesn't burn as hot as it did before. It smoulders, and it makes it easy to call it up from its slumber again, but it doesn't just jump me anymore. At least I can be sure I won't blow my hands off again by mishandling munitions.  
  
I'll see where we head tomorrow. I hope Maeva gets some sleep.

# 65th of Colossus

Moved camp, we're not at a camp called Serenity, further north, and on the other side of the Brand. It's a Priory camp, so we're in among friends here. We look out over some old ruins that apparently lay smack dab in the middle of the dragon's route, and is now reduced to chunks of rock and crumbling statues. It's ominous, because they lie just a good stone's throw down slope, and the crackling, hissing veil of the brand hangs over it, waiting to spill out. Still, I've slowly grown accustomed to the looming evil of the brand; it is a dangerous place for certain, but the branded don't stray out of the twisted landscape as much as you'd expect, and it is mostly safe to camp out directly asides from it.  
  
The Priory people themselves are nice, though most of them keep to themselves. I doubt they have much to talk about with us, since we are occupied with completely different areas of expertise. Much as I would delight them talking about old rocks and errant ghosts, that's only really important if we're supposed to slay them. So far, though, the days have been calm. Only the knowledge that there is a Shatterer occasionally looping around, surveying his domain, disquiets me. I assume we will march again soon enough, unless there are things beyond the small hillocks that require our swords. I suppose we'll know soon enough. Or at least, the Chapter will. I'm still on light duty for a few days, on account of my hand. The scabs need to heal, and the burns need to soften and fade away. Which annoys me, of course, because idle time means my mind keeps wondering back home. Bah.  
I've considered perhaps pulling out that beautiful carving knife Vatorn gave me for my bonding, and seeing if I can't make something nice for Reuzie. Maybe add some more soldiers to his toy army, hm?  
  
Everything went well, aside from Maeva having an acute magical manifestation. I don't know the specifics, but she apparently demolished a decently-sized tree. There's an idea, I can probably steal some of the wood for carving! Anyway, yes, Maeva managed to blow up a tree with a spontaneous magical outburst, something which she's never mastered before. I suppose it's like Kraxxi said, the absorbed magic of the bloodstone manifesting itself. It reminds me a bit of the time when I discovered that if I dug deep enough, there was fire in my heart. Perhaps Maeva is experiencing the same? I'd ask, but she was so damn tired from lack of sleep I didn't ask. She joined us for a meal, until she randomly said she was craving sorbet. With a little magical help from Mithra, we managed to grind up some ice and pour the remains of the fresh fruit over onto it, as well as adding some syrup and apple quarts from our tinned rations. A little creative ingenuity goes a long way! It was good, too. Maeva dug up a bottle of officer ration rum, and passed it along. I had a good gulp of it. Spirits, I miss the strong taste of spirits. And ale. Hmm. Good ale... Anyway, she went off for some sleep afterwards, which I sincerely hope she gets. Especially if we have duties tomorrow, she'll need to have a clear head. I'm not sure if I want to have Mithra head off with her full command while I'm sat here with my thumb up my ass.  
Though perhaps I'm being over-protective. Kristen said that once, I care too much about people I love. I'm not sure if that's a bad thing or not.  
  
I'm tired myself now, and going to grab some rest. Another day closer to going home.

# 66th of Colossus

I'm still on lighty duty, wich, while annoying, does allow me to spend some time in camp. We're still in the priory camp, and most of the scholars are gentle and deliberate people. Not the sort that have a great tale to tell, but the sort that listen avidly and even take notes when you tell your own tales. It's nice to have a willing crowd other than Rioleth. I've started carving something for Reuzen; I found Maeva's busted tree and cut a nice chunk of hard pine from it. Almost as good as heartwood from the forests in the foothills. After some thought, I decided that the Jotunling has more than enough soldiers for his army, but he lacks some villains. I've set the blade to work on shaping a large wooden dragon out of it for his champions to vanquish. Spirit knows, I've seen enough up close to know what they look like.  
  
The day itself was relatively calm. Didn't see Maeva at all, so I assume she knocked herself to finally get some rest. Poor woman. The squads set out for duty; from what I gather Blade retrieved some lost Priory members who had wandered into a Grawl village. Apparently there's a searing crystal just over the ridge, the size of a lodge. I'd like to see it, soon as I can. I heard about the searing, but to see one of the great crystals shards that actually boiled the land... I suppose I could always sneak a look over the ridge under the excuse that I'm standing picket.  
Lance went to talk with the ogres, whom indeed turned out to be friendly. They gave Lionhead a chicken the size of a keg, which I promptly slaughtered and turnes into fried chicken bits. Spirits, but that was a good animal to eat. Never seen one chicken feed twelve people, but you better believe it did! With some nice fried vegetables too.  
  
Only the end of the evening was spoiled by Kaitark and Vatorn bickering again. I'm sick and tired of those two causing a ruckus every single camp we pass, and acting like little children. If that's what they are, they should stay at home. Bah! Even Reuzen has a better disposition, and the boy's not even able to use a potty! I swear, I am not usually short on patience, but I lost it today. I sent in a disciplinary note putting the frank sentiment down that if they are not able to leave their asanine feud in behind, they have no place in the Chapter. I can only hope command actually puts the boot down.  
  
Bah! I'd let them spoil my evening too.  
My hand still hurts, though it's not lessened. I'll probably ask one of the medics to clear me, tomorrow or the day after.  
Carving and thinking about Reuzen and Kristen has brought me some rest on that matter, I have to say. I keep thinking of the lad's simple joy when he gets something to play with, and what the mighty Dragonsbane will say when her husband brings home a wooden dragon the length of his forearm. Hm. I think it'll all be alright, really, if we try, and if we're honest.

# 67th of Colossus

Missed another day of duty due to my bloody hand. Bah. It'll heal soon enough, just have to be patient. Over-taxing it would just make it worse, like the stitches I had in my side.  
Chapter headed out north, apparently tackled some Siege Devourers and settled a feud between two Ogre kraals in our favour. The Ogres responded by giving us food supplies, which I've set to use. Fresh eggs! So, with Fletcher's help, I baked some buns and threw in some Griffon meat patties and cheese. It was tasty! I do enjoy proper field forage, and being back to cooking some food now and again. I missed it.  
  
Some Priory fellow put up a notice saying he's examining a couple of people. I think I'll humour him tomorrow. He already handled the warmaster, Kaila and Maeva, so it can't be that bad right? I wonder if he'll have something interesting to say about my fire. It's been welling in my chest these past few days, but I've gotten to grips with it. It helps understanding your own anger; makes it into a weapon. If I close my eyes and take a deep breath, I can wake a flame in my chest. It doesn't linger very long yet, and I feel the strain of doing it, but I practice it every now and again. I feel it helps me.  
  
As for the two bickering soldiers from yesterday, the Warmaster put her boot down and stated that if they cause a ruckus again, they'll be out on their asses. Good. Maybe finally force them to act like actual soldiers. Spirits, Kaitark even wrote me a letter to which I answered with exactly as much patience and tact as I had. Sometimes...  
  
Regardless. My progress on my dragon sculpture progresses well. I've got most of the form right, just need to get down to detailing without cutting my hand open. The blade Vatorn gifted me is phenomenally good, it is just so damn sharp I keep fearing I'll lop one of my fingers off when I slip. A small risk, however, when I picture the joy my boy will gain from it.  
You know, I used to have more regular nightmares. So regular, I never actually deemed writing about them. Now, I dream more often about Kristen and Reuzen. They are on my mind so often that they even come find me in my dreams. I'd think it'd be a comforting thought, except that I regret waking up every time. I suppose that's just the way it is.

# 68th of Colossus

Serenity camp.  
I went down to the Priory Scholar this morning, a pleasant man called Damwain, for the examination he posted his notice about. He peered at me with some goggles and asked me some odd questions, like if I had been to Orr and Tarir. He waved some skulls and what looked like a scrap of Exalted armour around my face, and kept stroking the air. I told him about the the ley-line, and my worries about going badly ill, but he assured me that I shouldn't be worried. According to him, the concentrations of residual magic are very high, perfectly benign, which was a serious relief to hear. More than I had expected actually. I showed him some fire magic too, by summoning up that little ember I keep locked deep and my heart. He said that it was interesting, and noted that the contact with the ley-line might have kick-started some deeper magical potential I hadn't tapped into fully before. He said Maeva had much the same happen, just with different sorts of magic. I suppose that's interesting as a thought. I'm mostly glad he's convinced I'm not about to die. Spirits. I said it already, but I could feel a weight slide off of my shoulders.  
He gave me some zhaitaffy as thanks, and urged me to keep practicing my fire magic whenever I could.  
  
I contemplated all of it for a while. Inner fire, just like the guardians, comes from passion. I find anger and rage to be so easily accessible when in that peculiar state of martial trance, where all my emotions are like a lance. When I know where to strike, the fire comes swiftly, leaping off the steel as I had been casting fireballs since I was born. It feels good, too. The fire roars through my blood just as much as it strikes my enemies, and sometimes the discharge of pure energy feels just as powerful and tingling as it does when I am wrapped in passion with a woman. I remember claiming here, after Usha's letter, that Kristen was the fire in my heart. It is true that she is sometimes in my mind when I draw upon my fire; the thought of her makes my heart beat faster, and the fire surges easily then, fed by passion and desires, burning my enemies to ash. Such a strange thing. When I was in Orr, and my heart went out to Sana, it sometimes felt like mountains of emotion bore down on me, but never would I feel anything as strong and powerful as these flames that fan in my heart.  
  
But enough musing. The day went rather well, for the remainder, though it was largely uneventful. I have a feeling we won't stay here for much longer, and continue going north along the brand. It has become such a constant presence most of us hardly pay it any heed. Only the violence of a Shatterer thundering overhead briefly draws weary glance to the sky. Still, we are secure below Steeleye's guns south of here. If the beast tries anything now, the cannons will blow it limb from limb. I have no doubt that it won't stay like this forever. The Great Wall lies splintered in the north, and anything beyond that is shielded from the guns of the Span. We'll see soon enough.  
  
After the examination, I went out to have a look at the Searing Crystal. It's a beautiful thing, for the amount of destruction it caused. Big too, like a tower set in its own crater. The local Grawl have set to worshiping of course, though this time I can hardly blame it. The Charr and their fake Titan gods forged terrifying magic. I can almost understand why the Vizier of Orr sank his land when threatened by the threat of them invading his holy country. They barely left anything of Ascalon whole, perhaps sinking Orr was actually a kinder fate than what would've happened if the Charr shamans had their way.  
Vatorn joined me for bit, but of course the man knows either his history or his magic, thinking there was any wisdom in trying to harness some of the crystal's power. What folly! The Titans and the Fire Legion made those crystals with the sole purpose to destroy humanity. He has nothing to gain from it. It's a moot point anyway, the Searing was over 250 years ago. I doubt anything still remains in the old Tears of Ascalon that would even cause the smallest spark.  
Still, I might see if the Priory folks collected any shards of it; if not for its magic, then as a keepsake.

# 69th of Colossus

Serenity camp.  
Long day at watch, spent away from camp, so nothing to report. All is quiet.  
It's nice seeing the Priory people bustle about their daily work with such concentration. Makes me wonder what Freyja does for the Priory, and if she's bent over peering at rocks and reading ancient letters as much as they do here. She's always had a mind for old stuff, but it is sometimes hard to imagine her sitting still for long. This sort of, slow and methodical excavation doesn't seem like it'd keep her attention. But then, she still surprises me. Perhaps she can read as much into the old stones as she can take enjoyment out of a good fight, eh?  
No doubt she's celebrating the first winter ales as merrily as she always does.  
  
My hand's stopped bothering me now, just keep the bandage around it to remind me I can't just run out sword in hand when line up's called. I'll need to convince one of the medics to clear me for full service tomorrow.  
Kalla starts her rotation in the engineers after a rather mediocre seven days from Seleea. Wonder what we'll get to see, hm? I hope it won't induce me to pull out any hairs. Thankfully, despite the crackling threat of the Brand, Serenity camp is calm enough that I doubt we'll have much issues. No doubt move up north again once our supplies arrive up the convoy train, and we can finally continue to where there's actually enemies to fight. It's as it always is; when you're bored, you're itching for a fight, and when you're in the thick of it, you wish you were bored again.

# 70th of Colossus

Serenity camp, though we're slated to advance on the 72nd. We got a number of orders in, including a demolitions strike against an Inquest lab that's apparently out there. Lionhead got the required information and set to prepping the detonation charges. Knowing the Inquest, it'll be a sturdy enough facility, but foolishly built into some sort of cave that won't be too hard to collapse. The preparation went fine, except that Small once again started acting like a cunt, being deliberately obtuse about minor things, to the point it came noted down in the report. Second time that this has happened during a training exercise; if it passes again, they're off the team. If I don't take petty squabbles from Vatorn and Kaitark, I won't take skulky petulance from Small, you can be sure of that like you can about the sunrise.  
Regardless, it only highlights the disjointed state of Engineering. I have two about-to-be-Ballisticians with an excellent track record, one lazy petulant, and another who has the social meshing qualities of brick to the jaw. Makes me wish I had Force and Kraxxi back inducted into the team, at least they have some notions of teamwork.  
Perhaps some teambuilding exercises are in order?  
  
Not sure how much time we have either, we're heading up the battle line soon. Something tells me our line of advance will bring us to a support position, before we'll try and force this Shatterer out of the air. We've done this sort of combat advance before, down the bogs south of Lion's Arch, and north into Frostgorge. Wouldn't surprise me that's why we're here. Thankfully, the White Mantle cultists and those odd rifts have started disappearing from our surroundings. Not that that's exceptionally good news, just makes it someone else's problem. The Priory's, for example.  
About those, I picked up that some Priory people are going to try and crack open Ravenwest's curse problem. She didn't give me any details on the matter, because she apparently barely understood it, but Carmine's OK'd it, along with command. I suppose it can't be all bad then, right? We'll see what happens; I'd be good for Ravenwest to get her head back straight on her shoulders, even at the cost of letting the Priory fiddle around it for a bit. At least I know the Priory isn't one for rash action. There was some confusion about whether or not she'll stay behind to recover or not, but I suppose that's command's call to make. Wonder if I'll see it in action, tomorrow?  
  
But yes, as I expected, everything was calm today, just that soft build-up towards activity again. Wonder where we'll go next? Before we left, though, I asked the Priory fellow that does the magical examinations, Damwain, if he had any shards of the searing crystal. Apparently they're not exceptionally uncommon, considering the Priory finds slivers of them often enough during excavations. I got a few small ones for myself, which I'm thinking about using for the eyes of my dragon carving. It's turning out a mighty good-looking critter, too! Cutting out the frills and lines along the spine and down the tale; the crystals for the eyes will be an excellent master's touch to finish it all off eventually. I got a few larger ones for Vatorn, since he seemed so interested in the larger one last time. He seemed pleased, which I suppose is a good thing. As long as he doesn't try to eat them or something, of course.  
  
Kristen and Usha have been on my mind a lot, still, though less vividly than before. I'm yearning to go back and have the knot in my chest be untied, but I'll have to exercise patience. The good thing is that I've mentally foritifed and prepared what I will say. I'm prepared to forgive them both, if we can just agree not to hold secrets from each other unless dictated by utter necessity. I am not so naive that I can't see the need for secrecy now and again, but I really hope that truth and trust are valued much more.

# 71st of Colossus

Last day in the Serenity camp, and it's been a weird one.  
Some time in the afternoon, we were mustered to escort the Priory team out into the ruins of the temple down the slope, right in the middle of the brand. Apparently that's where they had planned to perform whatever bizarre ritual they enacted on Ravenwest. Pissed off the Foefire spirits guarding the place too, they appeared out thin air and crashed into the perimeter line a few time. There were also orbs of spectral energy that burst into fire.  
Meanwhile, some Priory scholar was chanting at Kaila, while she was screaming and thrashing. But, apparently it all went well. According to them.  
I don't know really what to think, though, I later saw Kaila and Carmine struggle, and Ravenwest seems badly ill from the entire affair. She was yelling that Damon was trying to kill her, and trying to run away from us. Didn't seem in a good state of mind. Well, I hope that it passes, and it's worth whatever greater ill she suffered before. We're leaving them both with the Priory people come the morrow, until they're fully recovered.  
  
Stonefist is busying herself with getting all the equipment ready for the demolition mission. Inquest lab, once more. No surprise there, Inquest are pretty much everywhere. Luckily the Vigil has a long-standing tradition of deep mutual enmity, so we're going to destroy their lab, and set back whatever grubby little plans those long-ears cooked up. Explosively. I'll probably oversee the operation myself, though, since Inquest structures are notoriously awkward to demolish, thanks to their weird geometric building habits. We'll have that to look out for in the coming days.  
I've also had a mind to talk with Lorma about getting all the scouts certified for demolitions work, just so we have another subset of soldiers that can handle basic explosive devices. I'll think about it.  
  
I hope we're moving away from the brand a little. That purple sore is starting to wear on me.

# 72nd of Colossus

So, we moved camp up to a Vigil siege camp known as the Guardian Stones. Spirits, but talk about a change in scenery. I thought the ruined Serenity temple with the teetering stones and broke statues, and the Searing Crystal were impressive... Well, the fortification here looks straight onto the remnants of the Great Northern Wall the Ascalonians built over a quarter-century ago. The stretch we look at has been hit by the Brand, which has only made the sight more impressive. Enormous bastions and crenelations reach up to the sky, some floating free in the maelstrom of dragon magic around it. It quite dwarfs many of the constructions I've seen, asides from the very greatest, like the arches of Arah, Rata Sum, and the vaults of Tarir. Still, a sight that impresses, not just because of what it is, but because what it is implying to have once been. The ruin has given over to Foefire spirits and wildlife, though. They are ever present, their glowing forms dot the ramparts, and crowd near the collapsed slopes and fallen buttresses. At night, like now, they sing, as if they were all still alive. not loud, not soft, but you can hear their voices carry at night. I suppose it is them, rather than us, who are eternally vigilant.  
  
The camp itself is well-constructed, and is a true Vigil fort. Three layers of defense, with virtually every approached fully covered and protected. Sentries sit in watchtowers, ready to spring into action. We're right on the cusp of the brand again, though across from us we can only see a single large hillock that is lit up starkly purple. The other view lends itself to the view of the Great Wall I already described. The camp drives home how hostile our surroundings are. This is a warzone, with ancient cursed spirits on one side, and a mindless horde of Branded beasts on the other. The engineers did a control pass. Claridge found out a strange little incline that could be used to inch closer to the inner wall, so we mined that approach. Also recalled everyone to the inner fort, so their tents are protected by the gates, and they have some cover should the Shatterer decide to take an interest. We're further out from Steelspan, so that's become a real risk again. At least I also got confirmation that we are, indeed, marching over the wall in due time to destroy that damned thing. Belmont noted that the Legions have a heavy duty cannon set up past the wall, which he thinks they might use to hammer that winged bastard out of the sky. I figure they shoot it down, we close the noose. We seem to be a reinforcement group to the local Chapters here, so I suspect most the materiel is already on site, they just needed boots to man the lines.  
  
But I'm getting ahead of myself; we have a demolitions mission planned, which will be a bit of a pickle. The Warmaster sent a letter to Klixxa and myself, as well as some of my engineers, noting we're dealing with ley-line batteries. Klixxa pointed out that blowing those up haphazardly could be disastrous, to the scale of Thaumanova. That does change the mission profile. We'll be storming in, securing the lab, and then Sel's golemite will hack into the system. Klixxa will then declare a plan of action. Whether or not that means we scuttle the entire lab, or just make some targeted strikes is not determined yet. We'll know soon enough, the strike operation is slated for execution in a few days. I need to make sure I have a cigar, in case it's needed.  
  
Mirka has finally been suspended from medical, following tampering with Sacra's records to hide that she was a lich. Apparently Marcus has requested a court martial, which I find peculiar since they have already determined guilt. In effect, they know Mirka did what she did, they might as well just issue a formal action and be done with it. Mirka herself has responded with some distress, which I could only gather from Rioleth's stilted responses when I asked him if everything was alright. I hope that Bloodletter pulls herself together, and doesn't pull another idiotic stunt like she did in the Foothills. I'm worried as to the outcome, however, as Bloodletter is already a recruit. She runs a very real risk of dismissal.  
The Warmaster seemed unusually agitated throughout the evening, and I have a feeling she needs to have an opportunity to vent some frustrations, before her hair catches fire. I'll have to see if I can't make some time for an off-the-record chat. Usually don't need to counsel your Warmaster, but I suppose Alleshia is not any less human than any of her soldiers.  
  
What else? Right, we left Ravenwest and Carmine behind in the Serenity camp with the Priory. Kaila seemed better today, just a mite too paranoid for her normal sense. She kept fussing over the smallest thing, until I eventually distracted her by making her sort out sharp gravel. I'm not sure what to say, but at least she wasn't screaming about Damon trying to kill her, so it's something. They're going to stay back there until Kaila's mind had settled from whatever horrible ritual the Priory dragged them through, before rejoining us. I just hope they're not going to miss too much of the big fights ahead.  
  
Makes me want to write Kristen, tell her to get over here with her bow and arrows, but there's little point. Even with all the speed of the spirits, I doubt she'd get here in time, nor is she well equipped to fight in the Brand. Rather she stay home, keeping an eye on the family, and imparting Leopard's wisdom to those who come to find her. I wonder of she'll be a shaman by the time I come back? I have so many questions I want to ask her, and so many answers I dread hearing. I dare not write either, for fear that I'll allow my panic to write ugly words that would cut wounds that I'll regret making. I need to keep a clear mind. There is so much that needs doing before I can go home again.  
  
At least my dragon is now finally done. It looks fierce, and the crystal eyes help. They shimmer and catch the light, as if alive. I might have used too fine a craftsmanship on a child's toy, but it won't matter much of Reuzen is even half as glad with it as I am. He shall have the finest army in all of Hoelbrak, carved from the finest wood! I do miss the boy already. I wonder if he'll have grown much by the time I see him again.

# 73rd of Colossus

Guardian Stones camp.  
We went across the wall today on another separatist stomp. They were holed up in some old collapsed fort that was slowly getting buried by the rest of nature. In fact, they were fairly well hidden; we had to navigate a narrow fracture in the wall to get to a much larger hall formed by the remains of a curtain wall, around which a cave had formed. It was large enough for them to have put up tents inside this space, too. They must've been lax on setting out pickets, because most of us were already through before they turned to fight. Well, 'fight', more a slaughter. Those that resisted were put to the sword quick enough. We cornered some Torment-blasted White Mantle scum in there too, who tried to negotiate their way out by selling out the bandit leader. A scuffle followed, in which one of the two mantles got shot, and the bandit decided to off herself rather than endure capture. We managed to overpower the other two quick enough, with one being wounded, and the other disarmed following the fatal scuffle.  
Holm and Bloodletter also took two prisoners by cornering a few of them in a tunnel we thought was a dead end. Majority of those inside stood their ground, however, and had to be cleaned out the bad way. Later found out that they probably were covering the escape of some of their friends, considering there was a crack in the wall of the ancient structure that led outside. Pity we didn't get them all, then.  
  
On the way back to camp, the other, unwounded, mantle prisoner must've hexed Sinclair, because he had to be rushed off to the side once we got back, and apparently let out a blast of magical energy. We made sure to strip the prisoners of all of their equipment, just in case they would try something like that again. Suddenly realised the wounded one is someone we know. Small picked up that it's the same woman they found with Sigra, which probably means that she's the one that experimented on her to begin with. I was tempted to just stomp on the wretch's neck and end her life right there, but I stopped myself, even though the fire inside me flared angrily. Very nearly lost control for a second, but I fought it down. I'll make damn sure she pays for it eventually, though.  
The other one was mostly blapping about how our unseen masters would kill me, which is the same old boring shite cultists always prattle on about. After seeing Risen monsters that had once been my allies claw at my shield, after hearing Mordrem scream into my face how I would serve Mordremoth, a few long-dead magical beings don't scare me much. I've fought Zhaitan and Mordremoth on the field, beings that I have no doubt are much more powerful than something that hasn't even been extant for the last 250 years. Hah... Well, I have no worry about them dying for their cause; I'll happily slaughter them for their little gods if that's what they want me to do. Misguided idiots.  
This woman, the wounded one; she can be happy I no longer feel the need to honour the memory of my accursed mother by eating the flesh of my enemies, or I would have cut off all her fingers and ripped out her tongue. But that's just forgotten and half-remembered rites. I'm content to see what punishment she will have at the hands of Pact and our allies. Likely hanged for treason by the Krytans, if I know anything. Bah. May their spirits dwell in Torment for an eternity!  
  
Tomorrow is the demolitions mission. I think we're all prepared and ready to go.  
I've even gotten a cigar, just in case the plan does come together exactly as planned. Nothing like watching the dust settle with some smoke in the lungs.  
It'll be good, too, I think. Loose some pent up anger and energy by taking it out on the Inquest.  
  
Blegh. I'm looking forwards to going home again, but that prospect seems to be remote. Shatterer, White Mantle cultists.... spirits, those weird rifts that keep opening all over the place... I have a feeling we're not done yet.

# 74th of Colossus

Guardian Stones, after a long day.  
Demolitions mission was a success, if hectic. Turns out the big hillock we can see from camp, across the brand from us, is where the Inquest made their lab. Or least, below it, the entrance was sheltered by a stream that had cut a furrow in the hills. The lab itself was quite spacious and equipped with a large amount of force fields that separated different sections from a larger main area. There was plenty of Inquest personnel on side, but we killed off most of them soon enough. Even took a prisoner, the weird black Asura; the same one that Small kicked asides in training a while back, and apparently had left the Vigil after they destroyed her research. Odd to find them with the Inquest. Disappointing, really. We locked her up with the other prisoners.  
Anyway, the day was hectic. We pulled out two Sentinel Charr as well, though they didn't seem too well. From what I understood, the Inquest were pouring ley-line magic into them and studying the results. Marcus and the medics had some trouble getting them ready, and something happened that put both Sawyer and Prydwén out of action due to magical supercharging. Not sure what that means, but it was dire enough to send Cheery into a state of shock. Kaitark had me resuscitate her for a while while he summoned around some life force. Not sure if I helped at all, considering Sylvari biology, but one of us did something right, because she resumed breathing after. Scary thought to think she might have died if Kaitark hadn't been as vigilant on the matter. Klixxa and him set up a datamagic camera to monitor their health for the time being.  
  
The demolition itself wasn't smooth as butter either. First of, Sel's golem did fine, cracking through several of the security fields with ease, except it got zapped and stopped working. We had to work our way around the other terminals by hand, though thankfully one had the password taped to a note on the back, and the other seems to have been fried just as much by the shock it gave Sel. We managed to bypass it using a default "password" as a password, which... somehow worked.  
Once through to the storage facility, Klixxa found a golem-suit that she used to clear some of the ley-magic containers out, giving the engineers the green light to start setting up charges. This all went well until the golem-suit jammed, locking Klixxa inside, and engaging the suit's self-destruct sequence. Considering this was inside the main chamber, it could've set off the other charges. In a moment of reckless inspiration, I called on Bear for aid, and she surged to my assistance. Managed to dig Klixxa out with my claws, before throwing the malfunctioning golem suit down the back of the chamber, where it popped harmlessly. Not a moment too soon. Spirits, but I am *strong* when I wear Bear's skin. I am glad she has forgiven me for the abuses of her form I committed when I last called on her strength. It's been a while since I have been awed by the power of the spirits that guard my people.  
But I digress. We eventually managed to evacuate the prisoners and the wounded, before setting the fuses. Klixxa only got a few of the magic containers out, so there was a very real risk of a super-magical explosion happening, like in Thaumanova. If that'd happened, I doubt we'd have gotten out alive. I have to admit, I felt unsure for a moment, whether or not this was wise, when I was supposed to strike the match and light the wire. But Klixxa made a call, and we decided to risk it, rather than allow it fall in enemy hands. Once we got outside the Chapter had decided to seek cover directly alongside the bloody rock we were blowing up! I had to make a mad dash past them and along the Brand to get us far enough from the demolitions site. And even then, the tremor from the detonation caused rocks to rain down on us, only abated by our guardians casting up sanctuary shields.  
Thankfully, it seems the magic dispersed naturally as soon as the containers were ruptured, and there was little to note, asides from the partial collapse of the Asuran lab. Either the Sentinels will mine it further and perhaps take use of it, or it'll gather dust and be turned into yet another ruin. I don't care much.  
  
It took us a while to get back, because we had to find a safe way to cross the Brand again, now with some extra prisoners and wounded, but we got back home eventually. This is when Cheery had her dance with death, as I described above. It's been a hectic day. I've also started to work on some of the specialist certifications Force has requested, by giving him the practice kit and instructions for the basic demolitions certification. For Force, it's a bit of a joke. The man's been Iron Legion for almost his entire life, he should probably be teaching me, rather than the other way around, but hey, there you go. No doubt he'll present me his dummy charge in perfect order tomorrow morning.  
Oh, and I spoke to Small about the engineering second in command. It's going to be an annoying choice. Small favours Seleea over a personal issue with Lionhead, but Lionhead's paperwork was in better order, which is the principle asset on which I'm basing my assessment, since both are about equal in actual fieldcraft. It'll be weighing administrative merit against a slight tick of cohesion. Either way, it means work for me. Force Seleea to hold better records, or go through large amounts of team-building exercises. Blegh.  
I'll have to the latter anyway, I suppose. Why can't we all just get along, hm? Eh, I'll send out a task group for that big cannon Belmont reported, hopefully cooing over a giant gun will help.  
I wonder if setting up something over leave might also help build up a group-feeling. Maybe I'll invite them to Hoelbrak on the day before leave ends, and buy us a feasting keg of ale. Call it something silly, like the Chief's Reserve. It's an idea, I suppose.

# 75th of Colossus

Guardian Stones. Quiet day. No-one passed out of this life overnight, so that's good.  
Force passed his demolitions certification without any issues, as expected. He added a few seconds on the timer, but that's a minor issue, since the fuses burn approximately anyway. No actual duties for the remainder, just taking it easy and calmly. I went out looking for a good place to run through the grenade certification, also for Force, and found a decent location to practice in. Bjorn and some people went out foraging at the same time, and they found a lovely stretch of forest and meadows near the Ogre Kraal we've been trading with. Glad we're not killing all the Ogres we come across, it bothers me every time. Anyway, Bjorn shot a hog and a minotaur, which is technically Small's job to dress and butcher.  
Except Small doesn't know for shit how to do that, and is apparently iffy about handling some of the creatures. So, of course, in the end, I just did it. That way I'm sure it's all done nicely and cleanly. We'll eat well of those critters in the next coming days, I wager.  
  
It was good to be able to take a little break after all the excitement from yesterday.

# 76th of Colossus

Spent the day on watch, not much going on. The Brand and the Wall still stand, as if facing each other down, and there is a quiet enough rest in camp. The prisoners keep to themselves, as far as is needed, which suits me just fine. Always enervates me, having folks that would rather see us dead in the middle of camp, but there you go. At least I don't have to deal with them much.  
Tomorrow we'll do some work, get that big dragon-gun up and running. We'll need it in the days ahead.

# 77th of Colossus

Guardian Stones.  
I responded to the Sentinel request for engineers, and by Bear's own claws, was it worth the trip. The Senintels at Skara Braevus -which is either the name of the place or of the gun, I'm not sure- have an enormous steam-powered cannon that's bigger than any single weapon I've ever seen, bar for perhaps the main array of a Glory-class airship. It's a jagged, spindly looking thing that just screams Iron Legion, and is built on top of an enormous boiler platform that keeps the weapon under operating pressure. The Sentinels called us there because a misfire had apparently forced them to do major patching, and then needed extra hands to assist with the test-fire following the repairs. That wouldn't be too much of an issue, except they did it in typical Charr fashion and had suspended some of the feeding pipes up to a pole with chains that leaked about every single corner. What's worse, a Skritt had holed up in one of the exhausts, and clogged off the line that was usually used to stop the boiler pressure from going too high! We only discovered this when the boiler was already at full burn, causing a few intense moments where Lionhead and Ravenwest patched up major leak inside the gun itself, and Kraxxi slipped down the exhaust itself to clear out the debris by hand.  
In the end, though, the big bloody gun cycled fully and then started firing at the test targets. From the whooping Charr Sentinels, I assume it was hitting their marks. I have a feeling that this gun being out of action for a long time, is part of the reason why we've been seeing that Shatterer overhead. The machinist, a Sentinel called Foehour, said that is was specifically built to hammer those bastards out of the sky before they settle in. With the heavy gun back up and running, we'll be making rapid paces towards bringing that flying crystal bastard back to the ground. We've got a battle plan ready to go on the 81st, just as expected. I'll be heading up a battery of support guns, laying down fire into the killbox they've planned out for us. It's nice to see us take down a lieutenant with the planned efficiency we've seen in action so often before.  
Oh, and Foehour gave us all a little Sentinel badge with "Skara Braevus" engraved near it. Suppose it's a badge of honour, of some sort.  
  
As you can infer from what I've written above, Ravenwest's also back from her recovery. She looks fine, though she's saying some pretty odd things, like how she believed she was an Itzel for a short amount of time. Command allowed her to go straight back into the fray, following a letter from the Priory, so I'm not asking too many questions. She seemed a little drawn after today's exertions, however, especially the rather physically imposing task of working on that gun for a whole afternoon. Regardless, rather have an extra pair of arms for when we're fighting that Shatterer. Or one arm, in this case, considering... well, never mind.  
  
Small is keeping a very optimistic view about leave coming after we shoot down the Shatterer. I hope it's true, but I'm preparing to be disappointed. Last Wintersday I spent sweating myself to death in the Dustbowl, and hanging upside down from the innards of an airship. I'd like to go home though. To taste whatever wonderful drink Usha has been making ready for the celebrations, to see how Reuzen likes his wooden dragon, and to sit down on Hrothbeir's Rest with Kristen and forget that anything exists outside this little bump tuft of snow cherries in the middle of the Mourn. We'll see. There's dragons to kill first, and another dragon kill to bring fame and glory to the legend Kristen and I share. Dragonsbane indeed!

# 78th of Colossus

Guardian Stones.  
Quiet day again, though it's the calm before the storm. I'm trying not to longer too long on the idea of the fight itself, since I know I'll just start worrying.  
I put the hog up for roast today, and it's just about cooked. Start pulling off the meat tomorrow, enjoy a proper feast before we go into the fray again.  
  
Prisoners caused a slightly racket. Apparently the Warmaster interrogated two of them, and allowed the Asura we arrested at the lab some leniency. The White Mantle folks are still under observation, though. Once of them tried to rile people up by calling out to them, so I had them gagged. Their own doing, really, I even warned them. I hope the Warmaster makes a decision about them, so we can have them passed on to someone better equipped for dealing with scum like that. Besides, it'd stops me from wondering if I can get away with punching the loud one a few times.

# 79th of Colossus

Guardian Stones.  
Making more preparations for the big fight ahead, including going back and retrieving a large amount of parts and pieces of equipment the Skritt apparently stole. They got so much, they actually had a fully functioning cannon pointing out of the mouth of their cave. I didn't think it was up and running, and called the squad to march straight into its bloody teeth. Thankfully, Claridge put up a sanctuary as we advanced, or the cannon would've mangled some of our troops, and it'd have been my bloody fault. Now it just knocked Claridge out with the magical feedback, but that was all the time we needed to disable it.  
Stupid. I underestimated the Skritt, didn't think they could operate a machine that complex; and I was wrong, and nearly killed half the squad by missing a beat. Bah! Not the sort of mistake I can afford to make more than once, especially with the big fight against the Shatterer slated to happen in a few days.  
Either way, we got the spare parts back, recovered them safely, and I spiked the Skritt gun, so they can't do anything dangerous with it. I think we'll be sending those parts up the line soon.  
  
I'm anxious, as I always am, before these dragon hunts. This is where people perish if they are not careful, and I have a feeling in my gut we'll be burning a pyre before all of this is over. I don't want to think about who it could be that ends up on it. That way lies cowardice.  
I got a letter from Freyja. She doesn't say anything in particular, and I can tell she was half-drunk when she wrote it from the rambling, meandering style. Her mind wanders, and her pen follows. Still, it... felt good to get a letter. It makes it easier to keep them all in my heart if they remind me they are out there. Reminds me why I'm out here too.  
I should write back. Before the Shatterer, just in case. Nothing is going to happen. But just in case. I don't want to leave this unresolved if I make a mistake. It will tarnish the memory.  
  
We had pulled pork today, but not a lot of people came for their meal. I don't know why that makes me sad. I ate a lot of it instead, even had some rum from Maeva's stock as a cherry on top. It just made me want to be home again.  
Bear give me strength, I've been struck by melanchology today. It's Freyja letter, and the looming prospect of the big engagement, I suppose.  
  
Nothing's going to happen. It will be fine. Another name to add to the legend.

# 80th of Colossus

Guardian Stones, the day before the Shatterer fight.  
It's all been quiet again, except for Force's grenade certification. The old Iron bastard passed it all without issue, of course, but that's no surprise. He'll be all-but-an-engineer once he passes the other two certifications. That's good, Force is solid enough as a soldier, asides from some minor dents here and there. Spirits, I remember Force being a First Crusader, back in Orr.  
  
Anyway, a lot of people are feeling the tension, but we're all doing our best to handle it as it comes. I cooked up the minotaur ribs with Rioleth, and they were delicious. Helped lighten the mood, too, despite the tensions creating knots in our shoulders. I spoke to the Warmaster and Rioleth about it too, they quieted my nerves, if only a little. I'm afraid to die again, because it'd mean Reuzen grows up without his father. I want him to grow up in my footsteps, rather than just the shadow of my legend. I want to be there, to tell my tales to him, and one day see him eclipse me.  
Besides, I still have to build a lodge for Kristen, and see Usha's cubs.  
  
We also got an older recruit transfer in, apparently for medical. Human woman, she seems to be... I don't know, endearing, to a degree. We accidentally started speaking about children, though I think her oldest died, and it all took a melancholic turn. Thankfully, tea solved that conundrum smoothly enough. I hope they'll come through tomorrow.  
  
Spirits, I hope everyone comes through tomorrow.  
I'm going to write Freyja back before I go to sleep, and try to get some solid rest in before a day of war. Let's hope we'll destroy that beast, and all come home hale and hearty. Bear will give me the strength to stand against the onslaught, and bring pride to Kristen and my legend as dragon-slayers.

# 81st of Colossus

Guardian Stone.  
  
We fought the Shatterer, and... well.  
We didn't kill it. Only managed to force it to retreat back north with a sustained cannon barrage. It was a horrific battle. We overlooked the beast on a ridge set with cannons, inside the Brand, and directed fire on it for what seemed like an hour, but can only have been a few scant minutes. The Branded... they swarmed us, while fire rained from the sky, and cannons thundered. It was horrible, like being at the mouth that leads to the deepest reaches of Torment. It didn't go well. Many of us are injured. While I manned my cannon, dragonfire burned through the barrel and set off the munitions hopper. I'd be shredded to pieces if Bjornolf hadn't tackled me out of the way. He's badly, horrendously, injured and may not survive the night. Lalowa is dead. Caught in the blast.  
  
It has been such a long, exhausting, nerve-wracking day. I am utterly spent, but I dare not got to sleep yet. Everything still... some of it hasn't sunken into place yet. I know, intellectually, that I should be dead, torn limbs from limb and shredded with metal shrapnel. But Bjornolf saved my life, and is now on the cusp of death for it. Lalowa is dead. I keep forgetting, and realizing it again. My mind wanders, and then it suddenly snaps back, blooming in my head that she's died. That Bjorn may die, any second, while he fights for his life. They pulled a length of steel from his back that had embedded itself next to his heart. A piece of steel that should have embedded itself in my chest instead, but didn't.  
I should be dead. I should be dead.  
  
I kept walking, talking, cooking, eating, joking today. I had the new recruit, the old lady doctor, help me make a meal. She needed it. It was her first day, and people already died on the field. Force handed out a bottle of mead, and we drank to Lalowa's memory, without realizing that she was dead yet in our hearts. There was a merchant too, a caravan trader, who sold sweets and things like that. Carmine got a large box for some reason, that I had to take away because Prydwen was eating it all. It seems so silly. How did that happens? Is it even real?  
Kaila was wailing in medical because they cut her hair. She had a cut on her head from when the mortar exploded.  
I didn't understand why. She should be dead, like me. She's only lost her hair. Lalowa's dead. Bjorn might die. What are a few hairs? I should be dead! Spirits, I own Bjorn a life-debt that I'm not sure I can ever repay. If he dies now, how will I repay it? If not for him, I would be dead. I should be. Then what would they tell my son?  
  
Oh spirits, Aska. Lalowa's dead, but her daughter is still in Hoelbrak.  
I'll need to tell her the news, that her mother died. She'll have no-one left; the Svanir stole her father before she was even born, and now she has no mother to care of her. The girl deserves better. So much better, than to pay for the sins of others. Kristen'll understand. She can have a family. I have to. Keep Lalowa's memory alive when she grows up, so she can remember her mother as the kind and unbreakable woman that she was. I need to talk to Sinclair. He seized up, when he knew, can't be separated from her side. It's fitting, but he can't raise a norn child... Poor girl. Poor, poor girl...  
  
I tried to commune with the spirits, to ask them... I don't know what. Guidance. They didn't answer. I think my mind is too unsettled to ask clear questions, but spirits, I wish they had answered. I wish they had given me comfort and wisdom. I don't know if I should be glad or ashamed that I am alive. I curse myself for being relieved that I live to see my children again, while Lalowa does not. I hate myself for considering Bjorn's life as the price to pay for something that should have killed me. I should be dead. Spirits, watch over Bjornolf these following days, and give him the strength to survive, so one day I may repay that which I own him.  
And Raven, carry Lalowa on dark wings to the Hall of Spirits, where she may take her seat among heroes such as Asgeir and Jora, and know that she fell in battle, facing what few would dare.  
  
I'm so tired. I want to destroy that damned dragon, to chase it all the way north through the cursed Dragonbrand, grab it by the tail, and rip the crystals from its hide, until it crumbled into dust. But I can't. Today, I am no Dragonsbane, and the loss weighs heavy on my shoulders. I wish Kristen was here, so I could find some comfort from her arms, which I now so sorely miss.  
I don't know what's going to happen next. I hope I can go home. I really hope I can go home.  
I can't stand Ascalon anymore.  
  
I need to sleep. All the adrenaline and tension washed out, and now I am simply exhausted, bone-weary and bruised. The Ghosts are singing, like they have done, but I've only listened to it again today. It is strange that they can find some mirth and joy, false as it is, in death. They are cursed, stuck between two worlds, forced to die again and again. What a wretched fate. And yet, they sing proud songs of long-dead kings, as if they were alive today, and their Great Wall still stood, rather than stooped. I wager Lalowa sings better songs and makes more livelier tales in her death than these Ghosts. We will tell your tales too, and you will be remembered.  
  
84. Lalowa, slain in battle.

# 82nd of Colossus

Guardian Stone.  
The last day here, since we're burning Lalowa's body come morning, before marching off. Good. I want to be far away from this place. Bjorn at least, is still alive, though it'll remain a risk in the days to come. I am unsure whether or not we should be moving him, where-ever we're going come morning. I have hope we get leave, there is so much to do, but we might just as well march deeper into Ascalon. We're not chasing down the Shatterer, apparently, because it fled deeper into the Brand. A damn pity, or we'd have dashed the blasted beast's brains out, and wreak some blood vengeance! Bah.  
I spoke to Alleshia a bit, about anything, just because I felt like it. It helped, really, even though you'd think I'd feel less comfortable talking to my field officer than to my troops, but it's actually easier. We've both seen quite a bit of the world. Apparently she had an old love who used to take to the sea, before he got sunk near Malchor's Fingers one day. I never knew that. It made me think of my own ill-fated voyage south, and the people that died as a result of it. The Warmaster told me an old sea-legend of giant sea beasts known as Kraken that would rip ships from the oceans. I wonder if that's what scuttled our ship? I can never admit, but my fear for deep, dark waters is much greater than anyone knows, and the idea of vast sea monsters terrifies me. It would make for a grand feat-name, however. "Krakenslayer!" I very much doubt I'll be able to undertake such a hunt, however, with all the dangers of the seas...  
  
The day has been mostly morose, and subdued. I've counted the munitions stocks of the field armoury and readied it all for transport again, because that's the only thing I had on hand. I also made a meal, using some of the candy I impounded yesterday, but folks don't seem to have the stomach for chocolate-chili sauce on their minotaur burgers. Hm.  
  
I also spoke to Sinclair, about Aska, and he's agreed to let me take care of her. It was difficult, though, his grief is still powerful, and I don't think he has had any sleep yet since yesterday. Tomorrow will be a harsh day for him, when we commit Lalowa's body to flame and memory. I am glad he didn't try to assert his claim on Aska, however. Much as I can respect his affection and care, there was no way I would've allowed Aska to be taken from her home to be raised by a human, of all people. At least with my kin she'll have good company. She was well enough with the little Jotunling, I have no doubt she'll find it agreeable to spend more time with him. Kristen can teach her to hunt, too. She's at that age now, after all. And we'll make damn sure she knows who her mother was.  
Raven's feathers... It'll be a long, long talk with Kristen and Usha, just to... make sense of it all.  
  
A Kodan showed up today. Apparently a Crusader? Kodan are strange, but they fight well enough. I don't doubt he'll prove useful enough in a fight. I should show him my Kodan bow one time, maybe we can talk about the times I went into Frostgorge with Kristen.  
  
Hm. The Ghosts sing their songs, for all eternity.

# 83rd of Colossus

Vigil Keep!  
We're finally out of bloody Ascalon, spirits have mercy.  
  
The warmaster arranged for an airship to come pick us up, changing our troop rotation out, and shipping us back to the Vigil Keep. We're hearing more tomorrow, but hopes are high for some bloody leave this time around. It wouldn't come too soon... It's good being back in the Keep, though, after all the brown, scorched plains and hills of Ascalon, it is good to see the green Krytan grasslands again. That, and there is no angry, pulsating purple swear across the sky, nor ghosts singing at night. It's not as good as snow yet, but at least you can feel the wind get colder here if it comes from the right direction, and wanders down the mountain flanks.  
  
We burned Lalowa before we left, as is our custom. Not a real remembrance yet, though, until we spill ale over it, and tell the tales loudly. If leave happens, that's what I will do. Bring Aska along too, so she the memory is not too painful. She us young, and she will need to come to terms with her own grief, but it will be best if she is surrounded by people who are warm and welcoming. And we will; after all, we are her new family. Lionhead might join us as well, while she visits Leif. The boy apparently has been staying in Bear Lodge all this time, and she didn't tell me! Well, the more are present when we tell Lalowa's legend, the better. We will make the lodges ring so loud that they will hear our hails in the Hall of Spirits itself! She's in better company than ours, now, likely teaching Asgeir a thing or two about selflessness and gentility. May her memory live forever.  
  
But, we're not there yet. Who knows, perhaps the Warmaster will direct us somewhere completely different this time, and we can kiss our leave goodbye. You can never tell.  
Oh, news, though. I finally got formally promoted to Senior, to I'm now Blade's full second, while Lionhead and Belmont both received First Crusader badges. I suppose that cements the choice for Engineering second pretty easily too, as I know have an actual ranked second that can take the role with little issue. Belmont's promotion reminded me of his shenanigans with Drakemoor, out in the Foothills. Still miss the fat cow, with his over-sized gun.  
Why does that feel so long ago already? Bah, too many dead friends have turned me maudlin.  
I'll have to see Silfr, add the names of the fallen to my skin. And Aska, Kristen, and Usha... So many people I need to see, and always so little time.

# 84th of Colossus

Hoelbrak. Spirits, finally back in Hoelbrak.  
I'm tired, and almost certainly drunk. It's been a very long and tiring day, but it deserves to be recorded.  
  
After yesterday excitement, we were finally mustered and told we got ten days of leave to enjoy ourselves, which is mighty fine as gifts go, and much needed. The Warmaster seems to have prepared this, as many folks also found Wintersday gifts from her in their quarters come dawn. She gave me a bottle of Bear's Brown ale, a bear amulet I'm wearing next to Kristen's bluescale from Southsun, and a book about a legendary norn called Bjornjan the Tall. He's an old hero, and I know his tale well enough, but I didn't know they started writing books about heroes yet. Seems I'm not the first after all to record a legend on paper! Alleshia also wrote me a note that... was appreciated, with what has been happening. I've slid it between the pages here.

Spoiler: Alleshia's note[Show](javascript:;)

Alleshia Willhem wrote:

*Tzahr,*  
  
*Faithful, loyal, veteran. There are the words I find when I think of you. You are a stone in the vast ocean of this Chapter, firm an unmoving, a mountain amongst men. Your legend grows every day and I will be honored to find It with the Skaalds when fate overcomes you.*  
  
*-Alleshia.*

That's not the only note I found today; Nauja Dawnsong, the norn woman from over Wulfbane's steading has apparently decided to leave the Chapter's service. With what passed to Lalowa, the sudden realisation that our children are at home has struck many of us, her included. She invited me to come over to Wulfbane's steading, and perhaps make use of their hospitality, which is an idea. Might spend some of actual Wintersday away out in the Foothills, take the entire horde of children with us.

Spoiler: Nauja's note[Show](javascript:;)

Nauja Dawnsong wrote:

*Davidsson,*  
  
*I don't have much time before I leave, so I'll cut to the chase of it. We have spoken little, and maybe my name is unfamiliar to you, but I have long admired your character and leadership. Word spreads quickly around camp, and I have to say that what you are doing for Lalowa's daughter is beyond what you have to do, and I thank you sincerely for that on her behalf. It could easily be my children orphaned by that beast, and to know that someone is out there looking out for the girl warms my heart. She deserves to know family after all that has happened to her, and your kindness will replicate that in some way.*  
*I write this letter to let you know you and the girl have my support by any means. If she is ever in need of anything, no matter how big, myself and my family will always be willing to help in some part. If there is anything I can do, let me know. No child deserves to go without, especially after what this poor little girl has been through.*  
  
*I'll be at the Brusah Steading if you ever feel that you would take me up on this offer. After this I have no stomach for the Vigil life.*  
  
*Spirits guide you,*  
*Nauja Dawnsong*  
  
*P.S. You may recall giving this to me in Rata Sum some time ago when we were recruiting there, for my children. I feel that Lalowa's small one may appreciate it more now, even if it's just a small gesture. So please, give it her for me. Thank you.*

But I'm getting ahead of myself. It's been a long, long day. Lionhead and Sinclair accompanied me to Hoelbrak, since we were going to make arrangements for Lalowa's remembrance to be celebrated in the norn fashion. We arrived through the gates, because I had little stomach to take the long way around and lose another day and a half trekking through Snowden. Lionhead went to see her son, Leif for a moment, while Sinclair needed some time to mentally prepare to speak to Aska, so I went to find Kristen in Leopard's Lodge first.  
  
I found her sure enough, still apprenticing under Valharantha. Spirits, I swear every passing day just helps make her more beautiful. She looks the part, too, with the robes and the staff. Ahh, it brings a smile to my heart. It almost made me forget the entire fact that she used to be an Order of Whispers agent, and never told me. But, as that turns out, that was long before she met me. She's said that by the time we first exchanged glances in Southsun, she'd left the Order far behind. Like me, she served in Orr during the great war against Zhaitan, but had enough after the dragon's death, and left the service. I did much the same, after all. I cannot lie, it was like a weight being lifted off of my shoulders to know that there never was a breach of trust between us. I wouldn't want that; I love her, and I should be able to trust her unconditionally. Usha is a different story; she probably knew who Kristen used to be, and kept it purposefully hidden from me until now. I haven't seen her yet, as the day's work in the brewery has apparently left her exhausted and unable to join the revels. Something tells me she is fine, but unwilling to meet my eyes as of yet, which... is unlike Usha. I will probably speak with her on the morrow, but I doesn't sit well me that this has happened. I'm trying to be angry, and much of the other events today have helped with softening my mood, but still. She's my sister, after all...  
  
Regardless, Kristen and I remain unchanged, as far as I know, and once again I thank the Spirits for bringing us together as we are. She even retrieved a large curved blade, a relic from her time with the Order, and passed it to me as a symbolic gesture that all of that is behind her. It's an ornate enough weapon, but I doubt I'd make much use of it in battle. Freyja, who joined us by leaping at me across the table, laid claim on it pretty quickly.  
I brought up the news of Lalowa's passing, and my decision to bring Aska into the family, which was met with much approval. So much, actually, that Freyja has stated her willingness to take up Aska as her own, directly, together with Grace. I wasn't so sure at first, but Freyj seems to be utterly determined that this is the way it'll be, and I've not yet seen anything that can make her budge on something she's made her mind up about. Apparently, after I left, Freyja has been taking the Jotunling over to see Aska with some regularity, and Freyj has taken an immense liking to the girl. Grace wasn't too sure either, but I think Freyja managed to talk her into it eventually.  
  
We decided to have the remembrance at the Might and Main, in between the Spirit Lodges, under the night's sky. Lionhead brought he son, Leif, a healthy looking toddler with her mother's hair. Once arrangements were maid, we finally went to fetch Aska.  
Spirits, that was the hardest thing I've ever had to do.  
My kin, me and Sinclair, trying to tell this little girl that her mother wasn't coming back. Sinclair has it much worse, his emotion palpable. I'm not sure if Aska understood everything that's happening, she's so young... the idea of death is not yet as final. She kept asking of her mother would come visit her, and every time it was like ripping your heart out to tell her that her mother was in a different, happier place now, and that could come with us instead. She cried, confused, and bless her heart, Freyja swooped in and picked her up, consoling the little girl as best as she could. We took everyone out to the great bonfire over the Might and Main, and set to retelling the tales of our departed warrior, our faithful companion, and our missed friend. Ale was passed around, and people got merry, singing the old funeral songs, and recounting their best moments with Lalowa. Others listened, joined, drank to her memory, and then departed, perhaps to pass on her tale to others. Freyja, unlike her usual self, took Aska to sleep early, when the girl became tired, and said she's stay with her throughout the night. I went back to Wolf lodge afterwards to collect little Askavild's possessions, and keep them together with all the little things she's been getting. Nauja returned the toy golem I once bought for her children along with her note, and Kaila throw me a small norn doll as well. I've added it all to the meagre little bundle, along with... Lalowa's old necklace and a small blade Sinclair wanted her to have. It's all small compensation for the loss of a mother, but we'll do what we can. I am happy Freyja is embracing the girl with such zeal. I was doubtful about the entire thing, but she might have strong instincts that will make her a good mother to a girl like Aska. I noticed that Aska still had the toy soldier norn I originally made for little Reuzen; she painted the wolf blue, for some reason. Askavild Blue Wolf, eh? She's certainly favoured by Wolf, that much is clear. That big wolf that Lalowa had around for a while, Golm, follows her everywhere. A guardian spirit.  
  
They're all asleep now, thankfully. Lionhead and Leif, Freyja, Grace and Aska, Sinclair... Just Kristen and I, and the last embers of the fire, deep in the night. I was wanted to see the Jotunling, but the little boy has long since gone to rest, and a child's dreams are sacred, not to be disturbed by neither father nor mother. Hrist is around, drinking, laughing, living. There is the soft feeling of melancholy that comes over you at the end of an evening that was equally filled with joy and loss, that gentle feeling that comes only after you've lost someone. You need to feel loss to understand what still remains. I held Kristen close, and was simply happy that we both existed. Spirits, and Bjornolf, may the spirits forever keep him, I owe him all of this. Please leave, my friend. Please live.  
  
I'm drunk. I want to see my son. I want to see my sister, my niece, my nephew. My granddaughter... Hah, the family has grown quickly, though I wish it was under happier terms. And this is without Kristen and myself even having our own child... oh, what a beautiful gift that would be, too. Hmm, I should set to build a lodge for all of them, for everyone, to keep them. So Reuzen and Aska can grow up together. Leif too, if Lionhead wants him to. They're all kin, as far as I'm concerned, blood or no blood. All family. Kristen and mine.

# 85th of Colossus

Hoelbrak, not too far off from year's end either. Hah, 1330, eh? Wonder what the year'll bring. Perhaps we'll mark it down as another great victory for all of us over the dragons.  
  
I spoke with Usha today, and met the cubs. Bear's claws, but they are much smaller than I imagined them to be, though Usha does tell me they'll grow quick within their early years. Apparently they'll start walking and talking on their own well before they're into the second winter. They're like leopard cubs, when they're newborn, all great, wet eyes, and small ears. Though they sprout horns and fangs already, the little buggers! They bite too. I expected them to be more akin to a babe, like the Jotunling, but they're already walking, following Usha around on all fours, and eating meat scraps Usha feeds them. She seems happy, though subdued, which worried me. I'm not used to Usha so... insecure.  
We spoke for a long time. Longer than I expected, actually, about many things. About the Order. The blunt part of it is that she's been deceiving me for... near on five years now, about what she did and what she knew. From what I understood, she's is, or was, a ran part of a supply chain that passed materiel from the Shiverpeaks back to Lion's Arch, and beyond. The brewery used to be the cover for much of the shipping, which... explains why we sometimes seemed to be sending more off than Usha actually produced and bottled. I never questioned Usha's business skills, but I wish I had now. She also knew about bloody Sana, and about Kristen, and so much more that it came pouring out like a torrent. I feel like an idiot, all these lies she must have told to my face, without even...  
I got angry. I still *am* angry. My sworn kin! I have no words for this, it is... Bah.  
  
I'm not sure what will happen. I am considering breaking the bonding oath, over everything that passed, over this betrayal, but... I don't know. Freyja cornered me about it, not too long ago now, before I went to rest, and said that Usha was there for both of us, ever since Freyj's mother died. She's right, too. I have to put all of these things in balance. It tears at me, because I've never before had to think of reasons why Usha and I shouldn't, can't, be kin, and all I can think of is that she's just another bloody Charr. I know, intellectually, that Usha has been fighting the same war I have been for years now. Her time with the Order, her lies, they were as much a sacrifice she made for us as the time I sacrifice to fight the war in the field. My head knows this, but my heart rejects it. I cannot reconcile this. Not yet. Not now. Perhaps in time...  
Spirits, and Fuse... damn old Fuse... You had to run and try and get her cubs into the Fahrar behind her back, you... idiot. What were you thinking? Usha hates the Legions. We norn are all she has, and even now, that hangs in the balance by a thread that I might cut with my own hand. I don't know. If Fuse comes back now, Usha might kill him, I feel. Or worse, listen to him, and just disappear off back to her own kind. Or perhaps that's for the best?  
Bah! Bah. Not even Kristen's wisdom can help me here. I'll have to meditate on it, tomorrow.  
  
The rest of day was... alright, considering. Freyja is cooing over Aska, and seems to have taken her new role seriously. She can't stop talking about the girl, and is intent on teaching her how to read soon. Aska herself is struggling with the news of her mother's death, which is no small surprise. She still asks the same question, whether or not Lal's going to visit her, after which she seems to go quiet until Freyja cheers her up again, or the other children distract her for a while. At least all the toys she's gotten from everyone seem to help keep her mind off of dwelling on the matter. I'm glad Lionhead brought Leif, the boy seems to do perfectly with Aska and Reuzen, and it is small blessing to have them all here, tumbling through the snow, or tumbling around the hearth fire when it goes dark. The little Jotunling is doing just fine, too, for which I am thankful. The boy is starting to bounce and roll about a bit if you let him sit, which means he'll be crawling around soon, heh. Good, give Hrist, Kristen and Freyja a reason to keep their eyes open, before the boy crawls off somewhere he shouldn't yet be! Either way, I'm glad the women have taken good care of him. He's the youngest in a quickly growing family, though I wonder how long that'll last, with Kristen and me still alive and in our prime. The woman's developed a mothering instinct at least, I'll tell you that. It goes well with her shaman skins. A year ago, I wouldn't have said Kristen'd at risk of bearing children in another five years if she could help it, but now?  
  
That leaves the difficult question I've been trying not to pose myself these last few days: is it time for me to retire, and stay home? Spirits, Lalowa's death and Bjorn's timely rescue has turned me around to value what I stand to lose. On the other hand, I know that there are still plenty hands present to raise the children should something happen to me. I don't know. Perhaps I'll talk to Kristen about it, and she'll slap me about enough to send me scampering back to the Vigil ranks. I'll see. I still have days to make up my mind, about this, and about what my heart has to say about Usha's place in our family.  
  
In better news, I got a letter from Bjorn, who is finally awake. It's clear it took him some effort writing, but I've never been more relieved to get an ill-written note from someone. I won't lie, my heart skipped a beat first, when I thought it was the Warmaster writing to tell me that he'd passed away, or some such. But he hasn't, Raven be praised, and only asks we drink something for him. And we shall, a cask of Braided Horn from Usha's stores, to honour the brave deeds of a brave man. Perhaps a good measure of alcohol in my blood will help my judgement on other matters as well. Even if I become maudlin, at least I'll know it's from the heart, and therefore true.  
  
Hmmm... Seeing the children make play outside Leopard lodge makes me want to take them all out somewhere, tomorrow. Perhaps bring a good leg of yak and that cask I spoke of, and set out into the Foothills for a bit. Maybe even ask Hildr to come with. The poor lass is still not found her memory back, though she seems to have quieted down a little. It's still a little difficult to see the someone I once knew, and for them to be so... hollow. I still think a good whiff of forest air will benefit her. The forest and the children. Powerful magic in them both, after all.

# 86th of Colossus

Hoelbrak, in the winter's wind. Spirits, but the wind bites these days, makes the skin tingle. It's a good sensation, the wind rushing past between the mountaintops, like the breaths of the Spirits, giving us their blessing.  
  
I took the children out into the Borealis Forest and Grawlenfjord again, along with Freyja and Kristen this time. It's always good for them to spend some time away from Hoelbrak itself, and start learning the smells and sounds of the forests. We ran around, chasing each other for a bit through the pines and along the riverbank, me with the little laddies, and Freyj with Aska bounding about on her shoulders, squealing with glee every time Freyj hopped over a shrubbery, and forced me jump after. Spirits, you wouldn't say she had a Risen almost cut her leg off, the way she was hurtling through the underbrush, hah. No, no, it was a good day. We ate overlooking Outcast's Cleft and the river, before Kristen went off with Aska and Freyj to go shooting arrows, and pass by Leopard and Wolf shrine. First lessons for Aska to flew a bow, I think. I kept the boys, skipping stones over the water and meditating on some questions while they napped over the noon.  
It was serene. Quiet. I pondered Usha, and laid some questions before the Spirits, but they didn't answer me much. I feel favour from the guardian spirits, especially Bear whom I feel walks with me again now. But no clear answers. Perhaps things need more time. They will speak, when the time is right. Leif eventually interrupted my thoughts by throwing stones into the water, so I taught him how to skip them off the surface for a bit, until the lasses returned from archery.  
  
On the way back, Aska put Reuzen up on Golm's back, which the wolf allowed well enough for being what it is. She lead him on, until Leif got jealous and pulled him off. Reuzen's fine, thankfully it wasn't high, though he cried for a little bit over it. Aska tried to berate Leif for it, but I told them both it's fine. After, I took Leif on my own shoulders, a fair better ride than poor Golm's back. Wolves aren't for carrying anyway. We had some minotaur pastries near the Great Lodge to settle the mood a little, before I took Leif back to Bear's lodge, and the Jotunling back to Hrist and Hildr. Hildr didn't want to come with today, and I didn't press the issue. She's still not very well. I think I'll let her have the boys tomorrow.  
  
When I came back, Aska came up to me and asked me about Lalowa again. I finally took her up on my knee and tried to carefully explain to her that Lalowa's running with Wolf now. She seemed to make better sense of that than before; I think the Hall of Spirits and all the things about Raven and her memory might have overwhelmed her. She's still having difficulties with it, but by Raven's feathers, we're trying our best to make her feel welcome and loved. Freyj's surprised me several times now, pleasantly, by the zeal she puts into the girl. Somewhere, I feel she's compensating for not having a mother of her own when she grew up. Either way, Aska then asked me if we should make an offering to Wolf, then, if her mother was hunting alongside him. Girl's got a good grasp of Wolf teachings, at least, thank the Elder Shamans... But she's right, we should make an offering to Wolf.  
Luck has it that Kristen picked up that there's a large ice wurm burrows south from Hoelbrak, in the direction of the Haivoissen Kenning, with a broodmother that would make a worthy pack hunt. If we leave the children for Hildr, Helga and Hrist to keep an eye on, it could be a worthy and good endeavour to spend a day or two taking down the critter, and take it down. Kristen and I, as well as Grace and Freyja should be able to take it down handily enough, whereas on our own, it'd be much more risky. I remember when Knut captured Issormir... Pity I didn't get to see that Great Hunt to its conclusion. Still, who knows, maybe this ice wurm will be match for our skill. If so, then bringing it home for Wolf's rites as an offering will bring great honour on Lalowa, and perhaps allow Aska to buy some peace of mind in her own, childlike, way.  
  
I'll talk to Kristen about it now, actually, before we all dwindle off for some bedrest. I think Freyja has already retired with Grace and Aska, but I don't doubt Freyj will want to join us, and she'll drag Grace along with her. Hm!

# 87th of Colossus

Out in the Dredgehaunts, travelling afield for the hunt. As expected, the idea got met with considerable enthusiasm, and we departed some small time after the noon.  
  
Before we departed, I bumped into Vatorn. Lad was busy waving his finger at Vatorn, after the lass threw a snowball at his head while "hunting". I think Kristen's little idea yesterday with the archery caught on, and I am pleased she's using her energy to practice; even if it is on non-suspecting travelers, hah. Freyj'll have a word with her once we're back, perhaps help direct her a little towards more practical outlets.  
  
Vatorn himself was well enough, apparently he passed by to have some ink set down by Silfr. Reminds me that I need to sit down for some myself one of these days. He also came looking for a wolf pup, though he turned out disappointed. Wolf didn't seem too pleased with the stranger, and none of the wolves we keep at the Lodge turned his interest towards him. I didn't say it out loud, but Wolf's values of loyalty and dependability might not hold too true for the human. He'll need to embrace Wolf's teachings further if he wants to be considered worthy of tending to one of Wolf's many children. Either way, this was all right before we left off. I'm still surprised to have seen him in Hoelbrak at all, to be fair. Ah well.  
  
We made road out south smoothly enough, but the Jotun were agitated, and wouldn't let us pass. We found a way around, but it cut a good few hours off of the journey. We make for a mottled hunting pack, too. Kristen, slipping ahead gracefully and quietly, with Freyja and I stomping through the snows not too far behind. And Grace! Spirits, I doubted the girl's combat prowess before, but she's like a flitting shadow. I understand much better how she manages to keep up with Freyja in battle now, hah. I suppose if you can't be strong, you have to be quick and smart, so it all holds out. There was some debate from Freyja if we should've taken Aska along, but the other three were all against it, for obvious reasons. As far as first hunts go, rooting out giant frost wurms might be a little overkill, especially for a girl that young.  
Anyway, I had hoped that the travel would be quick enough, but it's getting dark, and we had to make camp another three hours or so off from the moraine where the wurm is supposed to make its lair. If we rise at dawn, and make good time, we can slay the beast, and be back in Hoelbrak not too long after sundown. Wonder if the wurm they spoke of is worth hunting, really. Sometimes these tales are exaggerations, and I'd hate to end up here having chased down nothing more than an overgrown hatchling. Eh, I suppose we'd just stay in the field, and let Kristen track us some worthier prey.  
  
I hope Hildr is keeping the children entertained in the meantime.  
No decision on Usha's matter either. I feel like one thing, and then suddenly I change my mind. I flit between forgiveness and anger, like a Charr's tail in line up, swooping from one way to another. I'll talk to her again, once we return from the hunt. Perhaps something changed. I don't know.  
  
Anyway, we've opened up a small cask of mead, while Freyja boils some water for Grace's tea. Let's see how the hunt pans out first, perhaps wisdom will come to me in the thrill of the moment.

# 88th of Colossus

By the Spirits, what a day... Hale and hearty back in Hoelbrak, but not without a full day's worth of excitement and head-scratching, I'll say that much. To say that I am exhausted and spent measures it lightly, here's hoping for a long night's rest after the day's account, and no more bloody frost wurms for at least a season.  
  
We woke up come morning, a little before dawn, and made ready to continue the journey and find our legendary prey. We made our way down the moraine easily enough, and saw all the good signs of ice wurm borrowing; a lot of disturbed ice and stone, and plenty of smaller wurm hatchlings burrowing up from the ground, and snaking about. We could see them clear enough from a distance, and after some preparation ventured deeper into the field. The moraine sloped down nearer to a cleft, which seemed to be the main burrows. A few of the larger ones got agitated as we ventured into their territory, but they were dispatched easily enough. If Kristen's arrows didn't transfix them, they fell to our readied swords. Eventually, near the lower lip of the slope a much larger one surfaced and assailed us. Unfortunately, it was a much smaller specimen than we had hoped for, and it was dispatched easily enough after a brief skirmish. Disappointing, really. We were busy pulling up from the dirt when we felt a slight tremor, before the earth exploded around us. Kristen later told me that Freyja and I had been thrown clear several meters, landing hard in the snowy slopes around us. The real foe had found us.  
Spirits, it was a giant ice wurm, two or three times bigger than the one we had just slain! It must have been offspring. This one, though... Wolf's fangs, but what a creature! It must be kin to the legendary Mountain Heart, or Ssissth the Leviathan, of the great tales! It towered over us, roaring and flailing, while I scrambled back to my feet, and seized it up, still dazed. I remember Kristen yelling something, as her arrows started punching into the narrows between its thick carapace. Grace, bless her quick feet, darted in like a shadow, pulling Freyja back up on her feet, before my own lass started swinging her greatsword at it, lighting the ground around her with rolling blasts of wrathfire that accompanied every swing of the blade. I too added my own strength, my sword catching fire in the heat of the moment, and scourging deep furrows into the beast's thick body. Everything smelled of melting fat as our fire scorched the monster's blubber.  
It wouldn't be tamed so easily. It coiled, and burrowed away, leaving us gasping for breath for a moment before it surfaced again, trying to lock its jaws around Grace, though her shadow magic kept her safe. Freyj and I turned to engage it again, but it hawked a glob of wum bile at us. Freyj threw up a shield barrier quick enough, but some of it still plashed unto my shield and armour. If not for the defensive enchantments woven into the steel, I think I'd be a dead man! I still have some nasty frostburns in my neck and across my cheek that will sting for a few days. Kristen's taking good care to see that the injury is tended to well. But I'm getting sidetracked, the hunt, the hunt!  
We tried to assail it again when it slammed itself down flat on the ground, and swept its full, crushing, mass at us. I managed to roll clear, but Freyja was knocked aside with enough force to knock all the air clean out of her. It was here about that we heard some small voice cry out, and bloody Aska came running up over from a snow-dune she'd be hiding up on, throwing rocks at the bloody great ice wurm, Golm bounding at her side.  
I've never been more afraid for someone in my entire existence. By Bear's claws, may I never feel that fear again. Things went fast afterwards, and the sudden jolt of fear-fueled adrenaline makes the memory somewhat hazy. Kristen and Grace explained it to me more carefully after the battle. The wurm turned towards Aska, and Grace, bless her razor sharp reflexes, snatched the child away in an eye blink, before Freyja threw a sanctuary over them both. I remember calling on Bear's strength, and simply shoulder-charging the damn beast, trying to overpower it. Kristen saw what I did, and did the same, invoking Leopard's blessed form. I never thought I'd meet something so unrelentingly strong, and expect to come out alive. But, the Spirits were with us today, and no wurm can stand before the twinned wrath of Bear and Leopard. Together, Kristen and I managed to pull the damn wurm to the ground, before Freyja hefted her greatsword and all-but hacked the great beast in two with one titanic stroke. The resulting blast of wrathfire flash-boiled the snow in a small crater around us.  
I was so dazed by the entire thing I though I had died, until Kristen fell down on top of me, and started shaking me until I responded. Freyja was shivering with exhaustion, and using her sword a crutch. Only Grace and Aska seem to be comparatively unharmed, though Grace was thoroughly agitated, and she remained twitchy for some time after.  
  
Aska's fine. Hale and hearty, not a scratch on her. Apparently the girl managed to slip out from under Hrist's eyes, and followed us all the way out here, because she wanted to be part of the Pack, and honour her mother's memory. My emotions are difficult to describe, though dismay and anger rule at intervals. Freyja and Kristen were furious. I don't know. I think Aska did the very worst thing, for all the very best reasons. We explained to her that what she did was very, very stupid. Great pack hunts are no place for little girls that don't know how to wield a bow yet. Perhaps Freyja should've had that talk about safe hunting practice sooner, rather than later, but what done is done, and, with Wolf's guidance, no-one was seriously harmed. We got a great offering for Wolf from it too, so I suppose the hunt itself was a success. Freyja and I cut free the head after a breather, and we carried it back home to Hoelbrak. It'll sit in Wolf's lodge as an offering, another Great Wurm slain in the memory of fallen comrade, a testament to Wolf's strength.  
  
As for Aska now we're back home; Freyja and Kristen will teach her hunting in earnest, and impress upon her the real dangers that reckless behaviour holds for someone who is unprepared to meet their prey. She'll learn quick enough, especially now she's been chastised suitably, though knowing Freyja, her heart will thaw before the next day is over. Aska's a young norn, and only age and experience can temper the urge for adventure and glory we all start feeling. I suppose Aska's first hunt is a memorable enough one, even though her contribution to the fight was to run at a monster twenty times her size while yelling loudly. She doesn't lack for courage, that's for sure, even though wisdom is yet to be found.  
  
But now I'm going to rest, and woe upon who-ever wakes me up before I'm damn well rested, come morning!

# 89th of Colossus

All is quiet, after a long day's rest. The hunt was... draining, to say the least, even though it was pleasant, and we hunted down worthy prey. Kristen and I spent a good part over the noon in the hot-springs, letting the tension wear out. My forstburns ached in the warm water, but Kristen says that's just the skin healing. There's always something good about floating for a bit, feeling the heat of the mountain's water and the cold of the snow at the same time. You can close your eyes, and drift for hours, the mind blink and the spirit as close to being one with the earth as you might get.  
  
Silf did touched up on the markings with needle and ink nearer to the evening, once we got back. It's been a while since I had the growing sweeps and bands added to, and it was high time we put some more of those memories to the flesh. I find the small stings to be almost meditative, and once you get used to the little pains, it becomes a tingling feeling that dances around your skin. It relaxed me so that I actually fell asleep, and Silfr woke me some small half an hour later. I remember when she worked on the markings on my face and chest; that was less pleasant. She had me kneel before her, my chin resting between her breasts, and kept me like that for more than an hour as she ran the needle over my nose and my brow. It was a surprisingly erotic thing, actually. Hmm. I wonder if Kristen's got anything to say about *that* sort of thing. Seems odd. I like Kristen's markings, though, certainly. Like a map of knotwork that spirals out across her neck, shoulders, back and hip. I wake her up, sometimes, running my finger over the red lines in the early dawns. Always inspires me to do something... strange. Primal. Like daubing a rock with paint, like the Grawl, or pouring out sand in long spirals and paths that don't mean anything, but are beautiful simply because of their form.  
  
Hm... The children have been quiet. I heard Freyja and Grace took the entire herd of them out to Wolf lodge, to listen to shamans tell about hunts and the dangers the world keep for those that aren't ready yet. Freyj asked some of the elders to share their knowledge. I suppose it functions to instruct Aska on her foolhardy little trick from the days past. Ah, the girl still has so much to learn. I remember when Eirik taught me how to wield a sword for the first time. He did so, always warning me of the dangers that were out there. I was always eager to see them with my own eyes, but I didn't underestimate them. Well, not much. In any case, I hope she and the other little ones learn well. Perhaps next leave, I'll go hunting drake or skelk with her properly, and she can show me if she took life's lessons to heart.  
  
On other matters, I will speak to Usha again tomorrow. My mood has softened a little bit, and I think that, perhaps, room for reconciliation can be found. I am not sure of this feeling will linger, but I hope it does. The internal conflict has been troubling me, and I feel like I keep turning my mind to other things, as to avoid coming to terms with it, either for better or for worse. At least I'll get to see the cubs again, and taste some of the better drink. This Braided Horn ale she's fermented... it's damn good. Perhaps I can even convince her to ferment another batch of the same preparation, before we drain the last of this. Hm. I suppose a good measure of strong ale will only help, after all.  
  
But that's tomorrow.

# 90th of Colossus

I spoke to Usha. Actually, I spoke to Usha for so long, that we both got stupendously drunk over the course of the evening, and means I'm only making the record in the journal a day late, on the morning of the 91st. Ah well, it cannot be helped, really.  
  
Talks were good. Usha poured generous measures of Wyrmblood and Braided Horn to pass the day, and we spoke amicably enough, while the cubs puttered about in the background. Usha's decided that, in the thing between her and Fuse, to allow the cubs the final choice. In a year's time, they can decide for themselves what they want to be doing, and find their own paths. Be that with Usha in exile, or over into the Fahrar as their sire intended.  
She'll write Fuse, see if reconciliation is even possible. It might not be.  
  
As for us, well, I suppose we'll need to let time heal the rift. I swore an oath to stand by my kin through the worst and the best. Besides, the hunt for the ice wurm has only helped to remind me of the strength that comes from standing together in the face of adversity. Usha did what she did because she served a higher purpose. The cost for her was to keep things hidden from those around her. I'm not too different. I may not tell lies, but I am away in distant places for most days in the year. Freyja held it against me when I left fort Orr in 1325, which I regretted for a long time. I suppose I can be angry or dissatisfied with Usha, but that shouldn't change the fact that she is my chosen kin, for whatever reasons, and that I should be there to support them. And I will. Though, perhaps, not as much or heartily as before, until all of this has settled better. Right now, my mind keeps wandering to that raw feeling of betrayal. Even good drink can't entirely erase that.  
  
But now, I'm going to find my son, and spend some time with him. In all this excitement, leave is almost over! Bah. Freyja is taking Leif and Aska out to the brewery, while Kristen is over with the Speaker of Leopard, giving Reuzen and I plenty of time for a good man-to-man talk about wooden soldiers, and silly faces.

# 91st of Colossus

The last day in Hoelbrak, as tomorrow we're all heading north towards Wulfbane's steadings for one last evening of feasting, and then I'll be marching on across Snowden for the Vigil Keep, and back into the fray.  
  
So, of course, I took the day easily enough, just sitting with the little Jotunling near the fire in Leopard's shrine, give Kristen some time to learn from Valharantha. Freyja took Leif and Aska out to Usha's brewery, let the little ones run amok with Usha's little fuzzballs while Freyja sets to bringing up the ale kegs. Give us a little father-son time, while we still can. Kristen and I will be taking him along to Wulfbane's stead tomorrow just as well, but know the Chief's over-the-moon hospitality, I don't think there'll be much rest to be had.  
  
Not that I had much here either. Both Seleea and Alessa came by to visit, on two separate occasions. I suppose if all of your friends are in the Vigil, and you don't have much of a place to go over leave, it makes sense to drop by other folks. Everyone seems to be in a toy-bringing mood, too. Soon, the children will own more toys than I have trophies! Not that I begrudge them, they're nicely crafted ones, for the most part.  
  
The best part of the day was Kristen having Reuzen in her lap while the boy fell asleep. I was never quite sure that Kristen would take to the boy, but she has. And quite well, too! Spirits, Freyj and I never had a mother around, and suddenly they're everywhere around me. I feel... superfluous, almost, but not in a bad way. Freyj's finding her new parenthood to be a challenge, with a child as headstrong as Aska to contend with, even with Grace's help. Kristen's taken to my son, and I don't doubt she'll be wanting her own soon enough. Usha's struggling with the future of her cubs. And then Hrist's still about, doing what she does, more than happy to let us coo over the child if that frees her up.  
  
Hm! Figure this is how Wulfbane felt, eh? Suddenly you go from being a warrior to being a father, and before you know, you've got a steading where you can't take a step without bumping into some young one just waiting to pick up a sword and begin forging their legend.

# 92nd of Colossus

Brusah Steading, and the last day of leave. Tomorrow, I say goodbye to everyone and continue through to the Vigil Keep over the Lion Road through Snowden. A walk that'll take me long enough, but unless I run into any irregularities, I should be back in time.  
  
The day was good. Took Aska, Freyj, Kristen and the Jotunling to Sigrun and Wulfbane. Kristen hadn't been in a while, and it was a good way for the little ones to come into the countryside a little without us looking over their shoulders like the concerned parents we are. It was good for everyone, I think. I spoke with Nauja and Wulfbane at some length, laughing and joking. Maybe even convinced some of the young warriors that hang around the place to come seek glory in the Vigil.  
Freyj indulged happily in food and drink, and kept a close eye on Aska. Apparently she's not let the entire frost worm thing go yet, against my expectations. Not so much as to stop the girl from enjoying herself, mind, it just mean Freyja ended up in the snowball fights, and chasing around the children around the lodge.  
Kristen... Well, my sweet became unwell during the evening; she'd been having some discomforts through the morning. I just thought she had eaten something bad, or drank too much the day before, but Wulfbane said something about her being with child. I'm... careful about hoping. If Kristen's with child, it'll be the happiest day of my life, but Bear'll hold me for a fool if I celebrate, and it turns out to be only some bad salmon over the morning. Figures this happens the last day of leave! Kristen will have to write me, if she misses her moons... Spirits, another one, eh? Perhaps I'll need to think about raising this lodge now, sooner, rather than later.

# 93rd of Colossus

Vigil Keep, and ready to return to the fray. Unfortunately, they're sending us back to Ascalon. I'm hoping we ge a chance to finish that damned Shatterer that robbed us of Lalowa, but we'll see. Maybe the Sentinels have already managed to bring the beast down while we were pulled out. Not the first time we've been hot-swapped with the reserves, they did that in the Maguuma too.  
  
Anyway, most of the work in the next few days will be exercise and managing the field armoury. We're bringing the cannon with us into the field, along with welding gear, since we're expecting them to be used. Means we'll be carrying a heavier load, which means more work for me. Thankfully, Lionhead's promotion to First Crusader makes the pick for Engineering second an easy one. That should help dividing the workload.  
  
Spirits, leaving this morning wasn't easy. Kristen was still feeling ill, and the idea that she might be with child made me unhappy to leave. But I did, and traveled for most of the day across the Lion Road. Ahh... Kristen with child. I spoke with Maeva and Lionhead about it, might need to settle down that lodge sooner rather than later. Not sure if my family can wait for the Far Shiverpeaks... But I'm getting ahead of myself. If it turns out I've been getting all excited over a bout of indigestion, I'll be crestfallen! I hope she'll write me when she it passes, and I'll know. Or actually, I don't, it might make the wait for next leave unbearable.  
Spirits, it'd be the longest three seasons of my life...  
  
The talk with Maeva and Lionhead was generally pleasurable enough. The boasting and teasing of norn, which always gets out of control eventually. I think we settled on Lionhead and Maeva fighting out to see who was the best brawler over next leave, in the sparring ring near Marriner, wearing only their knickers and wet shirts. Now there's a sight I'll happily go see, both for the brawl and just the general view.  
Maeva gave me a Wintersday thing, a bear-shaped belt buckle. I've received gifts from some of the humans too, which is surprising. Small got me some cigar, Ravenwest a bottle of good whiskey, along with some toys for Aska. Aramis, though, got a wonderful canteen and a beanie hat. Wintersday's a human thing, and I find it mildly annoying I didn't think to get anyone anything. Maybe I can give a round of ale sometime.  
  
Talking about rounds of ale, I heard Bjorn's still doing well. I'll go see if I can't visit him on the morrow.

# 94th of Colossus

Vigil Keep.  
  
Long day today. Warmaster and Blade went out in response to a disturbance out in Lorna's Pass, through the eastern passages south-east of the keep. That turned out slightly more problematic than expected. First, we got beset by a good amount of Ettin that we only kept at bay by staying rigidly in formation and taking as they came. I managed to throw one off of Sawyer a good distance. Carmine got his shoulder busted, but thanks to Claridge and Sawyer, they eventually broke off. Damned Ettin are always a danger, but this was a big raid, even by their standards. Wonder if a chieftain managed to get a bunch of them to do his bidding... Either way, we pushed through well enough, only to find the quarry we were supposed to investigate overrun with belligerent Skritt. We chased them off quick enough, but not before they managed to kill some of the Marmox and miners.  
The miners apparently reported something big stalking the mountain passes and snatching some of their members. Warmaster thought it might have been an icebrood critter, though it sounded more like a big troll or a Jotun. Spirits, maybe even an Ettin. Turned out it was Fleshreavers. Aye, genuine damned Fleshreavers! They were holed up in a tunnel complex cutting through one of the mountains. We decided to drive them out, and found a hoard of... horrible things. Remains. I know that Fleshreavers are said to use the flesh of their prey to add to their own bodies, but Spirits, that was... Well, I suppose I've seen worse, like when we found Talon Chapter in Auric Basin, but still. We burned it. We burned it all.  
By the time we surfaced again, we were under the Priory! I didn't even realise how far we'd come, but we were several hours away from the Keep now. We eventually made our way back to the Keep through Lion's Arch, though by that time I was pretty much out for the count.  
  
I had a brief talk with Bjorn, who seems to be doing well, but in all honesty I was spent. I made some food, scribbled this here down for the day's record, and now I'm going to go sleep.

# 95th of Colossus

Vigil Keep.  
  
Today was mostly a long march on supply escort to Ascalon Settlement and back, with literally nothing passing on the road. A slow day, at least.  
  
We've been getting some new enlistees, too. Two norn, Agnar, from Wulfbane's steading, the son of Krumr who died defending the lodge, and a woman called Eyra, Hare follower. Also a human, but I didn't speak to them much.  
I suppose it's a good thing we're taking on some extra recruits. For the remainder, everything has been fairly quiet, not surprisingly.  
Now we just wait until the we deploy again.  
  
Apparently this also isn't the last day of 1329? There's another, extra, day tomorrow. Never used to count the season until the 96th, but I suppose they're filling in some empty days here and there. Or something. As long as the winter still comes more or less on the same days, I doubt it'll matter much.

# 96th of Colossus

The last day of the year, though as I write, it is the morning of the 1st of Zephyr, 1330.  
I wonder what this new decade will bring to us, which dragons will fall, and which faces will come and go. My heart and mind are with my family, knowing that we enter these new years with so much potential before us; by the end of it, many of my children will have grown up. The question is, how will the world around them look? I can only hope that by that time we've defeated the dragons. Perhaps this is optimistic, considering the titanic efforts needed to defeat Zhaitan and Mordremoth. The days will get darker before they get brighter, but as the Sylvari say, we will not fear this night. Dawn is but a heartbeat away, and we fight for that promise of sunrise after the Long Night every day.  
  
These coming years are for you, Reuzen, Aska, Leif, that this decade may be the last one in which the dragons cast their fell shadow over our world.  
  
Which reminds me, we need munitions, so we can blow those damned dragons into the Mists themselves.  
I need to hand in the requisitions. We're not done yet.

[margin]  
Hark these heroic deeds,  
of which many are well told.  
Bane of Dragons, Bow of Stars!  
Leopard's kin, she softly walked  
through a hundred hunter's tales.  
Her, no mighty snows would slow,  
nor could dire blizzards disturb.  
  
An arrow shot star's a-light  
fell fast from bleeding skies.  
All of mountain's mourning  
was beheld at red dawn's rise.  
Trophy took she home  
to Leopard lodge alone.  
Up here hung she the holy light  
of Life and love's last whisper.  
  
Across fair and far seas sails  
brave Bear who holds Leopard dear.  
Should storms befall this distant journey.  
by star's light is the way home held clear.  
The light that fell from heaven's arch  
is none but brave Bear's own heart.

# 1st of Zephyr, 1330 AE

Vigil Keep, first day of the new year. Orders came through today, we'll be moving back to Ascalon on the 4th.  
I suppose we'll see how it all goes. Apparently Force got a request from the Warmaster to prepare aquatic equipment, which surprises me. Ascalon isn't exactly nautical country, the only water you have out there are some lakes. I suppose they'll know something we don't. We'll find out over the coming days.  
  
I spent most of the day in the workshop, working on adopting a syringe from medical to be fired through a pressure gun. I've asked Kaila to bore out a barrel to a specific caliber that's only marginally wider than the syringe. It took the smiths and us the entire day to make a prototype, but in the end we got there with some help from a Hylek Amani that was staying with the Vigil Keep. Their knowledge of blowguns was invaluable. You're supposed to add a hook to the syringe head so the dart doesn't just fall out, and you can use a thistle head for fletching that works well with blow pressure. We did some tests with a blowgun, and the Hylek told us it'll work, so we have the apprentices copy a few of them for testing. I'll need to finish the actual gun as soon as I can, and then do some field testing. Perhaps try it on some of minotaurs or boars in the forests around the Keep. I'll need to hurry though, we only have a few days.  
  
Force got my supply requisition too, so those'll arrive tomorrow or the day after. Hopefully with no issues, and we'll be set to go.  
  
What else? We got some more recruits in today, which I suppose makes sense, considering the trek through Ascalon left some gaps in the roster. Asides from Topples and Lalowa, plenty of folks decided to leave. Nauja, for one, and that Ishaha Asura got kicked out. We arrested her later, but apparently she was released when we flew back home. The White Mantle prisoners were handed off to the Shining Blade, probably to be hanged. What they deserve, really. Anyway, I heard Ishaha set up work with a Krewe, and they set some sort of thing into Kaila's busted arm, in order to get it working again. Didn't think they could do that, to be fair, but there you go. Apparently it was really expensive, too. Hm. Well, I suppose it's better to have Ravenwest with two arms, rather than one. Always made it a little awkward to make her do things like heavily lifting.  
  
They also sent us a new handbook about soldiering. Not really necessary, but it's better than the old one. Spirits, this one at least doesn't still refer to Zhaitan being still alive.  
  
About being still alive, apparently Mithra received a letter from Athy's warden captain, or rather, ex-captain. The warden has apparently fallen to Nightmare, which has upset both Athy and Mithra. That entire Nightmare courtier thing seems to be a lasting pain for them both. I suspect it might not be so easy to resolve as tracking them down, and killing them where they stand. If it was, they'd probably have do so already. Hrm. Might be a different sort of hunt to undertake, though I doubt we have the time. They'll have to muscle through. Who knows, maybe one day the Nightmare Court does something stupid enough to attract Vigil attention, and we'll put the whole lot to the sword. Pity killing Faolain wasn't enough to break them...

# 2nd of Zephyr

Vigil Keep.  
  
Couple of oddities today. First, the Warmaster asked me some questions about Sawyer and Prydwen. Apparently someone made a disciplinary point about it? Seems strange, I'd think since they're both grown people they could stand their own ground without too much issue. Or at least, not take it beyond what it is. Considering it was just some teasing, and it has since mostly died out to my perception, I can't say I find the Warmaster's attention to something so piddling justified. Which is about the extent of what I told the Warmaster. Cheery's been acting a little more erratic since she came back from Magus Falls, but "predatory"? If you allow yourself to be hunted, yes...  
Either case, I put Sawyer to work with another recruit fresh off the lists. Elementalist girl with no field experience. Well, she's got a couple of days to get her mindset right, and then we're off to Ascalon again.  
  
What else? Oh yes, another recruit, one Asai, has managed to convince herself that she will and can be friends with Cinderkeeper. She aims to achieve this by calling her Fluff, and insisting she likes it. She survived with only seven days of latrine duty, which is a miracle. I saw half expecting to return the recruit home in a matchbox. Torment save me from know-it-all recruits!  
  
Not done yet. I also took a patrol out on the Lion Road out East, where we saw those Ettin some days back. Figured that if we didn't thin them out, they'd keep raiding the caravans. And from there, it's a short step before they come down the slopes into Almuten and Applenook. So, culling for the greater good. I despise those sort of tasks, since the Ettin don't know any better. Bear's claws, they're hardly intelligent enough to use tools, let alone understand the concept of diplomacy. I suppose that leading the operation myself, I could at least ensure we didn't kill more than we needed. No doubt some would've just wiped out the entire tribe. We found their cave lair, and challenged the strongest warriors and what I assume was a chieftain to battle, and killed them. Once they stopped coming, we left. They'll reform their tribe in due time, but if the Lionguard does their job and actually polices the road, they'll manage. If not, well, I suppose we'll have to root them out entirely. I hope not.  
  
Oh, and Celdric passed by, looking for Rotarn. He claims to be on a journey of repentance, and I assume he seeks to reconcile with him. He wasn't well. He looked old, and his face was mangled so that he couldn't speak. Nightmare Court, he alluded to. He could only communicate by notes, and wanted to see me or the Warmaster. Alleshia was pliant enough, and gave him the information he needed to contact Rotarn. It's something. I have a feeling I should help him, but I really don't know how. This is his story to finish. Besides, Rotarn and Celdric have caused the needed anguish in the past that makes me more weary than anything else. I hope he manages to find the salvation he looks for. If he's genuine about the entire thing, that is, something of which I am not entirely convinced. We'll see. Or, well, saying that, maybe we won't. Mithra apparently claimed Celdric had fallen to Nightmare? I don't know what to make of that. He seemed genuine enough when I saw him. I don't know, at this stage, I'm not even sure if I would care too much. Not a pleasant thought; apathy is a terrible thing.  
  
Finally, Kaila managed to tool out the barrel for the tranquilizer gun, Lionhead and Ravenwest managed to fit it all into place for use. We'll have to field test the entire device tomorrow, and see if it actually functions as intended. Might be a busy day if the supplies come in too, have the inventory checked and counted. My paperwork's all in order, at least.  
  
Oh! And I discovered that my minor promotion from First Crusader to Senior has upped my luxury ration allowance to the officer tier supplies. A minor but very welcome change, that! Now I can have some actual mead, rather than the watery ale... On that subject, here's to the Ashen Chapter, cheers!

# 3rd of Zephyr

Vigil Keep.  
  
Good news! Kristen wrote me, telling me that it wasn't bad fish after all. She's missed her moon by some time now, so it's fairly certain she's with child. Another child! One for us. She deserves one, after having to take in two of mine. Something that's a little bit of both of us, that we share, nurture, and will see grow before our own eyes. It is a gift. Ah, and I am pleased that she is in Hoelbrak for it, too. No place safer and more comfortable for such a fine huntress as herself to grow slow and heavy over the next three seasons, until she'll sway and waddle like a goose, carrying our son or daughter with her. I suppose Valharantha will be pleased to hear that her pupil will not be able to run very far before long, hah! Gives my beautiful Leopard lass the time to truly learn Leopard's wisdom.  
Oh, I wish I was home, to hold her and to kiss her, to show her how happy I am. Our child. No written words will do it justice. The next few tours will be hard, especially when she comes closer to term. I'll be eating my boots with nerve before long, mark my words.  
I celebrated the news by cracking open the bottle of whiskey Ravenwest gave me for WIntersday, and sharing it with the folks around. Lionhead, Mithra and a new recruit, Alevyne, got the best measures of it. It was a good afternoon, once duties were over. My mind keeps wandering to what they'll look like, if it'll be a boy or a girl, if the birth will go well, and so many other things. Three more seasons. Three more seasons, for Kristen to become a heavy-belly, and only then will I know. Then I will know my third child.  
  
It would almost seem everything else that passed today seem secondary, really. But it wasn't. Armoury supplies arrived, along with the post, so that was brought in order. Lionhead and I tested the tranquilizer gun, which performed adequately, even though there were some issue with the force of the pressure vent. Needs to be enough for the inertia to deplete the plunger and deliver the payload, but not so much that the needle risks snapping on impact. Eventually, at the cost of putting some local wildlife to sleep, I think we struck a balance that puts the dart gun at usable, if still within the experimental bracket. Well, anyway, now medical has what they need. Nevermind the use for the capture of prisoners, and such.  
  
Other news... yes, Mithra spoke to Celdric, and apparently managed to straighten something out. I suppose that means Celdric isn't a Nightmare Courtier, which is... well, good, I suppose. Celdric's apparently going to go after the Nightmare people that are behind Athy and Mithra's issues, including the ex-warden captain and Athy's previous companions. Thorns in the side, them. I hope he finds them, and allows an opportunity for retribution. The good thing about Nightmare courtiers is that I really have little compunction in killing them. Scum.  
  
Finally, Sinclair seems to have suffered yet another magical blowout of some sort, this time turning him into a shivering wreck. Apparently Cheery was talking to him about meditation techniques, and something blew out. Hard to tell, it happened on eastern battlements while everyone was on the western side. I managed to carry him over to medical, and the medics stabilized the fellow, but that's about as much as I know. Figures that we have days and days of quiet, and then the day before march day, Sinclair manages to do whatever. He's got a sense of dramatic timing, at least.  
  
So yes, tomorrow is go-day, back into Ascalon, the Iron Marches. Not sure if we're taking a long-distance march all the way out there, our are being flown in with the supply rotation. We'll see tomorrow I suspect. Some of the new recruits are fairly anxious about the entire ordeal. I keep assuring them, and giving everyone the illusion of competence, but Ascalon's a nasty enough place to wage war. Insurgency, local critters and the Brand don't make the best battlefield induction. But then, I suppose very few places are "good" places to draw your first blood. I'll need to keep an eye out. Especially for the human folks.

# 4th of Zephyr

Warhound Village, Harvester's Glade, Iron Marches.  
  
Long day. We did a full day's march all the way here, through Lion's Arch, the Citadel, the north of Ashford until we finally got here. A trip that, over conventional routes, would take days and days. Under forced march, we passed by just near the old, haunted Ascalon City, and into the territories north of the Great Wall. Thankfully, the only Brand I saw was a distant glimmer on the horizon, and everything at least seems to be quiet. Ascalon itself is all shades of muddled green, yellow and orange, just as before. The camp itself, after that Spirits-forsaken exhausting march, is fortified enough. It's nestled in a crevice in some rough terrain, and the Charr set up a large wall with a tower on one side. They seem to use the place for logging and keeping swine, as well as a restocking post for several Charr war-machines. Being in an Iron Legion camp has benefits. The surrounding area is... not safe, to say the least. To the east lies a haunted forest filled with ghosts. Not Foefire ghosts either, but something different. I went to take a look, and I saw Charr spirits stalk in between the trees, and a shiver crawl through down my back. Not a good place.  
South is an abandoned Flame Legion castrum, which mostly looks like someone charred and molded the ground with molten fire. Even further, there's a Searing Couldron. At least, according to Lorma, I didn't see it myself. She also says there are catacombs and ruins below the ground there, where separatists occasionally make their lair. If they do, I haven't seen any. The local Charr keep warhounds around to guard the forests and approaches to the east and south. They're within earshot of the camp, though thankfully they seem well-reared. Adding their constant barking to the already bone-rattling ruckus of the Iron legion's industry would make sleeping difficult.  
West is an Ascalonian ruin that also houses a Flame Legion castrum. It's of a lesser concern, considering the amount of defenses pointing that way. The Charr built a watchtower overlooking the road and the approach, so even a determined attacker will have difficulties storming the place.  
  
Engineers ran through a perimeter analysis which... ended up revealing the existing tensions in the engineers. I put Small in charge, since I figured if there was never going to be any initiative, giving her the work on a platter might encourage them to put in some effort. I did a parallel evaluation, leaving the others to exercise the observation skills. The results were pleasing enough, but apparently most of the actual groundwork came from Ravenwest, rather than Small. Lionhead claimed she just regurgitated the material that was spoon-fed to her by Ravenwest, thus invalidating the entire concept of Small taking the lead. Ravenwest herself said she simply provided assistance as needed, and tried to guide Small as needed. Both Ravenwest and Small in turn have accused Lionhead from not providing the required guidance.  
So, up front, Small is starting to grate me in the extreme. The marked reaction to me putting her in field lead was "I'd rather take a nap". The opening paragraph of Small's report is a jumble of words alluding to being forced in charge and not knowing what to do. That would be a valid point of Small hadn't been part of previous observation missions on two separate occasions. In fact, I remember Small taking part in a camp observation exercise with Seleea, out in the Fields of Ruin near Ebonhawke, and acting like a know-it-all, and refusing outright to actually participate at all. So, wasn't "unadequately trained", she refused to participate in the training. Even so, she participated in the defense survey of the Last Whiskey Bar, as well as the maintenance survey of the Branded mine. So, where is this suddenly coming from?  
You can't bloody cite lack of training if you were present at the training and didn't put in any effort. That's not how that works. The second argument she makes is that Lionhead has deterred her from doing her duties. I consider that a more serious indictment. My niggle there is that the mentioned exercise on which she acted like an utter child, Lionhead wasn't even present. What's more, I expect my engineers to do their job, regardless of how they feel about it. This is a warzone; if a personal feud is preventing you from doing your job, I don't need you in my department. It certainly hasn't stopped Lionhead from working at an above-average rate over the last season. That's why she was promoted, after all.  
Still, I need to have a stern talk with Lionhead and try and put this frankly asanine feud in the ground. She's a First Crusader, her duties have to come above and beyond petty squabbles. Her not providing adequate guidance to Small was a faux pas, though not a major one. Even so, she, rather than Ravenwest, needs to be the one picking up the slack.  
I suppose the good thing about Lionhead, Sel and Ravenwest is that they're uniformly competent at least.  
  
I'm too tired to be angry. After a march like this, I need to sleep, not write angrily about wastrel 'Crusaders' bringing disgrace to the name with their inane whining. I caught some wild hogs with Penbroke, and secured a jar of honey from Bjorn! Honey-glazed roast tomorrow, I think, if I can wake early enough, and Penny dressed the critters, as I asked. Something to look forwards too.  
  
I wonder what Kristen is doing. If she's been thinking of names, and if she's been celebrating the occasion with my other children. Freyja will be pleased, too, I think. How I wish I was home, away from all of this... drab danger. Eh, I'll have to persevere. One leave comes, the gift will be all that much the greater.  
I'll go to sleep. I suppose, in some way, that passes the time between then and now faster.

# 5th of Zephyr

Warhound Village.  
  
Bad day in the field. We got orders through to take Occult to the haunted forest out east, which we did. Except that turned out to be a mistake. There's a large, untouched, Ascalonian manor sitting smack dab in the middle of it all, surrounded by ghosts and spirits, one of which was supremely powerful. When we approached, it assailed us twice, summoning large amounts of ghostly spider creatures to attack us, while taunting us and slinging powerful spells at us. So bad that more than half the group had to be put in medical with severe magical afflictions. Klixxa completely collapsed, running off shrieking mid-engagement. I had to run to catch her, and probably wouldn't have found her if recruit Paffet hadn't done the same. Something tells me that if she'd gotten lost in that forest on her own, chances of us finding her again would be slim. We tried to damage this haunted house, but it seemed pretty much impervious to damage, forcing us to beat a hasty retreat. The old adage "if it bleeds, you can kill it" was sorely lacking in its practical application. I think that if we had stayed, we would've accomplished exactly nothing, and some of us would've died almost certainly. It was like Orr, wraiths, swarms and terror. Confusion reigned, and it says something of the squad's hardiness that we managed to keep our cool, asides form maybe Klixxa's magically-induced panic attack. I'd rather not have to go there again anytime soon; at least not without a weapon I can use to smash that ghostly house and its malignant spirits to splinters. Eerie, to say the least.  
  
The after effects weren't much better. Vahenir draw a blade on us, and we had to make use of the dart gun to put her to sleep. Fletcher kept seeing things. Worst of all is Claridge, who seems to be under the effects of a terrible hex of some sorts. Andrews tried to disjunct it, but I'm not sure how effective it was. We'll see what passes. Magical afflictions are always a problem. They're difficult to gauge, and the medics have issues with getting rid of powerful spells. And bloody Torment, it's some powerful magic haunting that forest. It is fairly certain that it all comes from the woman-looking spirit residing in that blasted manor, though.  
Makes me think of the legends of my mother, Hejja Dark-Eater. She's said to be a witch, except she haunted a bog rather than a swamp. And, since I am here, I very much doubt she was a spirit. Even so, I wonder if old Hejja ever lured an unwitting group of soldier into her bog, before she pulled them apart with the ritual magic she got from her patron. Wonder if she did really ate their flesh, as the legends say.  
  
Ah well, at least we had a good honey-roasted hog ready for us on return, of which I ate generously enough. Small comforts. Mirka helped carve it up, and it was a surprisingly pleasant little pass-time, considering the amount of chaos and confusion that had passed through my mind just after. It's always the same, combat makes the blood rise, and exhaustion only sets in afterwards. Now I'm bone-weary, and tired. Always more work to do.  
I've decided to call Lionhead and Small into counselling for what happened yesterday, and I need to give Force his flamethrower certification test. In addition to my regular duties, of course. I'm getting old.  
That reminds me, I'm turning thirty-six in a few days.

# 6th of Zephyr

Warhound Village.  
  
Long, exhausting day.  
Apparently the Chapter shot down an Aetherblade airship more than three years ago, which crashed into a nearby lake. The issue is that they never cleaned up the wreckage, and now munition pellets started coming loose of the wreckage and drifting ashore. Apparently three Charr scrappers got blown to bits trying to tow one to shore, so, we were called in with the engineers to clear out the remaining munitions. In the lake. Which explains why we needed aquatic work equipment. We ended up having to dig a shallow blast hole at the foot of the Great Wall, and drag unstable explosives crates salvaged from the wreckage into it. At first, Vahenir and Lionhead were on the water team, but an Armourfish cracked Lionhead's ribs, so we had to evacuate her back to camp. I went in instead, while Sigra and the rest of the team dragged the munitions to shore. We had to fish them out of the hold and slap flotation canisters on them. None of the four crates we fished out exploded on us, though, until we blasted them apart. "Safely disposed off". Field engineer work at its finest, getting drenched in water, dirt and mud.  
  
I was going to counsel Small and Lionhead, but I was too tired. Much less able to do Force's certification. I spoke to Alevyne for a while, but that's about the extent of it.  
I'm going to sleep now. Frayed nerves. These last two days...

# 7th of Zephyr

Warhound village.  
  
A quieter day, finally had some time to tend to some administrative matters. First, I called Lionhead in for counsel, which went well enough. In her end, she denies there being anything specifically malicious about her attitude towards Small, saying she's just doing her job. Even so, I explained that from Small's side, she might have to cut back on the jabs and such. Also, that she needs to be more proactive in taking the initiative if needed. The will to improve and do her work is there, so that's good in my books.  
Of course, when I called in Small, it all proved to be a rather moot point, since she will be transferring to the scouts. To be fair, considering the disinterest she was showing in her work, that might not even be a bad thing for both sides. Raven's feathers, if she turns out to be an even semi-competent scout, I'll be happily pleased. Lorma is a less easy taskmaster to please than I am, however, so I hope she knows what she is in for.  
For engineering, that means I've got a smaller corps of largely competent folks who aren't afraid to get their boots dirty. Point in case, Ravenwest and Lionhead ran Force through his flamethrower certification well enough, with little input from my side. We'll see how the rest of the operations go.  
  
Warmaster's in medical from yesterday. She apparently had a door crack her in the head, and got KO'd. Lionhead's better off, her ribs aren't actually busted. Just aching. Guess we'll probably sit tight for some days before we continue operations. The camp is quiet enough, though I heard that there are separatists crawling around the area, from their hidden base. Flame Legion too, but they're mostly north of us as far as I can tell. I spoke so some of the locals while I was cooking up another hog, and one told me that Flame Legion presence becomes worse and worse if you go north, until you're at the foot of Hrangmer, the Citadel of Flames, in the Fireheart Rise. An intimidating name, that's for sure.  
Anyway, I don't mind the chance to rest early, and sleep off some of the exhaustion of the past days. No doubt we'll see enough Flame Legion and Separatists in the coming days to last us a lifetime.  
  
I spoke with Force and Lionhead briefly on the family back home, about my children, and everything they mean to me. I think Force has difficulties grasping the concept, because the way the Charr interact with their children. For me, however, it is a constant pull home that seems to get stronger and stronger. How often I've considered staying home, and not risk disappearing forever from their lives, before I fully knew them. Too often. And the answer always comes down back to the same old truth. If the Elder Dragons still live, it won't matter. They will destroy us eventually, if we don't destroy them first. The balance is there. Besides, if I die in battle, at least Kristen will make sure they all remember me well. I hope not yet, though. Let me see our baby first, at the least, Spirits, if you plan to lead me to a glorious death.

# 8th of Zephyr

Warhound village. Remote sentry in one of the watchtowers for the entire day, looking over the area. Weather was fair; it never seems to rain much in Ascalon. In Kryta, occasional wet rains and cold still drums down, but never as bad as in the Shiverpeaks. It still gets cold mind, but never as badly or terribly as it does in the mountains. Soft winters.  
  
Nothing happened on the horizon, and I drifted off in thought a little too often for my own taste. But you really can't help yourself. You look out over the countryside, light a pipe, and just let the mind wander and question. I started carving little nothings to pass the time; plenty of good wood the Charr strip off of the logs they lumber, and it helps to keep the mind occupied. I throw them in the fire before rest, to let the weary wood return to ash and cinders.

# 9th of Zephyr

Warhound village.  
Weird things today. We set out with Occult again, chasing some sort of, as Klixxa terms it, anomaly. We set out in a small group, trying to gauge out the area for any traces with Occult's little datamagic devices. We found... something weird bouncing around in the wilderness, some vaguely humanoid shape made out of coherent energy. Apparently it tore out a watchtower or something, so it was within our interests to disperse it, which we did. The Iron Legion shelled a stretch of land it crossed too, just for safe measure. It didn't really... I don't know how to describe it. It popped like a balloon, but for no apparent reason. My sword certainly didn't injure it, in fact I'm not even sure my fire manage to touch it. I'd be interested to hear what it was. I suppose I'm happy that at least there wasn't a rift opening again. These magical outbursts and disturbances worry me. I know there is a something wrong, or something going wrong, but I don't understand these things well enough to understand why or how. At least no-one is injured.  
  
Claridge is apparently still cursed from out in the woods. Occult is apparently thinking about transferring the curse to a chicken or something. Before any of that, though they want to have another look at that damned forest, something I'm not in favour of doing at all. Last time we were woefully under-prepared to face a necromantic ghost or wraith, or whatever it was. I mean, logic tells me that to figure out how a mine works, you don't need to walk into a minefield. Kaitark seemed pretty adamant, however, so I suppose we'll see.  
  
Turn thirty-six on the morrow too. Don't feel too different, though that's never the case.  
We'll see what the day brings, eh? Maybe crack open a nice drink of mead for myself.

# 10th of Zephyr

Warhound Village.  
  
Ho boy.  
So, the day started off nice enough. Calm. I walked Force through his grenade launcher certification easily enough. The man find these things too easy. Had a training spar afterwards, longsword against sword and axe. Force got the better of me; he was faster with the two weapons, and I couldn't press my advantage. He kicked me right in the cuirass at the end, and I had to drop my sword. Call that a resounding defeat.  
  
I mentioned yesterday that Kaitark was looking to go back into the Hellion Forest to check on the spirits. Well, we did so, first with Sinclair and me, along with a small patrol force. Kaitark started acting strange, walking away from the perimeter, and waffling about around the mansion much closer than we'd wanted to approach at first. Eventually we had to order him back. Worst part of it all is that apparently no-one thought of calling up the report I filed for the first time we ventured in. Annoying.  
That's not the end of it though, oh no. I went back to training with Force, and in the mean time, Kaitark apparently decided he'd best go out on his own into the forest again. We sent the scouts in to track him down, and eventually he was brought back to camp and placed under arrest. I wasn't with the main group, so I decided to question Kaitark on why he'd done what he did. I mean, Kaitark isn't the most stable of soldiers, but he's never been directly insubordinate before, and it would've shocked me if he'd acted irrational for irrationality's sake.  
He explained to me that he'd seen Charr ghosts in among the trees, and that he was pretty sure they were displaced souls. Not dead, just ripped from their bodies and bound to serving whatever dark monstrosity makes its home in that blasted mansion. What's worse, he said that their live bodies were probably still around. It was when the bodies started decomposing that the spirits would become trapped in the mists for good. A suitably grisly fate. The reason he ventured out on his own was idiotic, but selfless. He wanted to expose as little of the other troops to the danger, considering most of us have little defense against a wraith that powerful.  
  
I lost no time getting the troops back ready for a third foray, of course. Our oath says "protect the innocent", and we'd not be Vigil soldiers if we at least tried to save those lost souls from damnation. Things went quick and fast; we were steeled by resolve this time around, and Kaitark did his work quick enough. The lost Charr ghosts ignored us, but they seemed to listen to Kaitark. They lead us to their bodies, slumped to the ground and almost dead. Evil spirits and ghosts came from the mist and darkness to assail us, but the ghost merged with its body, and came back to live, albeit unconcious. We did this twice, before the evil in the mansion awoke again, sending out its terrible black-wight. We retreated in good order back to the camp with our two Charr though. Force and I carried them, at a pace. Damn Charr are bloody heavy, especially when they're unconscious and hang like dead weight. Medical is tending to them now, though they are manacled. Not sure what getting your mind so close to something so vile does to you, after all.  
  
Kaitark, he's still under arrest. Noble intentions, stupid way to go about it. I'm still not sure why he didn't just open his mouth and tell us. Did he think that, perhaps, he could've saved more spirits if he was alone? Was he right? Spirits, what if that happened to us? To me. Getting torn from your body, and forced to wander around, your soul forever barred from entering into the Hall of Spirits. What a dread fate. It sends shivers down my spine, and that has little to do with the mild Ascalonian winter cold that comes at night. I never want to set foot in that forest again. That sort of... magical nonesense is Priory or Whispers business, not Vigil. Perhaps that's why Kaitark went in. Must be he Spook training surfacing. I don't know. The entire thing has me rattled and weary.  
  
I got a bottle of good mead, as promised. As much to celebrate my thirty-sixth winter as to calm my nerves. It tastes dangerously like home! Makes me wish I had Kristen here, or the little Jotunling, just to hold in my arms, or fill my ears with sounds I miss too often after a long day of horrors.  
Spirits, I hate Ascalon.

# 11th of Zephyr

Warhound Village. Long day today, but not entirely unproductive.  
  
Slept soundly enough considering yesterday's exertions. I blame the mead for allowing me a good night of solid sleep. Was pleasantly surprised to find that Freyja had sent in a letter for my year day, and managed to get it here already with the post. She write me about home, how everyone is doing, and how exhausting being a parent is for young Aska. She seems to take the challenge seriously, though, and I have to admit I am proud of her for taking on the girl. It's a large sacrifice of your youthful years to care for another being that depends so largely on your care. Of course, it is worth every year of hard labour to see something grow and blossom into fullness and beauty. It's why I cannot wait to see what the little Jotunling will turn into with good time, or to see what the Spirits will bestow on Kristen and me in three season's time. Children are the greatest treasure we own, worth more than mountains of gold and gemstones. It warms my heart to know that I am remembered, missed, and loved at home. It steadies the wavering blade.  
  
But enough about home, before I turn the entire entry into melancholy. We raided the separatist hideout that lies in the buried crypts to the south of us. It turned out to be rather thinly-manned at first. Lance and Blade secured two separate entrances and rushed the separatists down into the floor with little issue. The greatest threat came from large caches of explosives reported to be kept in the vaults. They were right about the quantity; several stacks of large bombs, though most of them were barely functional. They were just cast balls of primitive explosive powder with wire fuses fixed, and more than half of it was sodden with damp. We simply poured out the powder, and scattered it into the damp sand and dirt that covered the entire floor. I doubt they'll have any use of it. We also destroyed substantial amounts of supplies and weapons, knocking out a teeth or few to the armed separatist resistance in the region. In addition, we rescued an Asuran prisoner, apparently a Vigil Crusader called Leixxia from Guardian Chapter. From the debriefing report I read, she was lured or trapped by a squad of sympathizers in the Vigil. One of her Sylvari companions was apparently tortured to death. Just makes me happy we wiped out their lair.  
Of course, the reason they were so thinly manned became obvious soon after, when they attacked the Village itself in notable force. I suspect the gross of the separatist scum was out doing something nefarious when we hit the place, and then decided to get some retribution by attacking us. They were quick, had rifles, and came from every direction. A strong assault that would probably have overwhelmed the Charr here. I wonder if they realised the amount of Vigil troops present? Either way, it was over in the space of some minutes when we rallied across the encampment and threw them back. Sometimes literally. I was in Bear's blessed form, mauling them and throwing them clear out of the gates. Damned humans here haven't seen a norn with a strong patron spirit before I wager, because they shattered and fled before long. The Charr simply threw the bodies into their furnaces, where they were incinerated. The smell barely disturbed the stink of smoke and soot belching from the engine-tower powering the water pump.  
We came out without too much injury, just a nasty cut on Bloodletters neck which I dressed for her. First aid, only took some stitches and a little shaving to clear the injury. She'll be walking around with a stiff neck for some days, but it's not fatal. Could've been worse; the cut was pretty deep, but it missed any of the major arteries, thankfully.  
  
Once the adrenaline faded, everything eventually returned back to normal, just with the pickets slightly more watchful. No second attack came, so I doubt the separatists have the strength to mount one. Or they're smart for one, and realised that they'd just lose the fight.  
  
Back to yesterday, Kaitark apparently got released by the Warmaster, with the unfortunate consequence of being demoted for his reckless actions. A just enough punishment for doing a good thing in a bad way, I suppose. I hope he learns next time, and just talks to one of his superiors. Or at least, to the right one. We're not all jack-eared idiots after all. We'll see how he takes it.  
  
Lionhead requested to step down from engineering second, something which I roundly rejected. She's taken Small's sign-over to the scouts personal. Good, because it is. But rather than just strip her of the office, I hope she uses it as a positive learning experience, and doesn't make the same mistakes. There's nothing to hammer home exactly how much authority depends on being respected by the troops than losing the respect of one of them. Well, she has all the opportunity to fix that problem in future, and become a better soldier for it. She's a bloody First Crusader, after all. As I told her, a dent in a shield just proves it's a good shield. We'll see how she does.  
  
What else? I spoke to Alevyne a bit more, considering these were her first few days in combat. The little greenhorn seems to be coping well, which is good. Only thing was that she was asking herself questions as to the why of it all. I don't think she expected me to encourage her to be critical, and consider our cause carefully, as long as it didn't shake her resolve. We fight for a better world; ever life we take is to safeguard the lives of others. Paradoxically, we fight for peace. Or, as the Kodan would say, we seek to bring balance back to the way of things.  
  
I think that's it? Oh, yes, the Charr we recovered from the Mansion yesterday are still not awake. Seems like they will be out for the count for some time at least. I hope they'll come to before we move the encampment north in a few days. We'll see.  
  
Spirits, keep a watchful eye on my family while I am so far away.

# 12th of Zephyr

Last day in Warhound Village, marching north to Scale-something camp come tomorrow. Good, I'd like a change of scenery. This village seems surrounded by ill-omens.  
  
We went out against the Flame Legion today; a first. I've seen their castrums around here, but this was the first one that was actually manned. A maze of rocks and canyons, like the glaciers in Frostgorge. The Flame Legion had made camp within the maze, with the Iron Legions trying to shell them out of it with mortar fire. Since that doesn't always have the desired effect, we were sent in as reinforcements to clean out the place once and for all. I assume it also had to do with the fact that the Flame Legion had captured some Irons and taken them into their camp. I'm not sure if even the Charr are callous enough to shell their own people.  
We took it on two fronts, high and low, and swept through the place. They're... uh... difficult. They wield jets of fire, and their shamans call down great fireballs that scorch and burn their way through the ranks. Thank the spirits for broad shields and thick armour, or I'd have gotten out in a much poorer state. I doesn't bode well for the future, however, I have bad memories of burning my arms and hands before.  
Either way, we managed to muscle through, dragging out some of the wounded Charr, as well as Maeva, who buckled her arm the wrong way around. Seemed like a pretty solid victory on the Flame Legion until we passed back by the Iron Legion village south of the encampment, and found it alight.  
  
Not sure what happened. I think they managed to get some shamans to the Searing Couldron, and simply plunged the entire place into oblivion. Must've happened at the exact same time we went in to clean out their camp; I think we simply traded blows. Both the Flame Legion and the Iron Legion bases are wastelands.... And Raven's Feathers, we tried to pull out as many survivors as we could, but many are so badly burnt, I doubt they'll recover. Others were already so far gone we have them a quick death, right then and there. Kara, Andrews, was badly shook by the entire thing. Bad memories she said. Had to take her aside, and get her something strong to drink before she had a nervous breakdown. It was bad. When I use the fire magic that slumbers in my heart like fire does in a mountain, I slay my enemies quick, to end their suffering. Here, it gnawed and ate at the survivors, leaving them maimed and wailing. The smell of burning fur is sickening.  
Hrm.  
  
We had to dispose of some munitions too, before the fire touched them off. Seleea and Ravenwest carried them away from the burning buildings, and then we unscrewed the firing caps, and threw them over a sturdy wall that had survived the inferno. Highly unsafe, but we had no time to dig disposal pits. I almost fumbled a throw, and blew us all sky-high when one of the shells bounced back down. Luckily, we removed the fragmentation payload, or we'd probably be shredded. Too close a call. I should've... done it differently. I can't take risks like these anymore, damn it, I need to live, for Kristen, and my family.  
  
I don't know. Today didn't feel like a triumph. Felt like a mess. Well, it was a mess. I suppose at least we saved some of the Iron legion troops, but the Flame Legion bastards that set the village alight probably got away to another castrum or lair. We were just too late.  
Bah. I want to leave this place. Haunted forests, underground crypts, burning villages...

# 13th of Zephyr

Scalecatch Village.  
Strange little outpost; it's build on an island in the middle of a reasonably deep lake, cradled at the foot of an overgrown ruin. There's only a single, narrow steel bridge connecting it to the shore. The village is built into the Ascalonian foundations, sitting on ancient butresses and crumbling bastions that now support the black metal drums the Charr seem to build everywhere as permanent buildings. Mos of the island is impassable, a mass of stone ruble, with a central yard taken over by an expansive devourer pen where Charr trainers tame the chitting creatures. Their chirping and chattering is a constant buzz. That makes the rest of the camp cramped; wounded Charr soldiers are laid out for recovery across the overgrown pavement, including some of the Charr we pulled from the fire yesterday, and the two Charr we got out of the Hellion Forest. Here, at least, the Charr can take care of them better than they could in Warhound.  
The lake itself is alive with skale and drakes, which swarm around the shores. The water is clear enough that you can see the fish swimming in it, and see the bottom of it. It goes deep down below.  
Most prominent however, is what lies on the shores south and north of us. To the south, we can see the steep cliffs and molted stone of a Flame Legion castrum, curled up and shielding the cliffside atop which they're situated. It's the same castrum you could see the edges of from Warhound Village, though I never understood how large it was until I saw it from this angle. We must've marched around it to get here.  
On the other bank, north of us, a sight I didn't think I would see anytime soon. A twisted, grotesque vine tangle, as if part of the horrors of the Verdant Brink had made their way here and taken hold of the land. The vines are still, devoid of their own life, but the area is awash with Mordrem. You can see husks stalk across the shore. They are not moving with any purpose, but rather wandering aimlessly, simply attacking what they can see. They're remnants of when Mordremoth awoke, and sent out tendrils to threaten the world, and assault the Grove. We're here to clean up the mess they made.  
  
I have to say that the idea that the Charr High Legions were in control of Ascalon was a rather optimistic lie on this side of the war front. Allied Legion "control" here extends no further than the few scattered camps they hold, frequently not even going beyond line of sight. The Flame Legion holds visible presence, in open defiance to the war raging between them and the other Legions. We're caught in the middle, waging four wars at once. The war against the Elder Dragons and their Minions, the civil war between the Flame Legion and our allied Legions, the war between the Separatists and the Charr, and finally the never-ending war against the Foefire spirits that haunt the land. There is an enemy over every single meadow. Not an encouraging thought.  
  
As we arrived, the engineers did their usual defense assessment. I had Lionhead head it, with me observing. Went a lot better this time, with Seleea and Ravenwest contributing to make a healthy assessment. Only had to adjust a small number of things, but nothing major. This is good, as it helps build Lionhead's confidence as Head Ballistician and return the vague sense of competency to unit that seemed to evaporate while the tension field between Lionhead and Small existed. Ravenwest later brought up the carronade up to aim at the Mordrem cancer on the northern shore. Kaitark made the acutely clever assessment that if there were husks, they could probably lob rocks at us across the water. If they do, I want to be able to immediately return fire and smash those damned tree-ogres into firewood. She did well, I checked the gunnery emplacement earlier. I have no doubt that if she returned to Crusader rank, she'd earn her Ballistician grade with little effort. We'll see how that comes about at the end of the tour, I suppose.  
  
Other news, Rotarn showed up, asking weird questions about the Branded and the Shatterer we fought, as well as about Celdric. Mithra and I spoke to him, but apparently his only suitable response was that he'd stab him if Celdric found him. Alleshia later summed it up perfectly; one day they'll kill each other, and we won't be around to stop it. The very idea makes me angry. I had hoped I would've washed my hands of this, after everything those two have forced us through... but ultimately, it is their squabble, and they need to be the ones that settle it, not me. The question is, do I contact Celdric to tell him Rotarn is here, in the Iron Marches, or do I just let fate run its course? I promised Celdric I'd help him on his road to redemption. Did I? But to send him to someone who wants him dead... I will see tomorrow.  
  
I spoke to Alleshia for some time, both formally at first, and then informally. Few things of note. Sawyer dropped the complaint against Cheery, which I think is good. Vatorn and Ravenwest are apparently entangled into it too, and not too pleased. Seemed like a proper mess of people throwing accusations. Not sure how legitimate the grievances are, but I suspect lingering tensions will be the result.  
Also got Alleshia to open up a little, about the little things. Frustrations, angers, loss. The bitterness of Ascalon to an Ascalonian; though it is more that they revere a long-faded memory of some mythical land that never really existed, and then blame the Charr for taking it all away. It's like that old saying: "Raven's prettiest feathers are the ones he's lost". At least it is something I can understand; I make the old homelands that Jormag took from us with the same heroic aura in my mind. The lands where my ancestors performed heroic deeds that made the mountains themselves shake. Whether or not that land still exists, is a different questions.  
Not all of her worries are inherited, however. Apparently, over leave, the separatists in Ebonhawke staged a major attack on the people there, using bombs to kill their own people. A boy of six got killed, and his mother took her own life thereafter; a friend of the Warmaster's. That sort of pain and loss fuels a dangerous fire. But, I told her the same I told Lionhead; dents in a shield just prove it's a good shield. And that's what we do, we take dents, and keep going forwards, regardless of what happens.  
Spoke of home too. Seems the Warmaster expects me to retire sooner or later, with all the children. Weirdly enough, that's galvanised me to stay with the Chapter as long as I can. There are enough people home to care for my kin, and too few out here to secure the future for them. Put like that, the path ahead seems clear, doesn't it?  
Ah well. It was good to get to talk to people a little more openly from time to time. Remember we're all just people fighting the same war.  
  
I wonder how Kristen looks; if she's learning well with the Speaker, and if she's slowly starting to grow more ponderous and ungainly with the spark of life she carries for us.

# 14th of Zephyr

Scalecatch Village.  
  
It's quiet. Well, relatively quiet. There is the constant chatter of the Devourers coiling around the yard, with the whipcrack of the trainer's lashes. The Mordrem on the other shore are milling around, straying randomly from their sprawl of vines. We have the cannon trained on it, but we don't need to fire any rounds towards it. Even the husks still mill about, blind, confused.  
  
We can't leave the camp, making us feel a bit penned in. Did some sparring, hand-to-hand, with Eyra, a norn recruit. Went well enough, almost got me by twisting my arm around and force me to the ground, but she lost out when it got to strength, and I pinned her to the ground until she yielded. She also needs a tutor on guardian magic, so I asked her to talk to Sinclair. I'm not sure if sending him another norn guardian woman directly after losing Lalowa. Might bring very unpleasant memories about... We'll see, I have no doubt that Sinclair can be professional about it, when it matters.  
  
Also spoke to Mithra; she's been having bad dreams about the Mordrem, and wants to have command know about it. I think it's a little superfluous, but I understand her worry. She's an SFC, after all, and it's only correct that she appraises them of even the most minor dangers.  
Sawyer was also there, and we lightened her mind a little by making jokes, and talking of boasting. Sawyer can be a bit of a wet blanket, but he's a good man at heart. Just needs to grow a bit of a stronger spine, rather than folding in two immediately. At least it was good for Mithra to brighten up as a result of the antics. Sometimes, I just feel like giving her a strong hug.  
  
I miss good boasting. The only good ones around here are Lionhead and that new Asura, Lei. It's always nice to have a sharp-witted Asura around for that, until they just resort to calling you bookah over and over.

# 15th of Zephyr

Scalecatch.  
  
Quiet day out in the field, nothing happening asides from the Mordrem milling about, as usual. The Warmaster's worried about setting them off like a hornet's nest, but I'm not even sure it'll get that far. They almost seem docile, if you didn't know they'd rip you apart into a thousand shreds in the blink of an eye.  
  
I've been carving some more wooden soldiers for little Reuzen. A Charr. I slipped while working on the mane, so I had to cut some of it out. Ended up shaping it like a cog, so I guess it's an Iron Legion Charr now, ha. The Charr chop plenty of wood, before they turn it into coal for their mechanical buildings and furnaces. It's not the best quality, but it'll do for carving. If things keep being slow, I'll finish the soldier, and perhaps carve one for Leif and Aska too. It's nice to do something. I miss having my little boy on my knee already. He'll be walking soon. Hah, spirits, he'll be up and about, talking and running, by the time Kristen gives him a brother or a sister.  
  
Ah, home, home, home. Why do you make me stay away?

# 16th of Zephyr

Scalecatch.  
  
So, Mithra left camp, went back to the keep on leave of absence. The reason for that is that some strange Sylvari arrived with Meretti in tow to explain to her that... Athy tried to end herself. She's still alive, thankfully, but... Spirits. I don't really know what to say about it, really, except that I understand why she's going home. If something happened to Kristen, I'd want to see her too, and take care of her until she recovered. I hope everything will turn out for the better, eventually.  
  
On the other hand, it means Lance is without a SFC, and with Maeva's arm being twisted the wrong way around, without a Knight either. Good thing Lance has some First Crusaders with good prospects in their ranks. Lionhead and Belmont specifically have yet to make good on their newfound ranks, and assert themselves as capable leadership figures. They both have departmental experience, so we'll see how they do with squad commands, eh?  
Belmont already took us out on a recon patrol north, around the vine tangle. We didn't go very far, only into a larger Charr township clogged with smog and drifting ash. Not the nicest of places. In the distance we could see jagged rocks and molten rock formations that hinted at a very large Flame Legion castrum nestled somewhere in the crook of the mountains. If I didn't know mountains better, I'd think this was close to Hrangmer, but a peak like that would've been visible from much further away.  
Either way, no fighting, so comparatively quiet.  
  
Hm.

# 17th of Zephyr

Scalecatch.  
  
All is quiet, though that will change eventually. According to Alleshia, we're due north in Fireheart Rise eventually, on a link-up mission with another Chapter. Not sure what the specifics are, but it means we're not done here yet. In addition, there large castrum I saw yesterday is there. Or at least, the Warmaster has seen it before. As I thought, Hrangmer is further north, into Fireheart. We'll be seeing more of the Flame Legion then, no doubt.  
  
Today's duties were easy enough; I took Agnar, Aava and Lionhead out on patrol. It was like minding children, between the two younger norn. Unpolished, rash and prone to getting themselves killed, just like most norn youths. It is an unfortunate fact that they're simply... like that. More easily distracted by hungry stomachs than anything else. Ah well, nothing to report on the patrol anyway, so it didn't hurt. Back-lines are quiet as anything, until you get closer to the Great Wall. But, we didn't go that far. Just makes me feel old, is all. Old and cantankerous.  
  
Mithra's away and off with Athy, probably arrived there by now. Well, I hope they sort all their problems out, and find some balance, as the Kodan would say. I do hope they come back. There's so few old faces still in the ranks. Though I suppose if I simply tough it out, the young faces will become old faces eventually.  
  
Hmhm. I'm going to finish carving the figures for the children, while there's still embers in the fire, and then get some sleep. As always, we'll see what tomorrow brings.

# 18th of Zephyr

Scalecatch.  
  
Operations today, we finally went into the vine infestations we can see from the encampment. As expected, the Mordrem presence is dangerous, but mostly unguided. Up close, you can see large the vines actually are. I had some hope of blasting through them with our conventional explosives, but they wouldn't do much damage, even if the vines weren't hardened by the dead dragon's magic. We killed plenty of Mordrem though; it was just like in the Brink, they surge from the ground, crawling out of the ground under your very feet. Vines, twisting, flailing, and bigger Mordrem. Husks, lurchers, all the worst of the Magus Falls campaigns. At least there were no Mordrem Guard, so the killing was fairly straightforwards. Just the weight of numbers. There must be hundreds of them, if not thousands, still buried in the dirt, along with their vines. You'd need to root out the infestation, something which I'm not sure is even possible. These vines might run all the way back to the Maguum, for untold thousands of miles westward. Cutting it all away would be an effort requiring an army, and a generation worth of time. Time we don't have.  
Lionhead took Lance today, and nearly got flooded in their portion of the infestation. The vines twist and rise throughout the Ascalonian hills, leaving pockets of overgrown vines and brambles scattered around the land. Thankfully, I had Blade moving over to check on them, so we arrived in the nick of time to help them withstand a wave of acid-spraying critters. We were forced to fall back and fight a rearguard action. Force got injured, but he was well enough to complain about it, so it's minor. Still, hectic fighting, like in the Maguuma again. I suppose I should have expected it to happen, really. Even leaderless and aimless, the Mordrem are lethal. Just like the Orrians. Makes me wonder if one of Mordremoth's champions is burrowed somewhere deep below, driving them on even slightly. Given how the fought in the field, I can at least hope not. They seemed to be aggressive and focused when we were in the tangles, but most do no stray far from it.  
Let's hope that this remains so; the Iron Legion will have to march around the tangles, but at least minimal effort should stop the Mordrem from straying and causing serious damage, as they well could be capable of.  
  
We also passed a small Flame Legion burrow, apparently inhabited by a single crazy Flame Legion shaman. He was wreathed in fire, and the cavern walls were so hot they were flowing molten stone. The shaman hurled fire at us when we challenged him, so we slew him where he stood. But the chamber was so damn hot, we had to retreat before we were all boiled. Spirits alive, it was like striding into a furnace. If this is what the Flame Legion will be like further north, we're in for some rough fighting...  
  
At least the tail of the day was restful enough. I've finished my little carving, and am now keeping them wrapped on a cloth in the bottom of my pack, until we go home again. Some mornings, I wake up, and in half-sleep, I keep turning around hoping Kristen's there, still asleep. It is a pleasant feeling, right until it is dispelled by cruel reality. At least I can wait with good patience in my heart until I can have my son sit back on my knee, and pull at my whiskers in curiosity, until he's distracted by the mighty wooden warriors I will bring him.  
  
Oh, and Mithra wrote me, asking to keep training up for Alevyne and Sawyer. Physical exercise. I had them up and running come morning. Human mages, so ill-prepared for physical exercise, so sleepy. Hm! Tomorrow again.

# 19th of Zephyr

Scalecatch.  
  
Aside from an inspection this morning, I didn't actually do much myself today. I was kept on guard after some Mordrem wandered near a nearby rock quarry, and caused some prisoners to break free of the chaos. This included some Flame Legion bastards that the Legions were putting to work as indentured labourers. I was put on camp guard, after what happened in Harathi, while the rest of the Chapter went out to retrieve the prisoners.  
They returned in groups afterwards, bringing along their wounded. Cinderkeeper's group managed to track down their prey, and return him, though Alevyne got injured. That'll be a first combat injury for the girl, though she looked like she'd pull through. Lionhead's task team was a messier affair. Their target turned out to be a Flame Legion Legionnaire, who resisted their attempts to fight them. Managed to stab Agnar with a rock, and dig his claws into Lionhead's hip. They killed him in the end, though. Finally, Belmont's team was forced to kill their enemy too, apparently a mesmer. From what Cinderkeeper told me, Vatorn was morphed into a moa and sped off, getting captured by nearby Iron Legion. When the spell wore off, they imprisoned him. Lucky, I think, they could've just killed him under suspicion of being a separatist mage. He threw a tantrum of sorts, and Lorma had to drag him out of the Legion claws. Damned Demorique can always be counted on for making a fool of himself. The idiot even slagged his cuffs to such a degree we couldn't unlock them, and had to file through it. Cinderkeeper was not happy, and it adds yet another detractor to his service record. At this rate, he'll be peddling at recruit for all eternity.  
So, aye, three soldiers down for some Flame Legion prisoners. Not the best balance. Some of them look like they'll be out of it for a pretty long time, too. I suppose I should be glad none of them bloody died.  
  
Other news... Well, Small's considering retiring after the tour. She listed a number of reasons, but the gist of it is that she's simply not feeling it anymore. In all honesty, considering the decline in motivation we've been seeing, that's not surprising. If they can find their footing again, then that's for the better, but I doubt it. Her mind seemed made up about it. I think everyone's feeling the strain a little, wouldn't surprise me if she's the only one that rotated out by the end of the tour. A few of this tour's new blood already seem like they are not up to the task. I guess bravado only carries one so far before the burnt villages and Branded wastelands get to you.  
  
We still have operation strikes to be done tomorrow. I was planning on taking Lionhead for some repair and salvage work with an Iron Legion armoured company, but she's not able to walk. I'll have to do the heavy lifting myself.  
Got to love it when a surprise prison break ruins the operational planning, but I suppose flexibility is one of our core values. We'll see what the officers say tomorrow, I suppose.  
  
Hey Kristen. I miss you. People talking about leaving makes me more certain that I need to stay, but I also know that that's a decision that means I'm staying away from home. I know you and Freyj stand behind me and the duties I do out here, but it's hard at times. I'd like to see my boy's first steps, and hear his first words, rather than get irritated by petulant recruits. I'd like to be there when the first snowflakes fall on the child that will bind us together.  
Keep a weary eye on Freyj, Grace and Aska, will you, and take good care of the little Jotunling for my sake.  
I wish you were here, and I wish you never have to come here.

# 20th of Zephyr

Scalecatch.  
  
Patrol today out towards the edge of the Brand, supporting some Sentinels out there, rearing Devourers. Been a while since we had to stare down the dragon's corruption, and it remains as chilling as before. Huge spurs of glowing rock sprout from the mountains like the razor sharp stone scales of a rock dog, and the surface of a nearby lake has bubbled up and been distorted by huge lumps of boiling slag. Such a strange place. Work was light enough. I found the Charr tanks we were looking for, though we were too late to be of much help. In the six days that passed the Irons sawed down their other vehicles, and salvaged them down to only one operational tank. Only thing they needed us for was dragging it clear from the covered canyon they'd been bunking down in. They drove off after, getting reinforcements and materiel to salvage the other three tank wrecks they left behind. I had Belmont finish the actual patrol, and then we wheeled all the way around back to camp.  
  
Aside from that, I've left camp for what it is, and retired early. Spoke a bit with Belmont and Andrews. They seem nice.  
  
Oh, that's strange. I found this emerald gem out in the Brand, just in amid the dirt. I forgot about it unto just now, really... It's a beautiful little thing, like a frozen teardrop. Perhaps one of the Charr dropped it when they moved their tanks in or out. Should've asked, but I got distracted. Ah well, suppose I might as well keep it.

# 21st of Zephyr

Scalecatch, no duties today.  
  
Just everything being quiet out in the middle of no-where Ascalon. Is this even Ascalon? We're north of the Wall. Eh well.  
  
Smoke a pipe, on the edge of camp, and started fiddling with some more carving wood. Made a few rough thingies, but nothing quite took shape from it all. Sometimes it's just nice to work the blade across the grain, and see it take shape. The steel peels away the bark and splits the wooden flesh apart. It's stiff, and brittle, but alive. I like the way it feels, and smells. Ascalonian wood has a heart of its own, though I much prefer mountain pine. Or good bone, though that is much harder to shape. Need to file away the bone, slowly. I remember carving little figurines and tokens from Orrian coral. Or shaping the piece of dragon bone for Kristen. She still wears it in her hair.  
  
We'll see what tomorrow brings.

# 22nd of Zephyr

Scalecatch, watch duty.  
Long bloody shift, with very little to show for it. Just, perched up a little up on the ruins with daylight to keep an eye on everything, and boredom as a companion. Well, "boredom", it's a nice enough vista as it is. You can see over the low hills into the surrounding country, watch it run and twist out into the far distance, until the horizon dips away and the eye can see no further. You can even see the Great Wall from here, to the south. The old Ascalon City site rises like a mountain. Smoke and smog clings to the air from the Charr towns, like little pillars of smoke holding up the sky, and the Flame Legion castrums glowing like campfires when the evening starts falling.  
  
I drew a star map into the dirt, and used my astrolabe and sextant to measure the sun's stance. Just because I was bored, and it's been a while since I had an opportunity to use my instruments. Of course, I doubt it was correct, but I used little tokens from what I carved yesterday to mark the constellations as well as I can remember. Must admit, my attention from the actual watch wavered a few times during the day... Ah well. None of us are perfect.

# 23rd of Zephyr

Scalecatch camp, though we're going to move up in two days' time, probably to that smog-covered Legion township we passed through on patrol some days ago. Pity, I'll miss the water, and the old stones. I won't miss the constant racket of the bloody Devourers, though. Spirits alive, they're a menace.  
  
Today was a rough one. We cleaned out Vermin's Folly; that's the name of the Flame Legion castrum sitting on the cliffside near our lake. We could see the fires from the distance at night, but from what I can tell, the Legions already killed off most of them following the destruction of their village, and the tussle over that Searing Couldron. Either that, or most of the goldies had already left. We carved through them with very little effort, only encountered token resistance that did not take long to break. A good sign that we've managed to erode the Flame Legion's grip on these areas, which is probably why we're advancing north. Once all our strike targets are gone, it's usually a good sign that we've done our job well.  
We didn't take much chances, and went north along the road to check on the Flame Legion burrows we found a few days back, the little underground hideout. There were a couple Flame Legion troops hiding out in there, but Sigra put a hand-mortar grenade through the entryway, and turned them all into stains. The heat was difficult though, we couldn't really search the place, or you'd end up roasted to a crisp. I don't understand how the Flame Legion can survive living near it. Perhaps their Titan gods give them the will to endure the heat? Anyway, we had to have Vatorn conjure cold auras for a team to go inside. That was cut short when an ambusher collapsed the entryway from above. Damn bastard must've seen us coming and laid in wait. Or he heard Sigra's grenade go off, and approached afterwards. Regardless, I don't doubt that if Vatorn hadn't been with them, the group inside would've been boiled alive in their own sweat before we could've dug them out. As it turns out, no-one got seriously injured, asides from losing a few buckets of sweat over it, and a mild anxiety attack.  
  
Grimmer news when we arrived. A haggard and confused soldier ran into the camp, carrying a message stating that a patrol group had run afoul of the Mordrem, further north. The scouts managed to find the remains, which seem to have coughed up a sizeable Mordrem husk. Little we can do asides from clean it out, I'm afraid, but that's command's ability. These Mordrem infestations are a pox on the land, and I doubt this will be the last casualties we see from their presence. I hope some smart head in the Priory discovers a way to root them out entirely. Unfortunately, their last messenger didn't survive either, dying of shock and blood loss rather shortly after he managed to reach us. Hrm. Well, at least we know his name by his tags.  
  
85. Elric Strongfist, succumbed to his wounds.

# 24th of Zephyr

Scalecatch, last day. Calm again, I assume that asides from the Mordrem, there's little within easy strike distance to keep our swords busy. Pity we didn't get to strike out against the leafy bastards that ambushed our soldiers, maybe get some vengeance. But I suppose that there is very little we can do about it, aside from risk more lives. Maybe the Iron Legion can simply saturate the place from afar with a mortar battery, now they know.  
I'd rather not dwell on it longer than I have to. Just another name.  
  
We'll be gone tomorrow either case, marching orders. I understand that's not quite how it works, but every step feels like being closer to home, and closer to leave. It'll be good to be back home again; the need to see my wife and my son steadily becomes greater and greater as times goes onward. I just hope I can leave the blood and death in Ascalon when I go home.  
  
Ah well. We'll see what passes tomorrow, as always. Leave the goodbye rites for the dead, and move onto the next war-front.

# 25th of Zephyr

Cowlfang, new camp. Well, 'new', it's the Iron Legion town up north, across from the huge Invictus Castrum. It doesn't bode well for us if the Flame Legion still occupy it. But, apparently we're now on the actual warfront. Across the Invictus castrum, which is separated from us by a lake, lies Fireheart Rise. If the Iron legion furnaces didn't cover the area with thick smog, maybe we could even see some of from here.  
As it stands, the settlement itself is fairly well-defended with thick walls overlooking the lake, with cannon and a central tower to fall back towards. The only issue is the smell. Just... the constant odour of burning wood, and charcoal smoke. The furnaces churn out thick black pillars of smoke that hang over the township like a blanket.  
  
Duties will probably pick up soon. I sent out Penbroke on a forage mission with Claridge on observation. They ventured out outside the camp boundary to shoot some of the wild hogs that seem to hide in every nook and crevasse out here in Ascalon. They were promptly scolded by Meava for straying near the battle lines. An odd accusation, since Seleea and I were out about as far on the engineering survey of the place earlier. I could tell the troops didn't appreciate being called to order for something so trivial, and I have to say I agree the sentiment. Pulling them in line-up with physical exercises seems superfluous for something that could've been fixed with an on-the-spot correction. Would've generated less ill-will towards Maeva too, I'll tell you that. It's what you would call Sinclair-esque. Anyway, I pep-talked Penbroke and tried to re-establish the notion that the officers are not usually arbitrary. I'll need to do the same for Claridge, I think. I called the latter into counselling over some squabbling Fletcher reported to me. Seems like a case of petty argument between two soldiers, so nothing out of the usual. Claridge is usually conscientious enough to listen to good advice, even though she could give a minotaur a run for it's money on the count of being stubborn. We'll see, I suppose.  
  
Other news is that Marcus got recalled to the Keep, likely as a permanent alteration to the service roster. Not sure why, though I suspect he's been promoted behind a desk. Means I'm now an SFC with an officer's brevet for leading Blade outright. We had a discussion about shifting around the First Crusaders from the wounded pool to re-establish somewhat functional chains of command. With Maeva and Lionhead injured, and some of the First Crusaders not qualifying for unit leads, I've ended up with Klixxa, while Lance will be in the hands of the Warmaster and Belmont for the time being. Belmont's been doing excellent work these past few days alone, though I suspect he'll be surprised when he realises he's been picked out for a unit second already. Suppose trial by fire is not an issue, and he's got Cinderkeeper and Sinclair in Lance to carry him if he stumbles.  
Blade is a different matter. Still, I've been running the unit de facto for a while now, so the situation doesn't change. We might get a replacement in for the officer sometime soon, though I'm hesitant about putting an outsider who doesn't know the unit in lead. I suppose I'll have to bridge any gaps when that happens, right? We'll see.  
  
Not looking forwards to days ahead, as the prospect of fighting Flame Legion already irritates me. Ah well, I suppose I'll get to put Vethrir's old adage of fighting fire with fire into practice against the goldies.

# 26th of Zephyr

Cowlfang.  
  
Duties started good today. The Iron Legion sent out a warband to start work on thinning out the Mordrem infestation, including killing off the big Mordrem that ambushed our own troops some days back. At least Elric Strongfist, who-ever he was, is avenged. The warband ran foul of one Modrem infestation, however, and we were sent in to assist them. Turns out the vines had snared them all down, killing a few of them in the process. We were on site soon enough and managed to cut out the survivors from the vine bulbs that held them. Tried to snare me down too, but Bear's strength ripped me free, and split it all apart with fire and claw. The Legions will have their work cut out for them, another enemy for them to fight up here.  
I'm mostly pleased to hear that our own got taken care of, even if we didn't do it ourselves. Pity the warbands here aren't used to fighting Mordrem seriously, yet, they could've avoided getting snagged and tangled by the vines. Probably took them by surprise.  
  
Also the first day with Klixxa in the unit, which is something new for her. I've talked to Forgewood and Klixxa both, placed some extra task burdens on them as First Crusaders. At least, while I am where I am. The least I can do is pave the ground for the new officer by getting everyone working on improving unit cohesion. I might line out squad sections, and make my First Crusaders responsible for the troops in them on a more direct level. If I can do it on my own for Blade, they can manage to do so for half the squad just as well, I think.  
  
On another matter, had my counselling session with Claridge, which was strange. Sometimes Claridge's determination is a blessing and a curse; now it was the latter. She seemed almost unnaturally determined not to communicate at all with Fletcher on any level, until I gave her a direct order not to let it get that far. The only people for whom I've deemed that an explicit necessity were Vatorn and Kaitark, but Claridge and Fletcher? It seems absurd. Claridge noted some awkward interactions she's had with Fletcher before, many of which makes me wonder what the other side of the story is. Claridge also seems to think Fletcher is deliberately torpedo'ing her or some such, which to me strikes me as a surprisingly paranoid viewpoint. Ah well, I'll have to see Fletcher come morning, see what she has to say for herself. Maybe I can even get one of them to apologise.  
  
That's about the extent of the day, asides from Ravenwest getting humped by a large Devourer over dinner. Creepy critters. Had to drag it off of her, without killing it, or getting stung by it. Luckily, it seemed well-reared.  
  
Bah. Yawning. Day's been long. Time to get some rest, and dream of pleasant snow-covered slopes.

# 27th of Zephyr

Cowlfang.  
  
Long day today, most of which was spent rooting through some gigantic Devourer hive in the Brand known as the Infestation. It's as unpleasant as it sounds, though it seems the Branded in there are not as beligerent as some we've seen, or the day would've ended a lot, lot worse.  
We went out to assist some Ogre Kraal that sits right on the corner of the Brand. They eke out a hard living, but they are proud about their home. Their chief is a solid-built thug who relishes proving his strength against the dragon's minions. Hardy people. In that, they remind me of my own folks in the Mountains. Stubborn and proud in their endurance and strength. Anyway, nearby is a large crater. Apparently some Sentinels and the Vigil cast down a large Branded champion, and buried it alive there, so, naturally, we went out and cast an eye on the situation.  
No trace of it, unfortunately. Only suspicious thing in the entire area was a large magical barrier sealed with some sigils. That put Occult on edge to the point that we were hesitant to send folks into the caves themselves, because we might not be prepared to square off against something that powerful. I managed to convince the Warmaster that the least we should do is at least assert the nature of what we were facing before we made any commitment. I took four volunteers down into the hive itself, turned out there's very little to worry about, asides from a metric ton of Branded Devourers crawling about. The magical shield turned out to be a pair of sigils sealing off the place, probably Sentinel stuff we missed. Well, that's what I assume anyway.  
We pulled out soon enough, but not before spending several long hours digging around the corrupted dirt, the threat of a surprise stinger through the shin a constant companion. I'm getting pretty fed up with Devourers. They're fucking everywhere. The Charr have them, they Branded have them, and then there's more of the fuckers simply trundling along in the wild! Bah. Give me Dolyak and Minotaur instead.  
  
Anyway, I'm tired. An entire day in a gas-mask, underground, in the Brand? Ugh, Bear's Claws... That's one way to drain a man. At least now we know the entire area is pretty much calm. Lance killed off a local champion some days back, which I think sorted out most of the issues we'll have. A pity, I was sort of hoping we'd find a dragon champion for us to slay, though I suppose we'd have come out a lot worse for wear if all those Devourers had been guided by a champion. Probably would've swarmed us, and ripped us to shreds.  
  
Wonder how Kristen is doing today. It's been almost a month now, I thin? Close to anyway. And Freyj with Aska, that'll be a source of many a odd tale, I'm sure, though since Freyj hasn't written me, at least I can assume everything is still well. She'd have been quick on the penmanship should something have gone awry, I'm sure.  
Even Usha I miss now. Been a while since I thought about her, and everything that happened, now. My mind instead keeps straying to Kristen and the Jotunling. I suppose I'm not as angry anymore? At least, I don't feel very angry right now. Might just be because I'm tired.  
Yeah, should get some sleep. Everything's going fuzzy.

# 28th of Zephyr

Cowlfang.  
  
Went out to the artillery position out in front of the camp today, the one they're using to keep pressure on the Flame Legion castrum across the lake. Nifty place, they're using an old ruin, and reinforced it with gun batteries. Large stock of munitions and cannon there as well, probably be able to kit us out with extra supplies against a fair cost. I doubt they have a shortage, even with the sporadic shelling into the thick stone walls of the castrum down below.  
I'll pass a wishlist down to Force, he can arrange for the transaction.  
  
For the remainder, I had a talk with Vatorn and Zikk about this and that. Vatorn feels I undervalue him because I keep him back during the battle. Reason I do that is because I'd rather keep a mage as powerful as Vatorn in reserves until we need him to really burn through an unexpected enemy, rather than have him waste his energy picking off small-time targets that can just as easily be dispatched by the heavy troops or the skirmishers. He's proven his worth in combat often enough. I'd rather not start relying on it either, as a crutch.  
Perhaps we need to work on squad tactics it a bit better, it's been a little spotty as of recently.  
  
Bah, the smog. I'm developing a cough, simply from the constant ash and smoke in the air. It strings the eyes, and everything I own now smells like it's been hung in a smokehouse for a season. If I stay here much longer, the next medic to examine my lungs will need a shovel. Bah! What I wouldn't give for clean mountain air, so cold it tingles your windpipe with every breath!  
Ah well. From what I here, the worst still lies ahead of us. Not an encouraging thought.

# 29th of Zephyr

Cowlfang camp, still.  
  
Everything is quiet, as it stands. Well, I say that, there is the general clanking and rumbling of an Iron Legion settlement, and the constant, if distant, thunderclap of artillery firing at distant enemy positions. They fire haphazardly, especially at night, aiming at the distant fire of the castrum. The blaze over north is such that the sky glows warmly, as if the horizon is set alight. It is bright enough to be visible even through the thick smog, like a distant, angry red smudge. Whether or not the Iron Legion gunners are hitting anything is hard to tell, but they are making up with their enthousiasm, that's for certain.  
  
Cough's still there. As if someone poured little grains of sand in my throat while I slept, and I can't dislodge them. I tried wearing the air-filter, but that's somehow even worse. I just end up feeling like I'm choking, and start overheating. I wish I could dump my face into the lake, but being this close to the Flame Legion castrum, I can only assume that'd set a bad example. Don't want recruits dipping into the water at every turn.  
Which reminds me, I need some time to properly exercise Blade now that I have the officer's brevet. If we're going into Fireheart, I want them knitted together tightly.  
  
Also never thought I'd grow tired of eating boar.  
But, Bear's Claws, that's about the only thing that seems stupid enough to live on this blasted country. Charr, pigs and humans. Pity those Minotaur we had near the Guardian Stones don't seem to be more common, at least they are worthwhile to hunt. The hog herds here run so tick they occasionally run over the Iron Legion minefields, with unfortunate consequences for them.  
Anyway, it's only Invictus Castrum between us and Fireheart now, so I think the way forwards is pretty clear cut. Unless the Irons simply grind them to dust with steel and fire, we'll be seeing face-to-face soon enough, I wager.  
  
Missing my little boy. I had a dream of being out sailing in Lion's Arch, like I did when I first knew. Perhaps I should take Kristen and the Jotunling sailing again, and spend a day around the beaches again. Well, not until I've spent some days in the snow at least.  
Worse news from Lionhead's side; the wound she got from a Flame Legionnaire seems to have impaired her leg. The medics are still looking it over for proper healing, but... Well, if she can't march anymore, I fear she'll get to go home a lot sooner than I will. I hope not. Being crippled is always a bad blow for a hero. I suppose we'll see how it heals; if the Spirits are watching, they'll make it heal well.

# 30th of Zephyr

Cowlfang.  
  
Duties today were interesting. The Warmaster sent us a secondary objective some days ago, a lone Sentinel watchtower in the Brand that needed a cursory check-over. Nothing to get wound up about, but perfect to allow Klixxa and Forgewood to get their squadron boots on. Gave us an oppertunity to try and bring the sections out about, we have Sword and Sabre sections out in the field.  
Overall, the sortie went well as a training exercise. Minimal steering was needed, so I at least can trust them both to execute an order they've been given. Whether or not they can keep up with the more general duties is a different matter, of course, but that's something only time will tell. In the end, I think it will depend a lot about how much initative they show. With Fireheart coming up ahead, I suppose they'll have plenty of oppertunity to earn their marks.  
The actual tower was alright, the Iron Legion had four engineers already in place, fixing the place up. We only had to deal with a small surge of Branded, probably part of an approaching Brandstorm. The Sentinels have heavy-duty anti-materiel rifles up there that can split a Branded Charr in two from five-hundred paces, so I doubt they needed us much.  
  
Then there was a few thing happen in camp. In no particular order, Vatorn's apparently been bugging Sawyer about something, and responded very rudely to Fletcher interrupting the both of them on some talk. I don't know how, but that man keeps finding ways to irk me. Force keeps saying he's making progress, but... I don't know. He also picked a fight with one of the new Charr, Yevalin.  
  
What else? Oh, yeah, Fletcher and Claridge's entire mess. I spoke with Fletcher, and then called Claridge in. In all honesty, Fletcher overreacted badly, and Claridge acted a little erratically. In the end, it's more of a case that I find it difficult to imagine they can't settle this between themselves. Fletcher at least seemed willing to settle the argument, though Claridge is acting like a proper cunt on the matter. That's mostly the frustration talking, I'll admit. Our soldiers perform well on the field, but they apparently all inherited their social graces from Ettin. A good few of them could do with some lessons from Wolf about being a part of the pack. Spirits, even norn will at least settle their issues cleanly. Blegh. Grudges are for Dwarves, stonebrowed bastards.  
  
Lionhead's injury is... well, she's been formally invalidated now. Apparently the Legionnaire's claws dug deep enough to make sure it will be a lingering wound. Kalla's not happy, of course, but I think I managed to spark some ideas about her running her own fighting pit. She'd probably do a good job of it, too. She'll probably take Leif out into Lion's Arch; might have to see if my own folks can't take the gate more often, I'm sure the Krytan beaches will be pleasant for everyone. I've decided to carve her a good, big walking stick too. She'll need one, from the sound of it. Might as well make it a parting gift for a friend and a fellow warrior. Probably means Seleea will inherit second command of the engineers. Small is also leaving, at the end of the tour, as she mentioned before. Pity.  
  
Mithra is back, too. Athy is doing better, which is good. She seemed happy enough to be back, though I can understand that her heart is still with Athy. It's akin to my longing to be back home with Kristen, I suppose. Torn between two places. I hope she'll manage to keep up in the field.  
She got into some trouble with Cheery today. Well, Mithra, Force and Sinclair. Apparently Force, who is injured and put on light duty, was sent out to get some supplies, as I wrote out for him. Not a far trip, right over to Viper's Run. Prydwen apparently blew a gasket at that, because he left the encampment. Not entirely sure it was warranted, but she's acting head medic now Marcus has been reassigned, so it is her call. She didn't seem well. I'm worried something's wrong, or worse, she's showing cracks under pressure. Lashing out for minor things like this is a bad symptom for service stress... I'll have to look an eye out, I suppose.  
  
So, yes, hectic day. Especially Lionhead getting invalidated, that was a shock. Worse was that I even felt a little envious. I'd love to go back home, and not have to explain myself. To have the choice to stay with my children made for me by fate. It's a selfish thought, of course, and I have to be altruistic. We fight dragons, and we fight for a better world. I'm glad, at least, that Lionhead survived. It could've ended worse, like Lalowa, and poor Aska. Now Leif can have his mother teach him how to throw a proper punch.

# 31st of Zephyr

Cowlfang. Orders came in for tomorrow, we're going to go into Invictus Castrum along with the crack attack teams of the Legions. We're in for a full storm, like the shock troops we are. I suppose it is what we do best. Time for us to kick down the bloody door on the Flame Legion bastards, and put them to the sword. Slaving bastards that they are. Then, when Invictus is moved out of the way, we'll be on into the deep heartland of Fireheart rise. Fireheart, eh? A bit like me, that, when I get into the thick of battle.  
Anyway, tomorrow and then the venture into the Flame Legion homelands has given me a small nugget of concern. The real battle lines start here, and we'll be pushing it up all the way into the enemy heartland. From what I hear from the few people who've been there, the going will be hard. Blade will have to be ready for whatever comes, and I sincerely hope to bring everyone back alive.  
  
So, that left today for preparation and resupply. Making sure all the equipment is in order, and leave as little as we can up to chance. Mentally prepare for venturing into the fire and the flame.  
I haven't found a good enough piece of wood for Kalla's walking stick yet. It'll have to wait until after the assault tomorrow.  
  
Wonder if Usha would have anything to say about being out here, in Charr homelands. Probably not have the best things to say about the Flame Legion, I'll tell you that. Despite everything that's happened, I really hope she's doing well at home, and is keeping an eye on Freyj for me, along with her own fuzzballs.  
There's so many things I feel I'm missing out, being out here. I try and draw a picture in my mind of how a day at home should pass, but I can't picture it. Not clearly. Things have changed so quickly. Aska, Kristen, Reuzen, the cubs, everything is different. It's odd to think of yourself as a stranger to your own family life, but that's what I am. I am at the center of it all, the axis around which the wheel turns, and yet I am an outsider. Leave is a brief window through which I look into this life that could be mine, should be mine, but isn't. Because of the choices, the sacrifices, I make.  
Spirits, I wish I was home again now, in this tiny moment, to tell everyone how much I love them, and how keenly it cuts me to be away from them. Just for a moment, before I go off again to risk life and limb for a better future.

# 32nd of Zephyr

Cowlfang, after the attack on Invictus Castrum.  
It's been a long, and primarily a hot, day. The attack on the castrum proceeded about as well as can be expected. There was opposition, but it was meager. Either the Iron Legion bombardment has actually managed to inflict much more damage than expected, or the castrum was not fully staffed. Either case, we marched into that... caldera of molten rock and jagged volcanic spurs, and pushed them back slowly but steadily. Didn't even have to break formation. We essentially just rolled over them. At the heart of it all, all the way north through the castrum, we fought their shaman. He hid away at first, letting us almost boil alive, before he decided to step out of his hidey-hole, and fight us head on. Bastard conjured a literal fire storm around us, saturating the area with embers and waves of fire. If we didn't have our elementalists ready with water magic, we'd all have been burnt to a crisp. I suppose that's why the Vigil is a good to have on hand against these sort of enemies... The Legions don't typically trust casters, if I recall correctly. Anyway, we managed to eventually wear the bastard down. Klixxa insisted we cut off the head, and Claridge obliged. I decided to take it with us, might as well keep it for a trophy. I heard some Charr keep the horns of the goldies they killed to keep track. Just like when you hunt a good stag, or a Minotaur bull.  
We managed to pull out of Invictus once we secured the kill in relatively good order, just... heat exhaustion, for everyone. I was sweating like a bastard; the Vatorn, Klixxa, Sawyer and Mithra were lifesavers with their cooling spells, and Lyralii's cooling crystal is still doing its job. Without them, I'd probably have collapsed twice over. By Bear, it was a furnace. Everything was hot, flowing rock, and spurts of fire. They're almost like dragons, or Icebrood, they corrupt the land they occupy. I'm afraid of what Fireheart will look like.  
  
When we came back, I gave everyone permission to take a dive in the lake. Went in for a short dip myself, spirits, that was a relief. Finally cooling off after all that stiffling heat... Get away from the smog and the smoke for a short instant... It's all the quiet before the storm, isn't it? Well, Blade did excellently today, even though Klixxa managed to knock herself with all the spells. The new First Crusaders seem to function well enough in their section roles, though they were still all under my central command. I'll need to start giving them more duties that require their own initative. Ideally, they'll respond just as well then. Can't have Blade rely on me alone to keep the squad together until we get that new Knight they've been talking about.  
  
Anyway, I'm tired. I set to preparing the Charr skull properly, should be done come morning. I'll start preparing for the advance, doubt we'll stay here longer than needed, now Invictus is out of the way. The way into Fireheart is clear now. Only a matter of time until we continue down on it.

# 33rd of Zephyr

Cowlfang. We got medical checks today, a sure sign we're on the final step before we move into Fireheart itself. Sure enough, march orders came in later today, we'll be advancing come the morrow. Luckily, I was quick on the draw, and already secured the field armoury for travel, and checked Ravenwest's inventory, so Engineering is ready for the move. Still, doesn't hurt to rise early tomorrow and make sure everyone's properly packed.  
  
Lionhead was pulled out today, along with some surplus from the stocks, straight back to the Keep. In return they dropped us off, uh... Astrid Drakecarver, from Blade Chapter as a transfer. I've met here before, called her Legs when we were in the Dustbowl. So far, I'm not convinced about trading Lionhead for Legs, but I suppose needs must. Didn't get to say much of a goodbye, so I suppose I'll owe Lionhead a visit over leave. Good, gives me some time to find some good wood for that walking stick.  
  
Bigger shock, Cinderkeeper resigned on the spot after refusing to give a blood sample to medical. The Warmaster was not pleased by this, and I can imagine that'll throw a wrench into the operations for the scouts. Belmont's a recent promotion, looks like he's being flung into the deep end as Lance second and head scout at the same time. What's worse, Cinderkeeper knew Fireheart, most everyone in the Chapter doesn't. Bad timing. I find the entire reason strange too... not giving a vial of blood? I mean, if the enemy was filled with rank upon rank of necromancers, I'd be a little worried, but we're geared to be fighting Flame Legion. Strange. We can't afford thinning the ranks much more, or command is going to have to pull us because we're falling under strength.  
Bah!  
  
Also spoke with Cheery, about... well, what's been bothering her. Apparently she's still cracked by something Ruthford said, back in the Dustbowl. Apparently he refused to be with her because he was afraid she'd turn on him, with the entire Mordremoth thing. So, when we killed the dragon, she was hoping he'd come back to her and... well, yes. Heartbroken. I tried my best to speak some encouragement. She needs to find something to keep her afloat. When Freyja died, years ago, it was Freyj that kept me going through the days, again and again. You just need something to live for. It's like the Sylvari say, fear not this night, as dawn is just a heartbeat away. All storms pass, however great the damage might be. It seemed to help.  
She told me about her Wyld Hunt too. I didn't know she was a Valiant before. Apparently hers has her walking through a storm of ash and fire, before finding someone small, and protecting it while everything else burns. Or at least, that's what I got from it. An odd dream, that. I hope she finds what she looks for.  
  
I've also managed to clean out the Flame Shaman's skull. Ugly fellow had portrusions growing straight out of his skull and brainpan. Chilling sight. Excellent trophy, however. I've started engraving the surface carefully where I can, along the jawbone and across the forehead. Flames, and wreathing fire. I'll need to make a proper mount of wood so we can hang it in the trophy hall. That reminds me, I still have this... oddly green gemstone I found in the Brand. Found it again while rummaging through my pack. I've needed to do some clever packing to fit the entire skull in, too. I think I might leave it in my tent once we've moved camp.  
Need to find some good carving wood soon, really.  
  
Also, for Usha and Freyj: they should call their spring brew Spirit of Mirth. That's a good name.

# 34th of Zephyr

So, we're in Fireheart Rise, place called Tuyere Command Post. It's essentially the staging post into the northern territories for the High Legion in their ongoing civil war. It's an impressive concentration of weapons and supplies, with lines of armoured vehicles lined up, filled with supplies. There's enough munition and food here in Tuyere to feed half the Pact for a few seasons on end. Or, as it stands, to fuel the fires of war throughout the region. It's very much a warzone. I haven't gone far beyond the camp borders, but what little countryside I saw was scorched, the trees dead and burnt. The camp itself is more a series of Charr transports aligned around a large pipe system drawing in water from the lake to the north. That's the infamous tar-lake. Or well, rather, it's covered with a film of grease and oil that clings like a film to the top of the water. Anything you drag through there end up covered in the stuff. Not only does it stink, but the stuff is lightly flammable as well, making it a serious danger. I had Ravenwest set out a sign, just in case.  
  
In other news, my brevet got turned into an officer's commission, and I'm now a Knight of the Vigil. A surprise, in as much that I expected a transfer to come in and take over, much like Maeva did when she first joined the Chapter. But, it turns out that I'll be having Blade under my care permanently from now. Well, until I die, of course. Not the only promotions going through, too. Maeva's been moved to Tactician, and Lance has gone to Astrid Drakecarver. That's right, Legs. I had a small suspicion she was sent in to take over squad lead, but for Blade. Turns out not to be the case. I don't mind, but she's going to have to work from scratch to get to know her squad. She'll have to rely on her First Crusaders to do the job. Slight wrinkle with having Cinderkeeper leave, that.  
She seems pleasant enough too, considering I'll probably be working closely with her in future.  
  
I wonder what they'll say back home when I bring the news. Dad, a big hero of the Vigil, and everything. Kristen'll laugh, suddenly she's married not to a Crusader, but a Vigil officer. Another change in our lives. It's been an avalanche this last year, I'll tell you that. I suppose it does bind me closer to my duty than ever before. No more thinking of going home, and staying with Kristen and the children for a tour, rather than risking life and limb. I hope they're all well. I consider writing them, but I keep thinking it will be so much better if I can tell it to them myself, so I can see their faces. And I will, once the tour is over.  
  
It's been a long and confusing day, really, but it changes little to what I was planning on doing. Being acting Knight and actual Knight is a mere formality, though I appreciate the trust Alleshia has now placed in me. I intend to do my very best.

# 35th of Zephyr

Tuyere Command post.  
Received lengthy field briefings on the days ahead, most of which is helpfully labelled "need-to-know only" by the High Legions. A good chunk of it relates to large amounts of Flame legion positions they've already noted down, and are engaging in their own right, and we'll fit into the attack plans. A large amount of it relates to deploying us into hot spots so our experience with fighting highly magical opponents can benefit us most. Which, of course, means we'll be in the thick of the fighting as we attempt to push back the enemy. The Legions have the lofty goal of pushing the enemy all the way back, and into the mountains again. Whether or not they'll succeed, we'll see in the coming days.

# 36th of Zephyr

Tuyere Command post.  
Still at the staging post. The offensives will start in a few days, we're just gathering the last few supplies we need before we push onward. Everything is relatively quiet for the remainder, asides from the rumble of Charr vehicles coming up from the Iron Marches now Invictus castrum is less of a domineering presence on the area directly behind us.  
  
There are some smaller tensions within the unit, but most of them seem mostly harmless at a glance. Only thing seems that Sinclair's experiment with humour apparently goes poorly. He made some sort of joke about Vatorn's sister which landed poorly, and earned him a dressing down from the Warmaster. I spoke to Vatorn himself, albeit briefly. His recent promotion to Crusader is an opportunity for him to grow into something more than his awkward self. That, or he'll realise we expect much better of our Crusaders than we do of our recruits, and he'll sink. Either way, he'll have to cope with it. To say I'm sure he can do that is a lie, truth be told. Regardless, I think the gloves should come off. He needs to shape up, or fluke out.  
  
That's about the extent of it, really. Considering the warfront ahead, I can say these little social squabbles are not very high on the priority list.

# 37th of Zephyr

Tuyere Command post.  
  
Well, it didn't remain quiet for long, unfortunately.  
Earlier today, Penbroke received a rather unpleasant letter from one Kristov Burke who apparently is a few arrows short of a quiver. Not entirely sane, that is. Seemed mostly like some angry ranting intended to scare the ever-living shit out of Penbroke, and then threaten her into submission. Apparently Penbroke considers the threat serious, so we put the pickets on alert about taking special care with unknown people attempting to approach the perimeter. The High Legions are fairly strict about that sort of thing around here regardless, but precautions never hurt. Mithra debriefed her fully on the threat, and we know a little more. Truth be told, he seems like a generic cunt of a bandit picking on people not able to defend themselves. If he thinks that'll go unopposed in the middle of a Vigil Chapter, he's in for a bit of a shock. Idiot bandit doesn't understand we don't play games. I'll write to the Pact administrator in the Reach come morning, put the Seraph and the Spooks on alert. If we're lucky, the Spooks know exactly where he is, and can solve this mess by sending a Slayer to clean up the mess.  
Regardless, it seems that putting out the alert to the pickets happened just in time, as the Iron Legion caught a woman disguised as a Vigil soldier trying to waffle their way through the camp perimeter. When they couldn't produce papers, they tried to flee but were promptly gunned down, though not before returning fire. Oddly, though, Penbroke seems pretty sure this is not related to her bandit friend. So, that's begs the question, who sends out a single disguised insurgent into the middle of a High Legion command post, and for what purpose. Is it Ravenwest's Sicarius cultists? Separatists? White Mantle? No idea. Cheery seems to think it was just some poor girl tried to steal a meal or something, but apparently the attacker's weapons were well-maintained, which makes me wonder. Also the notion that they are wearing Vigil uniforms to try and walk in is an issue. We're the only Vigil troops currently stationed here, but I'm pretty sure there's another Chapter deployed closer to Hrangmer. It might get muddy.  
I'll need to look over everything again on the morrow, when I'm less tired.  
  
Aside from that, the day went relatively well. I had Klixxa and Forgewood work with their sections on team-building exercises, with good results. Have a feeling everyone in Blade is energized to perform well in the coming days, which is good. I hope that, if we increase the sense of importance felt by our individual soldiers, they'll feel like part of something greater, and fight all the much harder for the cause. We're the Vigil, after all, and each of our soldiers is a Crusader in the war against the dragons. Once the soldiers understand what they fight for, and how much of a difference they can make, perhaps they will grow to embrace the warrior's mindset, and take the notion that giving your life for the Vigil is not a hollow promise.  
  
Finished carving the Charr skull near the evening. Can't wait to see Kristen's look when I show her this one. It's a proper trophy, alright. I hope she's doing well, with the baby and everyone around her. No doubt Aska and Reuzen keep her busy as much as Valharantha does with her shaman's lessons. I wonder how long it'll be before she's a shaman proper. Who knows, maybe it's already happened? Ahh, lass, I wish you wrote me more. I want to write to you as well, but every time I try, words fail me. I wish I'd known before I left, because it is hard to pour my feelings into mere words. I feel the flames flicker inside my heart and warm me, but I cannot describe these feelings of desire and love in any way that does them justice. I just end up scribbling, and scribbling, and then balling up and throwing away the paper. Futile! I'll have to see you, Kristen. Hopefully soon.

# 38th of Zephyr

Tuyere Command post.  
  
Sent my letter out to the regional command for the Reach, hopefully get them working on sorting out Penbroke's stalker problem. For the remainder, the day was quiet. Or, well, I spent the majority of it reading up reports about the region and going over the scouting reports we got back. One of our first targets seems to be some sort of mine out in the middle of the tar-lake, further west along the shore. It's a high-priority target, and nearby, so that's where we'll be going first in the coming days. Just need to double-check all the battle plans with the High Legions and ensure all our supplies and equipment are with us.  
Crossing a tar lake to attack... what, a mine? An island? It'll be dangerous, to say the least. The notion that the Iron Legion have cannons looking over us does little to quiet that worry, especially because they've not been shelling the place. Our allied fuzzballs want that place intact; that, and there are enslaved Grawl in there set to work against their will. I'm worried as to their state of being if the Flame Legion realizes we're about to storm the place. Maybe some of them will see it as an opportunity and turn against their captors. Knowing Grawl, the ape-people aren't the smartest around, but at least they have ferocity ingrained in their bones.  
Yeah, it's going to be an interesting mission.  
  
So, that's kept me occupied. I've been feeling slightly ill from the bad air around here. It smells like pitch and soot. If the winds turns badly, the gasses in the air sting in the eyes. It sticks to the clothes and padding, too, so I'll be smelling like a furnace operator for a season after this too. Spirits, it's almost as bad as Orr at some times. Thankfully, despite the season, the weather seems to be holding up somewhat. Comfortable temperature for me to sleep covered without creating a small pool where I lay, which is always good. Small comforts.  
I'm almost anxious to begin operations here, just to get it over with, even though I know it'll get worse before it gets better. Eh.  
  
Astrid, or Legs, or Ookstrid, however you want to call her, has been nice. Not quite Lionhead levels of norn-down yet, but I suppose she's nicer to look at than the battered Lion's Archer. Makes me wish Kristen was here. Sure would've made the Ascalonian nights a tad more comfortable. Och, that's just me being selfish, you know. Being surrounded by nice looking lasses does that to a married man. I find it amusing, at least. Hah, you think Kristen takes little notes of all the handsome hunters that come ask for Leopard's wisdoms while I'm away? That'd be amusing. See one of the youngsters try and impress her, eh? Wouldn't blame them either, she's a gorgeous woman. *My* gorgeous woman, mind, but I suspect any enterprising hunter who mistakes Kristen for easy prey will find that out the hard way, hah.  
Ahhh, I do miss her.

# 39th of Colossus

Tuyere Command post.  
  
Sent out patrols to find out something about our mysterious Vigil-clad infiltrator the other day. Didn't find much, asides from some burned clothing near a bonfire site, or a Flame Legion cyst. Poses as many questions as it provides answers. Current public idea is that she's... a separatists? A slave? Well, a human girl, out in the middle of the Marches. She gets her hands on some Vigil uniforms, and puts those on, burning her own clothing. Then she heads north and tries to approach the picket, pretty heavily armed, before being stopped, and eventually shot when she tries to flee. Of course, I know that in the post-mortem report, one of the notes we found on the girl was a coded bounty notice billed to 75 gold, with a White Mantle sigil branded on the paper. So, yeah, the real reason why we sent out those patrols was to figure out where she came from, and perhaps gleam something about the target. Suspicion might be that she was a bandit assassin trying to place a hit on the command team, or someone important out here. Perhaps one of the local Char commanders. We don't know. We'll keep it under wraps as needed, the pickets and the Chapter will be on guard regardless, even if they don't know the finer details. We also want to prevent the idea that someone's been issuing bounties on us to run wild. Attracts the wrong sort of attention, after all. We'll have to, as the Warmaster says, stay vigiliant.  
  
Despite all this, we've decided to continue with the offensive as planned. In a few days, the sword leaves the scabbard, and we'll go hunting Flame legion bastards. Good. I want this campaign over with.

# 40th of Colossus

Tuyere Command Post.  
  
Operations started a little earlier, apparently the Order of Whispers took note of our reports to heighten security, and set us up with a local operative. They highlighted a potential strike base for Separatist forces in the region. If that little assassin that ran afoul of the pickets is associated with them, they might've used it to try again. Better to perform a preventive strike against them, kick down the door, and eliminate the threat. We had to take a storm boat across the Cistern, the name the Charr give to the pool of tar sludge that gives proper lakes a bad name. That went easily enough, thankfully, and once we made it across, a Spook mesmer opened a portal for us right into the bandit hideout. Aptly named Rebel's Seclusion, it's a series of half-buried Ascalonian ruins wedged together in some warrens, just like in that place in the Marshes where we found that tank. Narrow canyons. Unfortunately, it seems the local bandits dug a little to greedily and too deeply, awoke a small legion of Foefire spirits dormant in the ruins. Looks like the bandits fled in a hurry, leaving us to pick clear the remains, and fight little skirmishes with the undead Ascalonians. Unfortunately, we didn't find anything of value asides from a Bloodstone sliver Klixxa recovered from a chest. We pushed through and found some stragglers, but they either rushed us and died on our swords, and fled. Eventually, we surfaced somewhere in Sloven Pitch, with the jagged form of Hrangmer visible far to the north, obscured by thick clouds of smoke and steam. There was molten rock pouring straight into the river, probably upstream from the Cistern itself. Unfortunately one squad was not fit to venture into that mire of despair without preparation, so I pulled us back, and we got extracted the same way we got in by our Spook agent.  
Mostly fruitless, as far as I'm concerned, though we did scratch a potential enemy strike base off of the list, I suppose.  
  
The real assault comes tomorrow, when we send troops to Pig Iron mine. Today's performance worried me a little; unit formations were poor, and a far cry from the discipline I expect them to retain in battle. Having a good grasp of positioning in combat is important, and is a key factor I want fixed. I'll put it as a training stressor for the First Crusaders to handle, maybe they work that kink out of the system. Overall, my working relation with the troops seems to be in order. At least, in so far that I feel respected by the folks. That's always nice.  
  
As for the camp itself, I taught Mithra how to make a simple rice stir-fry. Apparently the lass never had to prepare a meal in her life, which is a gross lapse, as far as I can concerned! Being able to make good, hearty food is an easy way into people's hearts. Kristen certainly enjoys it when I put some effort into whipping up a real treat for her, after all. Carmine also made apple pies, which, I have to give it to him, weren't that bad. Makes me remember the days where all I would care about is finding good flour and making dough with the perfect consistency for cinnamon rolls. Now I worry about people coming to kill us while we sleep, or plant bombs in the latrines. I wonder if the world has changed, or if I was simply blind to all the dangers because I lived a completely different life. The strange thing is that, somewhere, that life still goes on without me. That makes me question how many people in Hoelbrak know Kristen, but have only heard of me through her. That's a strange thought, isn't it? For many here in the Chapter, I suppose the inverse is true. They know me well enough, but have no idea who this woman is that I am married to, and is expecting my child.  
  
Force noted again, that we're unlikely to survive all the wars until the dragons are finally defeated. I suppose that's true. That means that, to have the life I want, to see my children grow up, I'll need to say stop to it all, at one point. That's a thought that's been haunting me for a while, and I keep swinging back and forth on it. One day, I suppose I'll just know that it is time to pass on the torch; here's hoping that day comes before the day my luck finally runs out, eh?

# 41st of Zephyr

Tuyere Command Post.  
  
Offensives began today, against Pig Iron Mine, just as planned. Battle plans were a little more worked out, Legs and Lance got the distraction assault, while Blade was tasked with skirting around the main area towards an outlying castrum. We stormed it, cutting off the main reinforcement line for the Flame Legion into the mines, before our Order of Whispers contact created a mesmer portal straight into the mine's lower levels. Caught them by surprise, and overran the area. I admit, it went very smooth. I doubt the Flame Legion expected a second attack, and they crumpled under the collected weight of the offensive pretty easily. Guess we have a foot in the door before we push on deeper into the Fireheart Rise.  
Have to admit, not looking forwards to it. The parts we've seen are all destroyed. Burning forests of charcoal and cinders, beaches of ash, and the jagged stone formations that mark the earth like giant claw-marks. You know, they say everyone has a different idea of what the worst parts of the Underworld look like, but this is pretty close. Worse than Orr, and worse that the Dragon's Stand in the Magus Falls. I suppose the relentless, fiery heat and heavy air don't help.  
  
Regardless, the Charr will need some time to get the mine back operational, and get a lot of Grawl slaves out of there, and back to their tribes. We'll advance when the warfront stabilises, probably deeper inland to the Grawl territories. The Flame Legion have been preying on them for sport and cheap labour, and as far as I'm concerned protecting the innocent is both in our oaths, and part of our operational objectives. Here's hoping we don't come away being worshiped a gods again... Though I suppose that's not as bad as being under the yoke of the bloody Flame Legion. We'll see in due time.  
  
Small note about the squad's performance is that the people don't seem used to working in sections yet, in as much that they keep over-extending. Sections are only composed of half as many people, so they need to watch each other's backs much more closely. It's something for the First Crusaders to work out in due time.  
  
Long day. Best get some rest.

# 42nd of Zephyr

Tuyere Command Post.  
  
After the Pig Iron mine attacks, we're taking some moments to reform before we progress onward into enemy territory properly. Seems it was needed, most people didn't turn out for even a conversation. Guess rest is healthy. I spoke at length with Leixxia and Vatorn, which was pleasant enough. Differing views on things, and ideas we have. Also about what comes after the Vigil, and my family. It felt good to talk about it with someone after just keeping it in my head for so long.  
It's worth it. Really is.  
  
  
You know, thinking about it more, everything is a matter of perspective. Are we good people? Is the Vigil just? I hope so, because we at least claim to fight for a greater good. Our oath is about drawing a sword against a naked evil that would destroy us, if we didn't destroy it first. It's a war we've been fighting for hundreds of years, but only recently learned how to win. It is when we stray from the true purpose of fighting the dragons that things become muddier. This operation, for instance. We are fighting Flame Legion, a far cry from being the corrupted servants of an eldritch power, it feels like we're just fighting them because the High Legions are. Of course, on some level, I know the Flame Legion are monsters at heart, which makes it easy to draw your sword against them, and cut them to ribbons. Spirits, I have a trophy skull! Killing should never be self-evident. I should question the actions I take, and those I expect of my troops. Bear knows it still shames me to admit that I rejoice in slaughter and battle every now and again. I kill because in order to preserve life. I suppose my sin and my burden is to decide which life is worth preserving, and which are forfeit, and then come for the reaping.  
  
What I think I'm trying to say is that we, as the Vigil, seem to be judge, jury and executioner. And we're self-righteous about it, too. Spirits, from an outside perspective, who holds us accountable? What happens if we are simply wrong sometimes? I pause when I think pack at those times we decided to root out a tribe of Grawl or Jotun without a second thought. We protect the innocent, but we determine who is innocent and who is not.  
Confusing. In the end it all hinges on our conscience, doesn't it? We keep ourselves in service of everything that is good and just, that is the correct path forwards to our own convictions.  
  
Of course, that's it. We are the Vigil, because we aspire to do good. Even if we don't always succeed, we try to uphold the lofty standards of our order in our judgement and everything we do, in the hope that the common conscience of our many Crusaders keeps us pointed in the right direction. I suppose that's something I can live with.  
  
Strange. I've never considered whether or not I truly was a good or a bad man before. You'd think that the Vigil makes it self-evident, but it doesn't. The Vigil doesn't make us good people. It's good people that make the Vigil what it is. Blegh, I'm tired, and rambling. I hope that, deep inside, I am a good man, and a good father, and that through some part of me, the Vigil is indeed a light in the darkness that never wavers.

# 43rd of Zephyr

Tuyere Command Post.  
  
Everything's quiet again. I sat through a lengthy command meeting with the High Legion Centurions running the operations here, and they want nothing less than to go beating on the doors of Hrangmer, and they'd like us to spearhead half of the actions alongside their own troops. Working with these warbands will be interesting, though we've agreed to keep the troops somewhat separated. The last time we had a full warband of Blood legion troopers in camp, tensions ran high. Hopefully that won't be an issue.  
  
It's been tiring. We'll move ahead in a few days, the Charr have sent out scouts and Ash Legion runners to contact the forward positions they've been establishing, hopefully allow us to operate throughout the region in relative safety. Well, that's the theory anyway. Working with Charr is interesting, to say the least. They're prepared for this war, and it isn't the first time they've fought it either. They push and pull, losing and gaining ground as they go. It's been a while since they've been this close back to Hrangmer, though. I'm glad they know the terrain somewhat, even if I don't like a lot of what they say about it. Every step on the offensives plan ahead sounds like it will a pain in the ass. Still, we've proven what we're worth in the Pig Iron mine. Few armies that can match us pace for pace on that sort of assault. I suppose I can be proud of my little band of jokers.  
  
I've found a nice piece of wood, against my expectations. It was adrift in the cistern, hardened and blackened by the tar. I cleaned the worst of it, but the remainder works like a finish and sealed the wood. I kept the tar I cleaned off in a jug, I'll use it to seal the carvings when I'm done. I'll start shaping it, before I'll set to working the wood. I'm thinking lions killing dragons as a motif to go around the the head, and carve a grip at about her shoulder-height. Then tar the entire thing. I should be able to finish that before leave, with the assault timetable. I'd love to take Kristen and the children back over there to Lion's Arch. I wonder if Aska's seen the sea? I'm sure Freyj will enjoy me taking Aska along for a day, considering Leif. Maybe we can even take Hildr. I'll see. It'll be good to be home, either way.

# 44th of Zephyr

Tuyere Command Post.  
  
Quiet. Klixxa ran the troops through sparring exercise, without any injuries, so I call that good work. It's good to see Klixxa grow into her role as First Crusader a bit more. Now all I need is an excellent report for it to be a straight success. All the troops in shape and ready to continue on with the offensives in the next coming days, so that's good at least.  
  
While the troops trained, I had a talk with Legs, that was interesting. She's apparently raised in Hoelbrak, though a good years apart. She must've had her youth there while I was in the bakery. It's not the first time I've met a norn that I've probably crossed paths with before, but can't remember. I wonder if I ever sold her any pastries, and we simply both can't recall the moment. I have to admit, I can't remember the face of the bakers and vendors that sold me food when I was young. Or the faces of everyone I've ever sold something to in the fifteen years I spent making and selling food. Ah well. She's also called Drakecarver because apparently she used to practice necromancy on the drakes near the Grawlenfjord. Bit of a dark image, isn't it?  
  
I'm tired and somewhat distracted. I think I'll go put the knife to the wood while there's still some light, before I go to sleep. Might as well keep the hands busy.

# 45th of Zephyr

Tuyere Command Post.  
  
Last day before the march deeper into Fireheart, onto a deeper staging post established by the Pact. From there, we can deploy all over the region and strike at enemy targets pretty much at will. There's Pact troops on site already securing the area, and we'll march in for the assault components. It seems Pact command is pretty set on driving the Flame Legion out, because we're deploying quite a large amount of assets into the area. Odd, but if command has an ulterior motive, they're not telling the Knights. Not yet. I suppose I might be a genuine good-natured effort to assist our allies. I'd think we'd be looking into White Mantle targets too, but what would they be looking for out here of all places? Well, I say that, but the Flame Legion has made weirder alliances in the past. Somehow, I'm happy I missed the serious fighting against Molten Alliance and Scarlet's other mad alliances.  
We'll see.  
  
The rest of the day was relatively quiet. We got a new recruit pass through, though the Legion pickets almost shot him straight in the face. I checked the registration seals on the transfer papers twice just to be sure but at least he had actual paperwork, so that's one better from our previous assassin. I'll keep an eye on him, I suppose.  
  
In other news, Sawyer, who was granted special leave some time ago to visit his father, is overdue his return to the ranks. That apparently worried Mithra quite a bit, she suspect the lad's father is causing an issue for him. I'll issue a note to the Divinity's Reach administration officer to look into things, see if he is indeed still present in his hometown, or at least they can ascertain what happened to him. Maybe he's just got lost on the way back to the front, considering it's halfway across Ascalon. Either case, I don't want to leap ahead and label him a deserter. That's pretty much the last thing he needs. Anyway, I'll work on it.  
  
Oh, and I had some boasting with Astrid. She's alright. Not as good as Lionhead or, spirits, Usha, but better than nothing. Got to keep the wit sharp, after all.

# 46th of Zephyr

Burnt Hollow.  
  
Moved camp to the Pact strongpoint in the region, which is located in a large natural hollow further west, inland. We had to cross through some large plains that looked like they'd could've been lush in the distant past, but were burnt to cinders. Ravaged by adult plains wurms too, though they didn't bother the column much. The camp itself is defensible enough, if you don't mind the possibility of getting bottled in. A large stone pillar supporting a particularly sturdy tree grew up from the middle, providing us with shelter, but the ceiling of the hollow is pretty much open. That wouldn't be a worry, if not for the fact we found a gas rent in the dirt smelling of rotting eggs. Probably some run-off from the Flame Legion slagging the ground, but it worries me. If there's active volcanic activity throughout the region, there's a seismic risk. Getting buried in here is one of my less-favourite ways to die. I've asked Seleea and Kraxxi to see if they can't set up a cheap seismograph that tells us if something untoward might happen.  
  
Thinking about volcanoes made me think... Wonder if the Pact supporting the Legions as much as they are now is because they think the Flame Legion are up to something with Primordius? That would certainly explain something about tremors, if there even are any. That might just be paranoia, though.  
  
We're pretty deep in the region, with at least two Flame Legion castrums south of us, and a bunch more to the north and north-east. No doubt we'll have our hands full in the following days. Still, surprisingly, Burnt Hollow is actually a fairly pleasant place. Nice than Tuyere, at least.  
  
Also think I managed to tick Claridge off by pointing out that Ascalon Settlement is in Kryta, and therefore Krytan, despite her being adamant that it somehow, after more than two-hundred and fifty years on Krytan soil, they're still somehow related to the pale Wall-monkeys from Ebonhawke. I guess that means I'm from the Far Shiverpeaks, and a proud inhabitant of Varajar Fells! Humans, pfah. And then they're surprised the Charr ate their country for breakfast. We norn had none of that country idiocy, and we bled the four-ears for every inch of snow into the mountains!  
Anyway. Maeva spoke about perhaps writing Lionhead for leave. Since I was planning on that anyway, that sounds lovely. I'll have to find a spot of time to get the kids and Kristen out through the gate, and who-ever of the extended family that happens to be around. I wonder of Freyj and Grace have managed to stamp that library out of the ground, with Aska into the mix. It's hard enough to bring books to a people that doesn't usually read without a six-year old running amok.

# 47th of Zephyr

Burnt Hollow.  
  
Deployment into some bleak grounds south, all Grawl territory. Apparently the Spooks have been cracking away at getting them to work with us against the Flame Legion. You'd think that would come naturally, but it really doesn't. The one tribe we got sent towards was actually worshipping a chunk of Asuran refuse that was, according to Klixxa, highly radioactive, whatever that means, and would probably have turned the tribe into mushy peas sooner rather than later. They called it the God's Eye. A Godforged Flame Legion shaman tried to influence the Grawl by posing as the voice of their god. Unfortunately, he was entirely unprepared for the Vigil section on top of his supposed patron, and was cut down *quite quick*. The same Spook agent that's helped us in Rebel's Seclusion was on site too, and actually was able to provide a hazard suit for Klixxa to take apart the God's Eye. Felt like we had a moral obligation to remove a highly dangerous chunk of Asuran debris from the Grawl, except removing it would have caused a minor crisis within the tribe, and probably not have garnered their goodwill. So, Klixxa tried to fix it instead, quite possibly almost blowing us up in the bargain, considering the rather ominous beeping that came from the device. Though, eventually, she defused it. I had to tell the local Grawl tribe leader that we were here to cure their god, which had the desired effect that the Grawl tribe now view us as divine messengers. I suppose at least that made sure they listened to my suggestions to counter the Flame Legion actions throughout the territory.  
I don't feel too well about having to employ deceit on the Grawl, feels like taking advantage of some children. I suppose it's better that we're the ones keeping the Grawl in track, rather than the Flame Legion, who take them for slaves, but still. Doesn't really make us seem like the good guys if we employ the weapons and methods of our enemies for our own goals. Regardless, having the Grawl on our side, and actively opposing the Flame Legion wilkl severely hinder their operations throughout the region. The Grawl may be idiots, but they seem to be quite sizeable; I think there are at least four tribes in this region alone. If all of them unite in a common cause, that'd give even us pause.  
  
Anyway, I won't see tomorrow's operation, though, I'm being recalled to Severed Breach about an engineering thing with some of the local cannon batteries there. Nothing major, just an advisory course by an Iron Legion Centurion about some of the field artillery they're going to be using in the field. It'll take a day of instruction, but it should keep me up to date on the latest Iron Legion technology. But that's tomorrow.  
  
Oh, and apparently Cheery wants to, uh, perform a medical check about my prostrate. Which is a small gland in my ass. So, that's weird. I don't really look forward to it, but apparently it's very important for my health? I'm... uh. Worried in the extreme. Yeah. That's the term.  
I don't want to explain that to Kristen either, ugh.  
  
I think I'll just focus on the equipment course.

# 48th of Zephyr

Severed Breach.  
  
Boch, long day. Engineers Roteye and Rawscowl from the High Legions put me through a lengthy equipment review, most notably of which was a train of siege cannons they pulled into position. They're enormous, apparently mobile versions of the titan-cannon at Skara Braevus. They've been brought over to lay waste to the many Flame Legion castrums throughout the regions, a task for which they might be uniquely suited. They might well be some of the most awe-inspiring siege weapons I've ever seen towed into place, on par with the Asuran megalasers I've seen used in the past. I'm glad we won't be on the receiving end of it.  
  
That was most of the day, however. I'll be returning to the Chapter on the morning again, so we can continue operations. I hope Klixxa and Forgewood kept Blade in good order while I was away.

# 49th of Zephyr

Burnt Hollow.  
  
I returned to the Hollow in the morning, after yesterday's day out with the artillery. Seems I didn't miss too much, asides from operations in the region. Apparently Blade squad did quite well under Klixxa, which is excellent. I reviewed her operations report from yesterday, when they assisted some local Grawl dealing with a harpy flock. Nothing major, considering the notion they could be squaring off against Flame Legion troops, but it at least makes me feel more secure about leaving the squad in Forgewood's and Klixxa's hands. That's always good to know. Perhaps i'll let them take operation leads a few times in future, and remain in an observatory role for the time being.  
  
Asides from that, nothing new. The High Legions troops seized a castrum in our backline, and are holding it against the Flame Legion. With the big cannons they're dragging in place, they'll have most of the territory south of us fully under control soon. That should be good for our supply lines, that's for certain.  
We got another recruit sent up as well, with the rather funny name of Lightbringer. Recruit Lightbringer. We'll see how he does? Oh, and Morne apparently has been keeping some contraband, though hardly on purpose. I made him aware of the regulations; hopefully he'll get rid of whatever contraband he's got stashed up before he'll run foul of a routine check.  
  
That's about the extent of it, for today.

# 50th of Zephyr

Burnt Hollow.  
  
Still here, in our little cavern of joy. That's not as awful as you'd think, though, the cave has a certain echo-y charm about it. In addition, Seleea and Kraxxi set up their seismograph readers with an alert golem in case we have have any surprises. The notion that I'm currently sitting here, quietly taking notes while most of the encampment is in some form of rest is, therefore, pretty stellar. Just the rustle and bustle of camp life.  
Small note about the area of operations is that Sinclair spotted something odd on the perimeter, and Legs took out a small recon patrol to chase it down. Some Flame Legion troops trying to skirt around us and set to work on some sort of magical weapon out in the wasteland to our south-east. With the Grawl agitated, that pets them in a pretty poor position, squeezed between the heavy guns of the Iron Legion at Severed Breach, the Pact troops here, and at least three agitated native tribes composed of six-hundred pound ape-men who term their warriors "berserkers", and are primarily armed with the *sharpened bones of their enemies*. It's actually surprising most people aren't more intimidated by Grawl. Probably has to do with the stupidity.  
  
In other, probably worse, news, we heard back about Sawyer. The district officer in the Reach apparently kicked down the door on the mansion of Sawyer's family and found the lad to be badly beaten. Of course the father claims they were accosted by brigands, which I suppose is technically possible. Sawyer himself, for what it's worth, seems to corroborate this, but it still smells like bad fish. I suppose we'd hear about it when he returns, but that will be a while. The district officer wrote us that Sawyer's been hospitalized until further notice, and is expected to be spending quite some time recovering. I've asked Vatorn to perhaps draw us a nice "get well" card, so we can pass it around Blade and send it over for the extra morale boost. I'm sure he'll appreciate the notion.  
  
But yes, everything remains quite quiet here, for now, as we wait for the offensives to resume. It's always a bit of a stop-start. The good news is that Lionhead's walking stick is nearly done, so that's something I suppose. I did some finishing touched, before tarring the entire thing using a boot-brush. The finish will dry, and I have a feeling it come out quite well! I'll just have to keep it with me, along with the Godforged skull until leave hits. The nice thing about Knighthood is that I get slightly better pick on tenting space, and I can usually dump some of my extra kit in the command tent. The other officers don't touch my stuff anyway. That's nice about having all women in the officer's corps, they take purse-pilfering very seriously. Or at least, that's the excuse I'll keep.  
  
Been having random thoughts about home all day. Just, you know, thinking how random people are doing. That's still a little strange. I remember writing about Freyja more often, or thinking about the past. Now, simply wrapping my head about everything that could be going on while I'm out here leaves no room for that. Freyj is firmly establishing her own family, though not in any way I'd ever expect. Aska and Grace were surprises that I'm still barely aware of. Spirits, I hardly realise that means I'm supposed to be a grandafther of sorts now. Usha and the cubs is another matter. I never thought Usha would change, but she flipped the table herself with the entire Order of Whispers thing. That dust is still settling, leaving me with a bad mix of melancholy friendship and a sense of betrayal. The spirits guide me through that one. Then there's the little Jotunling, whom I miss a lot, with Hrist and Hildr attached. Them's a special case too. They're family in a sense, but on the periphery of it all. Strangest of all is that I don't really see Reuzen as being Hrist's child, even though he is? I mean, to me, he's my son, and to me, that means Kristen is as much his mother as Hrist is. On a purely cerebral level, I understand that's not true, but that's the way I still think about it. And of course I think about Kristen a lot, especially about her having a child. Sometimes I wonder if it's all going too fast. I mean, I din't want it to stop, at all, but it is just... so much, and I'm not there to experience it all. Spirits, I'm barely home, yet I've somehow managed to triple my family circle in a few years.  
It's just... chaotic. Making sense of it all is hard. I don't know, maybe I should just let it all fall into place, and let it all sort itself out.  
Maybe once Kristen has her baby, we should leave Hoelbrak. Or not, I don't know, at least Hoelbrak is safe.  
Spirits, strange that it can feel crowded, and I'm not even there. Maybe I'm just getting homesick, and feeling left out of my own family. I don't know.  
I could use some leave.  
  
Or a letter.

# 51st of Zephyr

Burnt Hollow.  
  
Still in our cave. Forgewood took the troops out training formations today, which went well enough. I took a moment to hammer our the importance of cohesion doctrine, which was what we've been lacking in the field. Hopefully that'll improve in a few days when we make our advance pushes again. Always the hurry-up-and-wait, hurry-up-and-wait. I suppose I should be getting used to such a... how would you even call it? Cyclic? In waves? Whatever type of living in the war here. No, Klixxa and Foregwood are doing quite well, can't say I'm displeased. I was worried Forgewood's period in the jungle had shaken her up, but she's recovering fine. So is Klixxa, growing into her role as second.  
Lance did a similar sort of sit-in as I did, where Legs introduced herself to her squad, and had them think about their own identity. But, apparently, Lance's troops take their duty a lot less serious than Blade does, which prompted Legs and I to share a moment of mild despair for their mental sanity. Belmont and Sinclair saved the day by actually coming up with something somewhat decent in the end. Well, I guess the simply illustrates why Blade's the better unit! Pfah, that sort of none-sense is idiotic, of course, but a certain level healthy competition is always good, as long as it remains friendly. Brings out the best in troops.  
  
Vatorn also finished the get-well card I asked for, which turned out to be quite nice. I've left it with an attendant on watch in the command room, in case folks want to come and sign off on it. Seems that quite a few have! That's always good. I'll let it sit for another small day before putting up in the post. Sawyer will be pleased, I hope.  
  
I'd say the day passed without injuries, but I'd be lying. Claridge, after spending some time about forage, went into meditation, and some of the new recruits thought it was a good idea to 'spook' her out of it. That apparently sent Claridge into some sort of trance-induced coma. Or something. She's asleep, essentially, and we can't wake her up. Cheery's keeping her in medical until she wakes up.  
  
Talking about Cheery, she apparently keeps a large bloody spider as a pet now, and is catching rodents to feet to it. What's worse, she apparently nicked the critter from the Hellion Forest, the one awash with ghosts and other horrors. With our luck, it turns out to be a Terrorweb Dryder or something. Bah! Morne is on a similar critter streak, apparently keeping a small devourer hatchling he's somehow caught, and making it fight other critters. At least, until it escaped. He apparently forgot they're burrowers. Tsh. I've instructed him to catch it, though that's more because I feel actions like this should have a consequence, than for any hope he'll actually catch a devourer. We're in Ascalon, after all, devourers are native here. No doubt his little "Gladys" just decided to buzz off back to whatever nest it came from.  
  
Recruits.  
Anyway, at least Sigra's concocted a keg of cider, using some apples we'd procured in the supplies. I'll be having a nice taste of that come morning, to clear the head, before I'll see if there's some leftover moa left to nibble on.  
Small things, eh.

# 52nd of Zephyr

Burnt Hollow.  
  
So, uh, special thing happened today; Kathleen Beaumont was reassigned to the Chapter. As a recruit. I didn't expect that to happen, that's for sure, but it is sort of... okay to see her again, I guess? She's changed a bit, has half of her hair brushed to one side, and wearing a somewhat ridiculous top that really brings out her breasts, much to the enjoyment of some recruits, and the regret of Claridge. Apparently. I sincerely thought she and Sanaje were off on their own, and I know I resented that for a long time. Now, I'm not so sure. No word on what passed between her and Sana either, which makes me think something went terribly awry.  
Either case, Beaumont is broke as all hell, and apparently enlisted again for the base pay, and sent back here. I'll have to have a word with her at one point, suss out what actually happened.  
  
I'm getting ahead of myself anyway, we actually picked up Kath from Tuyere while we were collecting a supply train. Apparently she's one of the new recruits they've been sending up the line to us. I suppose having Kath back in the rotation is nice in the sense that it's a familiar face. Plus, I think our guardians can really learn a thing or two about stamina management. It's strange having her as recruit, though, I mean, she used to be my Tactician. I think I accidentally called her ma'am earlier, for some reason.  
Ah well. An extra guardian in the line for when we march against the Flame Legion. That can never hurt.  
  
In other news, Claridge woke up, without any apparent injury, which is good. She was a little off-tilt because of Kath returning too, doubly so because she apparently didn't remember who Claridge was. I have a small feeling Claridge might have had an overly-positive impression of Kath during her tenure as officer, and is now proving to be a little too zealous.  
  
Anyway, I'm going to get some rest.  
Huh, you know, I actually don't think Kath knows I'm married. Spirits, it hasn't been that long, has it? More than a year? Time passes so strangely when you're in the field. Sometimes it feels like we've been out here for years at a time, but the seasons don't budge. I guess everything back home changing so fast also helps make everything feel so... well, just different. I suppose we'll see how much Kath has actually changed in due time.

# 53rd of Zephyr

Burnt Hollow.  
  
Spirits, I'm tired. Hot and tired.  
We attacked Vidius Castrum today, the one castrum that still lies to the south to us. The Iron Legion got their big guns into position, and we were first through the door when the walls came crumbling down. And spirits, what a delicious sound, the blast of three heavy siege guns pounding away at the castrum walls... And then the storm. That was actually the easier part, which is not too surprising, considering those Iron Legion guns must've crushed more than a few of the Flame Legion troops inside the castrum to a thin paste. No, the real issue was the counter-attack. The Flame Legion tried to swarm us with effigies. And not just a few, but a small army of them. They lumbered into, all-but unstoppable, fire and heat radiating from them strong enough to scorch flesh. Without our elementalists, we'd have been overrun, for certain. Even so, we came close to breaking at one point. We tried holding our ground, but the effigies didn't slow down. I had to bash them back every so often, but that took a lot out of me. In the end, I think we broke whatever spell held them together, because their inner fire consumed them, and turned them to cinders. We got back home after that soon enough, thankfully.  
  
I'm exhausted, really, from the fight. The magical fire, and the sheer physical effort of wrestling with huge walking monsters made out of flaming wicker. I just took a nap for an hour, let my skin touch the cold rock. That was good.  
One of the new recruit, Ilthy, was acting a little weird on the picket. I was having a discussion with Claridge about good and evil (and Raven's feathers, never put Claridge in a spot with decision-making powers) when the kid ran off to some tree, and tore something down. He tried to yakdung me into believing it was a page of his journal, but I don't really believe him. I find his behaviour rather suspicious. Will probably have his tent searched come morning for any contraband, see if he's hiding something.  
  
Anyway, sleep now, for my tired head.

# 54th of Zephyr

Burnt Hollow.  
  
Okay, where to start.  
Today we set out on what, on paper, should've been a simple assault patrol to stop the Flame Legion from establishing a stronghold on our flank. Which, incidentally, they were, but not in any force that would've proven problematic. They had a magma moat, and a shaman trying to shape a castrum, but it wasn't any threat just yet. We managed to storm their magma-enclosed island by crossing over some narrow rock bridges, and simply putting them all to the sword. No, the real twister was that apparently some bat-shit crazy Asura built a lad down the throat of the magma chute forming the moat. We had that same Spook who's been assisting us throughout the region show up again; she roped us into finding a way into this Asuran lab. It was a huge risk to take, but since I rather dread the idea of say, the Inquest and Flame Legion working together in some sort of magma-lad on our flank, I felt it was within our mission parameters to at least assert the threat.  
Well, that turned out to be a whole different game of Keg Brawl.  
  
I declared the mission volunteer only, but only Beaumont elected to stay behind, so we gave her a timed frame to wait for us, before she was to return to base and report our last known position. The rest of us, well, the Spook made a daring run across a series of disappearing hard-light platforms that lead into an Asura gate down a winding maw of magma, and then pulled us through with a mesmer portal. Lo and behold, we're in some underground super-lab. Turned out to be areal nightmare. There were dragon minions kept in cages, and huge aquariums filled with fully-grown sharks. There was a room which was just all built wrong. Staircases leading to no-where, impossible walkways, and dead-ends, all suspended in the air. The platforms were connected by small portals that just made you appear all over the room. We could see the exit, far above us in a corner, but it was Klixxa that eventually sussed out the right order of gates to go through. Well, she did at one point make a gamble, and leapt through a portal that put her a good two dozen meters up in the air. Thankfully, I was watching closely and with Bear's strength was able to catch her before she turned into Asura much on the hard tiles. We then had to walk over narrow bridges and jump through a series of portals, some of which dropped you out upside down and a few meters up. At one point, we all just ended up in a pile. It's a small wonder none of us got injured, or worse, killed in the chaos. We eventually managed to make it through, leading to the already mentioned aquariums.  
At the very end, we found the lab's sole Asura, a rarity for an Asura lab. He, or she, was wearing a rather huge golem suit, and was awaiting us on a large series of light-platforms suspended over a tank of sharks.  
  
No, really.  
  
I ordered us forwards, by sheer dint of any other choice, and we quickly overwhelmed the golem-suit and the pilot. The later ejected and got away though, damn it all, and were left stranded with a golem wreck above a shark tank. Thankfully, and for some inconceivable reason, there was an Asura gate in the actual shark tank. Deciding to take a serious risk, I went through it, and ended up right outside where we started again. The rest of the squad followed soon, ending a quite... strange and terrifying foray into what I assume was a delusional and insane Asuran madman 's toybox. But, even so, mission accomplished, and the Spooks now have a good idea what to expect when they send in their team to have a look.  
It's so... fantastical I'm still not entirely sure it was all real.  
  
Other things, I saw the Spook draw in Forgewood. Strange, never thought Forgewood swung that way, or much less, swung that way so quickly, though I suppose I can't judge. Or, I mean, I really can, but only as an officer, not as a person. That reminds me, I need to circulate a small notice, just for troop discipline.  
  
Also, that recruit Ilthy that I mentioned yesterday was placed under arrest, after I saw him eyeball medical repeatedly. I already had his tent searched this morning, along with all of Blade's recruits, but found nothing. Well, now, on a hunch, I asked Cheery and Ceridwen, who were both in medical, to step outside. And yes, soon enough, our own Ilthy Lightbringer darts inside. Unfortunately for him, I was watching, and had him halted outside. Cheery checked the stocks, and it doesn't look like he's stolen anything, which just makes me more suspicious. He himself claims he was trying to leave behind a gift for medical, but forgot it, which is about as flimsy as it can get. I don't know what to think really, he seems like a nice enough kid, but then he goes ahead and pulls this sort of weird yakdung that makes him look like a saboteur! Bah. I'll write to the Vigil Keep to ensure he is actually who he is, and his paperwork isn't falsified. I'll have his kit checked again, as well as have Cheery comb through medical. If nothing turns up, I suppose I'll have no choice but to let the boy go. Still. Hrm.  
  
So, aye, it's been a long, long, long day, and I need some rest. At least it'll be a good tale to tell back home.

# 55th of Zephyr

Burnt Hollow.  
  
Ugh, I fell asleep on a rock. Well, "ugh", it wasn't actually that bad, but my neck is killing me from the awkward angle. I'm surprised no-one woke me up, but then again, I did say I went for a nap. At least I'm cooled down a little from earlier.  
  
We raided another Flame Legion castrum that might as well have been a hollowed-out volcano. Out in the middle of a plains that was literally raining embers down on us, was a rent in the ground pulsing with magma. That was the castrum. We assaulted the place, but thankfully Blade only had to hold the entryways while Lance combed through what I can only imagine was a literal rock-oven. They pulled out some captives, which we escorted back. I don't even want to think about how hot it got in there. I was already sweating my boots full just standing outside. The heat just radiated, like the ovens used to do, in the bakery, except I was wearing several inches of steel. The land was so touched with the Flame Legion's magic, ember elementals simply formed out of the thin sky. We eventually managed to pull out again, with about three prisoners in tow.  
  
I was fighting, pulling apart the embers until they dissolved, and feeling the occasional scorch bounce off my armour, everything slick with sweat. It was almost like a bad dream of being stuck in the Underworld. Coupled with the near-insanity we encountered yesterday... I don't know. It's hard to take it all in today. Falling asleep mid-day doesn't help, that just makes everything seem even more distant than it already is. I think I dreamed about upside-down stairs, and being stuck in spirals. Strange.  
  
On recruit Lightbringer's case, scourging medical for any missing supplies didn't turn up anything, nor did his belongings. At this rate, I'll have to actually consider he was just being an idiot, but didn't actually have any bad intent; and then I'll release him. Regardless, I'll keep a close eye on him in the future. At this point, we're essentially just waiting for confirmation from command that he is indeed enlisted with us, which I don't think will come back as a negative at this point. Seems all of yesterday's hubba-dub was just a false positive.  
  
Eh well. The good thing is that today's operation does bring us closer to Hrangmer, which seems to be the end goal of the campaign. Not entirely sure why command is sending us here, but I suppose I'll hear that specific objective when I should. I'm looking forward to ending this. I miss not sleeping alone.

# 56th of Zephyr

Burnt Hollow.  
  
All is quiet, asides from Vatorn whetting his whistle on some Priory bird. Bloody, I let Forgewood off the hook once, and it instantly turns into an all-you-can-eat! I already circulated a notice within the First Crusaders not watch their behaviour, but I had to put the entire Chapter on notice now. Of course, Vatorn was acting smug about it, even though I reprimanded him on the matter. Even tried to imply I was jealous. Now *that* was funny.  
  
Anyway, it's quiet. We're taking a moment to recover from the operations, while the High Legions work in the area. It's good that we're able to pace ourselves through it.  
  
Had a long talk with Leixxia. Was good.  
I'm tired though. It is uncommonly warm here, for being late Zephyr. The good news is that we're set to move up north in a few days to Haymal Gore, to the north-west. That's on the foothills of the Shiverpeaks, so melting snow will come running down. It'll be cooler there, I hope.

# 57th of Zephyr

Burnt Hollow.  
  
Few more days until we march off. I took a long watch, short of needed to clear my mind of hellish castrums, and absurd Asuran torture rooms. And create a little bit of distance between myself and everyone else, just to hear myself think, or to focus on other things. Small things.  
It's hard to explain.  
  
I left Ilthy out of house arrest today, we got the letter back from command, clearing. I feel silly for letting that get the better off of me, though I feel that, in my defense, he did act a little off. Guess he just has to find his groove, all of this is new for him, after all.  
  
Hm. I should write Kristen. I haven't yet, and I feel there's a lot for me to say. Good words, kind words. Sometimes, being so far apart, it all just becomes a little too detached. Kristen exists as a concept in my head, living her life and doing her things, but I'd almost forget she's actually out there, breathing the mountain air, and striding through the snows. I haven't seen her since I left from Wulfbane's lodge. Doesn't know I'm a Knight either. Or anything, really. Spirits, that must be hard on her too.

# 58th of Zephyr

Burnt Hollow.  
  
Medical training for the grunts today, which was good. It's nice to see Cheery ensure we're all somewhat familiar with our first aid and triage kits. I've never really forgotten how to do basic aid, considering how often you're fixing up small cuts. Or much bigger cuts, on occasion, though thankfully that's rarer. Anyway, everyone seemed to take to things well, even though there was the occasional questionable act. Here's hoping they don't need it in the field.  
  
It's relatively quiet throughout the region for the remainder, at least on our end. We're being saved up so our casters can recover. The High Legions will have their proverbial paws full building up the defense lines and repelling the enemy counter-attacks here and there. Luckily, we seem to be outside enemy reach just yet, which gives the entire camp a strange sense of security. Shelter, is what it is. It's nice, when the sun rises, and filters in through the leaves shielding the hollow from the outside. The Ascalonian weather up here is mild, and rain is never more than a mild sprinkle that barely comes down to the ground. The trees snaking around the central pillar eagerly suck in all the water, and hoard it for themselves. On the floor below, not even grass grows. The trees cling to life like newborn children to their mother. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised to note that Ascalon is home to resilient plant- and wildlife. What the Flame Legion didn't torch, was scoured away and turned to ash by the Searing, and then the Brandstorm.  
  
It's been a while since I've just looked at things, and tried to simply see them for what they are. Nature's marvels. I remember writing full of wonder about the Orrian arches and structures, the size of mountains. The world is a beautiful place, with all the flaws and wonders of the world laid bare. Having the legend of a hero is a great aspiration, to be timeless and eternal like the mountains and the snow. There is something restful about contemplating being a mountain, and simply being. Perhaps that's how how the Deldrimor Dwarves felt when they turned to stone? Ah, the Dwarves. I think our peoples would've done well, if they had still been in southern mountains when Jormag rose. Besides, I heard they made good ale too. Stout.  
  
Mhm. I think Hejja is a good name, if it's a girl. Hejja Tzahrsdottir.  
I wrote Kirsten, as I said I would. Left me empty. Keep thinking I should've written more, but then I didn't. I forgot, or... I don't know. It is almost as if I can't make the quill write what I really want to tell her. It feels strange to be so passionate to a piece of paper. There are things that simply can only be said when you holding one another, or they are empty words. Worse, they seem cheesy and childish. I hate that I feel stupid for wanting to write down I miss her. But I do, and I can't. Spirits, I suppose this is what they mean when they say it is hard to be so long apart so often. I suppose it's simply part of what we've chosen for ourselves. Kristen's probably doing better, Leopard as she is.  
  
Spoke to Morne briefly. Interesting man. Bitter, lost a woman with their child. I can only thank the Spirits for only taking one Freyja away from me all those years ago, or I would've know the same pain. I cannot imagine the sort of agony that brings to someone. Hm. Hail to the fallen, may their spirits be free to hunt and feast as they would in the Hall of Spirits.  
  
Oh, before I forget, completely unrelated: Forgewood and Spooky Mel came over to request a formal relationship. That was fast. Either poor Forgewood was really in need of some loving, or the Spook just completed the world's speediest honeypot trap. I mean, asides from the, uh, let's say auspicious speed, though, there really isn't a reason why we should deny the request. Still, surprising, mostly because it was unexpected.

# 59th of Zephyr

Last day in Burnt Hollow, tomorrow we're marching north to Haymal Gore.  
Can do for a change in scenery.  
  
I'm tired today, don't think I'll write much. Busy mind, tired hands, they make for a poor combination.  
  
Some new Charr joined the ranks, apparently a victim of a unit that got degraded out in the field, and was lobbed over to us. Seems in order. Has grand ideas about working with our elementalists on some spell or something that will help in the field. She seemed enthousiastic to put it into practice. Would be nice to put some of the strain off, I think, though I'm not so sure I actually understood the goal of the spell. It's some kind of shield, I think, like what Vatorn uses to protect himself in a pinch.  
  
It'll be nice to be out where it's colder again, at last for a little while.

# 60th of Zephyr

Haymal Gore, down at the feet of the mountains. In fact, an ice slab hangs over the entire camp. The Kodan who have made their residence here along with some norn have built into the rock hollow. Norn biergarten and drinking halls stand side by side with the Kodan's ice-encrusted pagodas. Out in the water floats a small iceberg proudly bearing the symbol of Koda, linked to the land with a pontoon bridge fashioned out of floating kegs and sturdy wooden rigging. It's a strange displaced thing. The lake side opposite to us is littered with crumbing ruins, though I'm not so sure if they are still Ascalonian this far north. I think we're closer to the ancestral lands of the Stone Summit and Deldrimor now. It is a nice change from lowland Ascalon and the blasted wastes of Fireheart rise that you find further south. Thankfully, the march here was uneventful.  
  
The area itself is oddly position, in the hollow below and overhanging ice sheet that drips down into the lake when the temperature rises above the nill. The only approach is a long donwhill trek from the top of the ridge, dotted by braziers kept alight by the locals here. There are many of them too, Kodan warriors and settlers, as well as a smattering of norn living in some harmony. There seems to be a deep bond between my people and the Kodan, which I find pleasing to observe. There is something serene, if deeply tragic, about the bear-folk trudging around. Makes me wish I spoke more with the one Kodan Crusader we have following us around.  
Anyway, asides from the one approach, we're basically locked in by the water and the ice. It makes for an exceptionally scenic view, but it is a little bit of a weird one military speaking. I've asked to set out a sentry on the top of the ridge, so we have some early warning. If we get attacked in force, however, we'd do best to retreat over the pontoon to the Kodan iceberg. It'll leave us exposed to ranged attacks, but it's defensible ground. It's either that or make a stand in the norn lodges. Either way, we'd have to repulse or die fighting. I had a small idea to put in place a safety switch that could cause part of the ice sheet to collapse and bury any would-be attackers, but that was deemed too risky. Not to mention the potential damage we could cause to ourselves. At least none of the locals seem adverse to a fight. They are all armed, and I think a disproportionately large part of the Kodan here are Icehammers. Probably also why this settlement is standing, and hasn't garnered much Flame Legion attention. Here's hoping they still don't, we could outflank the main warfront nicely if we find a way through the area due east.  
  
I've already been enjoying myself, really. The local norn put a few kegs of surprisingly good ale at our disposal as a gesture of hospitality, and I had a few mugs in. Then I had a swim in the lake, which was bloody refreshing. Only downside is that there are very big ice wurms burrowing down the water, and one tried to snap my leg off. Missed, but gave me a fright and a half. I have problems with being in water with big things below me, they remind me too much of that fatal night at sea when the schooner sank. That still makes me lose my nerve. I think I'll steer clear of the water for a bit, unless I really have to. At least it was fun while it lasted, I suppose.  
You know, this is the soot of place I wish Kristen was here for. It's like that time we went out hunting in Frostgorge, and saw the Blue Ice Shining. That was pleasant. I doubt I'll be able to spend much more time like that, what with the expending family. Perhaps I should consider taking an extended leave to go lodge-building at one point in the future, then come back? After the baby is born, perhaps. Maybe take a season to go scouting for a location, and actually fell some trees and build us a home. Maybe even in a place like this, near a lake, with a beautiful view. Though perhaps not with this many Kodan.

# 61st of Zephyr

Durmand Priory, Lornar's Pass.  
Yes. Somehow.  
  
Blade squad, back in Fireheart, was tasked earlier today with investigating a cave where an entire Chapter went missing a few years ago. Not something we'd usually bother with, except that we recently found remains of those Dawn Chapter people in Lornar's Pass. The Warmaster and I went into some caves below the Priory and found those Fleshreavers, with the remains. Seemed that they didn't 'disappear' as much as they got displaced. The notion that I'm currently in the Priory again, despite that being *quite* far away from Fireheart, should be noted.  
Anyway, i'm getting ahead of myself. Warmaster decided that, with some of Dawn's Chapter physical remains recovered, we'd do them the honour of putting our Occult department to use, and perhaps shed some light on what actually happened.  
We found the cave alright, littered with old camp remains. We started poking around with Klixxa's datamgic camera, until she apparently tripped something, and the cave started flooding with hordes of spirits, or illusions, including what looked like a big Fleshreaver spirit. Klixxa was fiddling with the apparatus, and when I leaned in to check out what it was, there was a thunderclap, and before I knew anything else I had a mouthful of dirt and was rolling down a rocky incline in between the Shiverpeaks. Thankfully, I ended up in view of a road, and after taking a reading with my sextant and astrolabe, I headed north. Took an hour or so before I found anyone, who could tell me I was in southern bloody Lornar's Pass! Bah! I haven't seen anyone else of Blade either, so I have no idea if it's just me, or of the others got thrown around as well. Spirits, they could be dead for all I know, ripped apart in a cataclysmic explosion. I have no idea.  
  
Either way, once I somewhat knew where I was, I decided to head north to the Durmand Priory. Took me most of the day and the evening. I passed a Priory camp called Rocklair set on a crossroads where I was able to get some food and water from the Scholars to go with my pack. They were keen enough to help me when I told them how badly I got separated from my unit. They even offered me some rest, but I decided to press on for the Priory itself. I underestimated the trek, and spent most of the evening plodding though the narrow mountain passes in the dark, before I finally saw the bridge spanning the pass, and was able to make my way inside.  
  
By sheer dumb chance, Freyja, Grace and Aska are here. Freyja was happy if bewildered to see me, which I can understand, since everyone thinks I'm in northern Ascalon. It was a good surprise though. They're apparently here trying to make a selection of appropriate norn-centric works and for recording some of the skaald tales on paper, all to go into the new study post Freyj want to turn into the first norn library. Aska is well too, she's learning how to read proper with Grace helping her. The three of them seem happy, at least. I'm was honestly too tired and confused to do much of anything except give a brief explanation of what happened, and tell her I need to get back to Fireheart as quickly as I possibly can. Freyj's said she'll write a letter to the Chapter while I get some rest. Probably a good idea, that.  
  
Tomorrow, I'll pass through to Lion's Arch, report to Fort Marriner, before taking the gate through to Hoelbrak. From there, and with some good marching, I should be able to go far north again, and reach Eartshake in a few days time. The good thing is that I'll have a moment to pass by Kristen. Give me an hour to pour all of those feelings that never make it onto the paper into actions, before I'll be forced by necessity to move on again.  
  
Spirits, the Chapter must be going haywire. What if all of Blade was destroyed? Maybe it's just me?  
Well, at least I suppose it means something that I've ended up in Lornar's Pass, like those unfortunates of Dawn Chapter. Thankfully, however, no Fleshreavers. Just a long day-trek.

# 62nd of Zephyr

Hoelbrak.  
  
Confusing day. I woke up in the Priory, and panicked, because I'd forgotten where I was. Freyja was there, though, with a pan of ridiculously thick salted Dolyak bacon and raptor eggs, along with Aska and Grace. They kept it out on the fire until I was awake. I must've been more tired than I thought, because I slept until noon. I had to explain it all again to the three of them. In truth, it helped me get a grip on it all myself, just to go over it all. I suppose it's not the fist time I've ran afoul of magical things I don't fully understand, and I doubt it will be the last. I'll have to chalk 'being spat out across half of Tyria' as another accidental achievement for the Skaalds to talk about. Aska, at least, seemed thoroughly fascinated. It's good to see she's moved on a little, and Freyj and Grace seem to be doing quite well in keeping the child energized.  
I left a few hours later, after having ensured Freyj did indeed send a letter to the Warmaster. I hope everyone, and everything is alright. Spirits, here's hoping they didn't pull up a massive search operation, or worse, lost more folks doing so. Here's hoping I was the only one to be displaced.  
  
I was able to report to the fort in Marriner in the afternoon, though I had to wait a while for them to confirm my identity. I was also debriefed, or rather, interrogated, by a rather dour Warmaster for an hour or so. Eventually, they just told me to return to the Chapter within the next couple of days, circumstances permitting. Ironically, it took so long it was almost evening by the time I was able to get to Hoelbrak, so I've decided to stay the evening, before I'll try and make the two-day trek to Yak's Bend. From there, i should be able to get over the Rime Moraine to Earthshake, and then into Fireheart.  
  
Today, though, it is unspeakably good to be home. I surprised Kristen in Leopard lodge. She looks well, now into her third season. You can even see the bump on her belly starting to form. I did as I promised myself; picked her up, and pressed a good kiss right on her belly-button. Say hello to my new son or daughter, eh? She was surprised to see me, of course, but never in a bad way. I'm actually happy Marriner took a while, now I get to spend the remainder of the evening and night here! The little Jotunling was already asleep, however, but I'll be sure to go see my boy at least once tomorrow, before I march on. For now though, I have an evening to spend with my beautiful wife.

# 63rd of Zephyr

Cragstead.  
  
Long trek today. I didn't leave as early as I should have, for obvious reasons. Went to see the little one, and then got caught up in talking with folks. Hildr seems to be doing a little better, and the boy himself was looking healthy. It's surprising how fast they grow, probably made worse because I only seem him every once in a while. One day, I'm going to come back thinking he's still a babe, when he's been running on his own for a season. You'll see. Saw and spoke with Usha too. Was good. Not like it used to be good, but still better than it was. If that makes any sense.  
Anyway, eventually kissed Kristen goodbye again, and headed up north down the road. Managed to make good headway, and then I pressed on even further past the Haven to Cragstead here. Better hospitality than the Lionguard, plus it's on the road.  
  
Had a few beers; the locals here make that excellent Cragstead Red, which I personally adore. A skaald then told Eir Stegalkin's legend back-to-back with Braham Eirsson's. He hails from here, so he's a bit of a local hero. Made for good listening around the fire, along with heart food hunted from the foothills and Diessa. Worm bisque! Good norn food that half the Chapter would inexplicably take issue with. Ah well, more loss to them.  
  
Tomorrow come the hard bit, as I have to try and cross through Frostgorge. Not sure if I'll get there, it seems the weather might be turning. If that's the case, I'll try to get to Yak's Bend. Here's hoping it isn't a blizzard, or I might be stuck where I'm caught out for days. Thankfully, I've still got all my carry rations, so I wan't go hungry.  
Huh. Should've taken Kristen with me, she could've used a little trek while she's still nimble as a cat. Ah well, late thoughts for weary minds. I'm still a little shaken about what happened, but the good mountain air does good to clear the head. The Sylvari have a saying for this: "where life goes, so must you". Or something akin anyway.  
  
The only good thing about leaving home again today was knowing I won't be long away this time.

# 64th of Zephyr

Yak's Bend.  
  
Bad day. Was out trying to cross the Rime Moraine when a flash-blizzard blew through. Shuffled around some ice from the mountains too. It almost buried me. I had the quick wit to use my entrenching tool and hammer out a hollow in the side of an icewall to hide in. Don't know how long it lasted, but I only managed to dig myself out when it was past nightfall. Ice elementals stalked the area, and it was too dangerous to try and press on towards Earthshake.  
Thankfully, the folks at Yak's Bend were able to heat me a small keg of mulled win in exchange for a silver. It's been a while since I've ever been actually cold before, but spirits... I forgot how close to Jormag's eternal blizzard Frostgorge is. Lucky to have survived.

# 65th of Zephyr

Haymal Gore.  
  
Back with the Ashen. Managed to get past the Rime this morning, and then it was all downhill, literally, to Ascalon. Made excellent time, too!  
  
Good news, Blade is all still in order, Forgewood took over in the intervening days. Bad news is that, asides from myself, Klixxa also went missing, and is as of yet unaccounted for. That troubles me. I wonder if she got spat out somewhere else in Lornar's Pass, and if I could've found her if I tried. Something bad might have happened. I think back at those damned Fleshreavers... I shudder to think. Here's she's alright, and simply making her way back here, like the rest of us.  
  
As for the Chapter, they've been conducting search actions since, meaning they've not made a lot of progress. Biggest issue so far seem Vatorn and Ilthy apparently bothering each other. I'll have a talk with Forgewood when I can, see if she's aware, and what she thinks about the both of them. Also, apparently Claridge is now mentoring Ilthy, something which does not leave me entirely undivided. But, in the scheme of things, tiny issues;  
I'm on time for the advance in a few days too. Here's hoping Klixxa manages to catch up with us by then.

# 66th of Zephyr

Haymal Gore.  
  
We found Klixxa. Strangely, in exactly the same cave we both disappeared from some days back. One of the sentries the Chapter had posted spotted something, and when we went in to investigate, more strange creatures stepped from the shadows to fight us. And then, as if out of thin air, Klixxa was there, just... lying there. I can't make heads nor tails of it. It bothers me. I want to collapse that cave, and bury the magical trickery and none-sense within under a layer of rock and rubble.  
  
I grow weary of these... silly things. Magical. Not magical. Spirits, even the little magical I have finally started to understand well enough to use is primal and direct. Honest, is the word I'd like to use, though that makes little sense. Magic's just a tool, it is the one that wields the tool that determines how it is used. Tiresome. Very tiresome. Sometimes I wish the Elder Dragons could just be punched to death, and then the entire world would go quiet.  
  
Eh, I'm moody. Stomach cramps. Not the first time, not the last, but this time I'm worried that the portal thing might have done something to me. Like that ley-line. Last I need is a magical flux while we stand on the brink of thrusting our swords into the throat of Hrangmer, the heart of the Flame Legion.  
At the least the Kodan are calm.  
  
Never realised I liked them much until now.

# 67th of Zephyr

Snow Ridge Camp.  
  
Well, we moved camp north across the lake near Haymal Gore. Hrangmer now lies to our east, across a swathe of incinerated forests and cracked worlds. It's mostly a Pact camp, and the signal that we'll be hammering home on the Flame Legion's true heart soon enough. It'll be a hectic few days, I think. We won't be here long, it is merely a steppingstone into the wider flank. We'll pressure them here until they collapse, and then sweep in, rolling up the flank as we go.  
At least we're still close enough to the Thaw to be cooled by it.  
  
In other news, scouts found Cinderkeeper, left for dead after being stabbed with a poisoned blade some days ago. Apparently the attacker was her own Centurion, whom decided that she had disobeyed his orders to remain with the Vigil when she decided to walk out on us those several days back. Not sure how I think about that. I suppose in Legion culture, that's acceptable? Strange. More worryingly, it puts us in a very awkward position. Cinderkeeper resigned, so technically she's not a Vigil soldier. If the Ash Legion comes by and asks we hand her over because they have charges of insubordination against her, our alliance with the High Legions means we'll have to comply. Cinderkeeper, on her end, was able to tell us very little, asides that they might come to finish the job if they discover she's alive. For now, I've put her in protective custody, just in case, but the entire thing makes me worry.  
We really don't want to end up crossing swords with the bloody Ash Legion, or risk a serious incident. On the other hand, I am staunchly against simply handing over Lorma to be killed. That'd be lunacy. I suppose we'll have to see what happens.  
  
Being restless for the remainder. Ilthy and Vatorn are acting odd. Had brief notes from Forgewood and Claridge about them acting up. Actually, Vatorn seems to be his usual annoying self, but Ilthy is being like a little powder keg. Strange. Maybe that's just how he is, and we only really notices just now? Either case, Forgewood is on the disciplinary matters, as she should be. If she keeps it up, she'll get a commendation.

# 68th of Zephyr

Snow Ridge Camp.  
  
Struck out against the Flame Legion today. Off to a good start... The Priory summoned some ice elementals to support our advance, but the damn critters melted halfway across the assault, and we were left to storm Vorgas Garrison on our own with a smaller complement of external specialists to help blow open the gigantic stone door. Once inside, we were supposed to hold the place until relief troops could be sent to us to take over and harden the position, while we rotated out back to Snow Ridge to rest. Except the relief troops got issued the wrong map, and got lost. We had to repel two sizeable Flame Legion counter-attacks. Thankfully, Blade did well holding the gate, and I was satisfied with the cohesion. Just got a little hot at the end.  
So, with Vorgas fallen, we've thrown open the entire western flank, straight up to Hrangmer. More Pact and High Legion troops will be advancing overnight; we're just a cog in a larger machine. I guess of Smodur the Unfliching was here, he'd approve of that idea. Anyway, if all goes well, we'll advance again tomorrow, right unto the doorstep of Hrangmer. I can't imagine how hot it'll be in there, but at least that means the end is in sight. I try not to think about the literal hell-hole will have to clean out in order to get some well-earned leave, but there you. Here's hoping I get out with all my limbs attached.  
  
Other news, got a letter from a Priory Magister that heard about my displacement issue. I guess Freyj passed it on, and it somehow got word all the way over there. She's offered to examine Klixxa and me for some study. I've already written back that if she's welcome to pass by Hoelbrak after we get some service leave, which I at least know will be as soon as we finish here. That'll be a relief.  
  
Also dealt with Lorma's surprise appearance formally today. Seems to be that she's being forced to remain in the Vigil against her will by her Centurion, on literal pain of death. For now, we've decided to ship her back to the Keep as a Vigil wounded, considering the terrain ahead is not suitable for badly injured Charr in any form. I suspect will revisit the case when she's fully recovered. Didn't sit well with the Warmaster or me, though. Honestly, if some bastard decided to hang a sword over my neck, and then try to threaten me into obedience, I'd try and find the moron, and stuff his own sword down his gullet. What surprises me more if the way Lorma just... sort of accepts it. I don't think I can rationalise the idea that Cinderkeeper might actually fear something bad enough to just comply, but... here we are. Strange. Either case, I think it's safe to say that's been postponed until further notice.

# 69th of Zephyr

Liberation Dell, Forlorn camp.  
  
Moved up the encampment past Vorgas into a rock-hollow from where we'll stage our next couple of attacks. Closest to Hrangmer we've ever been, and also the must vulnerable. We're advancing fast, which always means there's a risk of overextending ourselves. If not, however, we're close, so damn close, to Hrangmer. You can feel the heat in the air. If not for the volcano and the Titan magic, I think the snows and cold from the Shiverpeaks would reach much further east into Fireheart than it does. Right now, it is like walking closer and closer to a roaring fire. The winds outside carry ash and cinders on every breath, with clouds of smoke wafting up from the incinerated landscape. I'm almost glad we're inside this cave, and not outside in Vorgas, boiling to a crisp.  
The end is in sight, though there remains one single, gigantic hurdle for us to tackle. I doubt the Flame Legion will go quietly when we enter their sacred ground. I hope our elementalists are prepared. They will be under constant stress. I also got the command dispatch about our actual objectives inside. It's... well, it explains why we're here, at least. Apparently seismic stress in a number of important volcanic centers is making the Priory think Primordius is active. They have suspicions that the Flame Legion might be involved, potentially in some attempt to harness the dragon's power to fuel their own magic. That's why we're going down into the Jaws of Oblivion, to ensure that is not the case. And if it is, to stop it. Well, here's hoping they're not. Hrangmer is a suitably daunting objective without the idea of Destroyers running around in the mix of it all.  
  
Klixxa also went back to the our magical cavern and decided to risk displacement again to shut down the magical anomaly, which she reportedly managed to do successfully. Perhaps not the end we would've wanted, but I suppose Dawn Chapter has now finally been avenged, of a sort. In the very least, their deaths are known, and can be retold in the ages to come. Better that, than to be forgotten, and remain a nameless pile of bones in a Fleshreaver's den. Vile creatures.  
  
I think that, if everything goes well in Hrangmer, I should hold a hunt when I get back in Hoelbrak. To prove my strength to the spirits, and ask them to grant Kristen the boon of a good birth two seasons hence, and bring about good omens and harmony for our baby. A great pack hunt, like we did to honour Lalowa's memory. It'll be good. I should ask around about worthy prey when I return to Hoelbrak, and talk to Kristen about it.  
  
But first, Hrangmer.

# 70th of Zephyr

Liberation Dell.  
  
Quiet before the storm. Not sure how long it'll last, but the tension's there. A lot of people are preparing for a last serious push. I mostly try to stay alone with my thoughts, and bolster resolve a little when I have a chance. Have to say, I'm distracted. Thinking of home. It's easy to think past that last, vast, mountain we still have to cross, and think of everything that will come afterwards.  
In the back of my head, I consider my own mortality, but never long.  
  
Tired.

# 71st of Zephyr

Liberation Dell.  
  
Strange name, really. Spoke with Belmont about family, home, why we fight. Made me homesick.  
No orders yet.  
  
Had a weird dream about being in an unending sea that somehow was also an oven, with something large and terrible coming up from below. The more I struggled to swim clear, the hotter it got, until my flesh was melting like wax. Woke up tangled in my bearskin, sweat running down my back.  
It's a new one, at least.

# 72nd of Zephyr

Liberation Dell.  
  
Orders came through yesterday evening, seems the ball is starting to slowly roll. Three more days of decisive action, then, if we are victorious, we return home. The engineering team will be readying demolitions charges for the hard work. I've given order to simply empty the stocks. It's more than the minimum we need, but with the foes ahead, I'd rather pack some extra in case it was needed. I'll have to ensure the charges are all heavily proofed against the elements, so we have no accidental touch-offs. Thankfully, the satchels were made from a sort of material that wouldn't burn if you held it to a candle. That, and our explosives are inert enough not to be touched off by residual heat. So, unless someone chucks them into a lake of magma, should be safe.  
Hrangmer itself will be tough. We've split into assault teams, and are readying to finally drive the sword home. I wonder what we'll find, though I hope that the suspicion of Flame Legion shamans cavorting with Destroyers is simply a fantasy. "Active volcanoes" can mean anything, right? Regardless, we should stand ready for all eventualities.  
  
Blade squad is in good order, and prepared. Klixxa had them run through discomfort exercise using water, which seemed to have severely annoyed some of them. Not Force, though, he's too much of a veteran to give much of a shit about drill exercise. In fact, I'm pretty sure he kind of likes it. Forgewood's idea, though. Good to see them both working together on getting the squadron prepared and ready for war. It'll look favourable on their end-of-tour review, I think. Especially Forgewood seems to have found he resolve again, as I've mentioned before. On the march back, I'll make her tell me about what passed after Maguuma. Bound to be a good tale, after all.  
  
Bear is with me, a silent presence in my every step. It's been a long time since I've felt so strong and capable as I have now. It is like getting into my prime. The furnace of my fury is at my command, Bear lends me her claws and her strength when I ask, and the mountains tremble at the sight, as if it they were shook by the footfalls of giants. I wonder sometimes if it is a false strength, an illusion cruelly played on me because I grown lazy in the comforts of commanding, rather than mere soldiering. I say that, because while I was tested, I feel like every success now comes naturally. I've heard others speak of this... sense of invincibility, and the folly it encourages. It makes me weary, and sours the sense of triumph and pride that I would wear like a cloak otherwise. Perhaps I have simply been lucky so far. The question then becomes how long luck holds out, aye? At least I am not so blind to what lies ahead that I refuse to consider what happens if the worst passes. I hope all the Spirits guide me in the days to come, and allow me to see my children again in this life. Two of them know me too little.

# 73rd of Zephyr

Liberation Dell.  
  
Tomorrow we'll start with a preparatory strike out to gates of the volcano, pave the way for our own advance. From the reports, it seems most of the Flame Legion has been driven back to the foot of it all. They're not broken just yet, but they've been steadily losing territory here in Fireheart. We've been collapsing the chains of castrums and camps steadily as we've penetrated deeper and deeper into their territory, and their frontline has crumbled. On paper, a great success. Operationally, the enemies' greatest bastion is still standing. It's their rallying point, the holy site around which they'll mount a ferocious last stand. Tomorrow will be hard. The day afterwards will be extremely dire, to say the least. I've been into Arah, but this still daunts me. Of course, none of that can be shown outwards. I make a show of being self-assured, in the hope the others will take heart from it.  
  
We'll see what the morrow brings. Let's hope we're off to a good start. I'll write Kristen tomorrow, and ensure everything is in order should something happen. If not, then at least she'll know when I get home. It'll be another few days even after Hrangmer, with the march back, but if the Spirits are with me, I'll be back home before the 80th.

# 74th of Zephyr

Liberation Dell.  
  
Preparatory strike went... well... We struck out to a castrum still occupied by the Flame Legion between our current camp and Hrangmer. The Flame Legion troops themselves were drawing enormous amounts of magic from the land, and using it to turn their castrum into a bubbling hole of molten slag. How they all survived inside the molten rock, I don't know. I suppose Titan magic is really that powerful. So, instead we slapped heavy duty sapping charges on the great magical... pustules is the world I'll use, that dotted the landscape and fueled the castrum's magic. We split three of them like swollen boils. Klixxa said that perhaps that wasn't such a good idea, considering the extremely potent magic at play, and guess what, she was right. Once the last one was burst, the castrum didn't as much lose power as simply exploded. It turned all the occupants to ash, and slagged the entire castrum into a jumble of rapidly-cooling magma. Every demolitions mission where one of the explosions wasn't planned is a bad one, but at least I can note that this specific mishap was in our favour. I think i'll just claim it was just as planned for the sake of settling people's nerves, but I had the realization that we might have turned ourselves into some ash slowly drifting over the burning forests of Fireheart.  
Not sure if that's a good start or a bad start to the coming offensives.  
  
I wrote Kristen. Tomorrow is the big day, into the maelstrom of battle. It'll be hard fighting, of that we can be sure. My mind is now occupied with thinking which of us I'll never see again after that day. It's that feeling before every major offensive. Like drawing straws. I always wonder who will draw the short ones, and who will live long enough to burn the others on a pyre of honour. Maybe it'll be me, this time. I hope not.  
  
I should go rest, and ensure I am ready for the storm.

# 75th of Zephyr

Liberation Dell.  
  
We survived the storm on Hrangmer. But, spirits, what a place. I thought the castrum were bad, but everything inside that place was worse. Yawing cliffsides running down into the heart of the world, swirling pools of lave, and scores of forges fueled by the blood of the mountains itself. The Flame legion fought hard, they sat cowardly traps, and tested us at every turn. Godforged, those abominations twisted by Titan magic they barely resemble Charr anymore, opposed us at every turn. My assault team took apart an effigy construction site. Or several, at least. The shamans used their warped magic at every turn, it was hard to make sense of it all. They made traps with large flaming boulders that came smashing down on us. One sent me sprawling, and almost crippled me. Luckily, I was already moving, so it did nothing but throw me out of the way, rather than crush me. My leg hurts like a bastard now, and it is hard to rise or sit without help. My entire leg looks as if it was painted purple and crimson, like body paint, but it just pulped and smashes flesh inside my leg. It will take some time to heal.  
Anyway, we dismantled forges and magical construction sites. They were killing prisoners in there by the dozen, and drawing their life force out to bind it into more of their damned constructs. If I think back at how many of those effigies we've destroyed since we marched into Fireheart, I tremble for the amount of souls and spirits the Flame Legion must have burtalized and stolen from their rightful resting places. I can only hope that us smashing it all to pieces has granted them some rest. All the way inside, at the very core, we found a... huge effigy. But it was different from the ones we had destroyed before. The fires in it burned much more violently, and were clearly tinged with magic. When we approached, it first slew all of its own shamans and acolytes, before it turned on us, and rained crystals down on our heads. Not just any crystals either, but ones that resembled the gigantic searing crystal we saw Blazeridge. I fear the Flame Legion were trying to do... something monstrous with the Titan magic they still possessed. Even though I was limping at that point, I ordered the charge. After a hectic skirmish of dodging fire and hacking away at the effigy's structure until it came crashing down, we stood victorious. No sign or trace of Primordius' presence either, as feared, so that's a relief too.  
Unfortunately, Damon was caught in the creature's energies, and we had to rush him out back to the staging position for treatment. My leg was hurting so much, I was forced to split up the squad and limp along behind.  
Once we got outside, we had to wait for the other strike teams to confirm their objectives, and pull out, before the High Legions and other Pact reinforcements followed up to exploit the holes we had punched into the defenses. I have no doubt the High Legions were grinning with glee at the amount of ground we claimed for them. I doubt the Flame Legion will recover soon from the blows we dealt them today. Even so, the extraction was laboursome. Many people were extremely exhausted, or had suffered injuries.  
Worst of all was when Astrid's strike team returned. Penbroke's dead. Gave her life to shield the assault unit from the blows of a Flame Legion tribune they cornered. She expired right next to me, with Mithra trying desperately to cling on to a thread that had long slipped away from mortal fingers.  
We extracted as soon as the wounded were organised, but... hm.  
  
Well, no dragons present, and the Flame Legion greatly reduced. That means our operational objectives were achieved, and we're finally cleared to rotate out back into rest. I'll make a point of lobbying for a training tour next, and give our troops some much needed rest. We deserve it, and unless another dragon rears its ugly head, I'm sure HQ can spare us the time. Anyway, tomorrow we say our farewells, and then a several-day march back to the civilized world. With my leg hurting, I don't relish the prospect of any marches, but I suppose I'll have to endure the pain and discomfort. I'm not going to let it come between spending some much needed time with my family, that's for certain.  
  
But yes, Penbroke has fallen. A blow, again. Mithra was especially badly affected, and I had to go at lengths to comfort her. I didn't know the two of them were that close, but apparently they even slept together at one point. Now, the officers in me deeply disapproves of that, but it was not a good time to make a point out of that. I'll have to address that at a more appropriate time. Regardless, it took some effort to level the lass out, but we got there in the end. She's worried about Athy just as well. It was strange to hear her talk about love and 'love', and what that all meant. She noted at one point that the thing between her and Penbroke was essentially like the love she feels for me, but then with sex. That notion makes me deeply uncomfortable. Not because I find such things inconceivable, but exactly because I can imagine coveting such a thing if I had been another person. But now, the me that I am, cannot help but look at the Sylvari girl and see a distant reflection of my daughter in her. The idea of having any physical relationship just twists into something obscene I don't even want to consider at any length. Sometimes these Sylvari baffle me. They are so sensitive, so strange, and yet so utterly alien and confusing.  
  
You know, I don't think my mind has caught up with the notion she's actually dead yet. Today has been so hectic, so focused on the living, that my thoughts cannot seem to linger on the dead. Hail to the Fallen.  
I am tired now. The heat, the pain, the stress... I should make a note to commend Klixxa and that Charr elementalist Acatha for their actions during the attack. No doubt that, without them, it would've been much worse. I, for one, am still well enough to be pleased with victory, even at the cost we had to pay.  
We'll give Penny a proper send-off tomorrow. I wish I could've taken her out to Hoelbrak to see the snow before she died. At least she is now in a more restful place.  
  
86. Alina Penbroke, died defending another.

# 76th of Zephyr

Tuyere Command post.  
  
Struck me this morning. What I said before I went to sleep yesterday. Struck me. Penbroke is dead. It's that strange hollow feeling below your breastbone, like a small bowl of hard ice simply sitting there, making everything feel slightly lighted and otherworldly. I went through her personal effects, uncovering her last will, much of which I was able to carry out even this afternoon. Some of it will require volunteers to carry out. She even left me something; her collection of books. I'll have to send someone to collect them, not sure I can detour to the Reach. But then again, perhaps I'll find the opportunity. I'll be trying to visit Aska and Freyj in the Priory anyway, or see if they won't be coming to Hoelbrak for the hunt. Either case, we brought Penbroke to final rest, with all the usual grimness of a soldier's burial. I wish we held them more like the norn, where we celebrate their memory, rather than mourn their passing. Penbroke died a hero's death, selflessly shielding others from the fury of their foe, and allowing her attack team to slay their fearsome opponent. A death many norn would be glad to meet in battle! It is almost worth of song. It is only a pity of the resting place. I hope that if I fall, they will put me to rest within sight of the snows.  
  
We marched a good distance today, morning 'till the evening, and are now back at Tuyere Command post. My legs throbs and looks yellow like sand, mottled with blotches of purple. Simply wearing the arming skirt hurts, putting pressure on the armoured plate. They suggested I was carried, but spirits have mercy on the poor sods that would have to carry me all the way across Fireheart. I walked under my own strength. I suppose the constant ache reminds me I'm still alive.  
I decided to slip out my armour and sit under the waterfall for some time. The water rushing down over me was... otherworldly. For a moment, it was like I was in the Mists, far away from everything, and anything. I have been meditating some time to channel my anger and fury into the fire I keep dormant deep inside me, but this... this was different. When I was roused out of it, I felt like all the weight of the world has just dropped from my shoulders. As if I was reborn. Just a pity it was spoiled by Ilthy having a fit over something between him and Vatorn again, and deciding to discharge a magical blast out on the edge of the camp. Surprisingly, they resemble each other more than they know. Still, I was not in a good mood and harshly reprimanded them. Maybe they'll learn. If not, I'm going to talk to Claridge about what's she's been teaching the boy.  
  
Home soon. Few more days at march. Then I can forget about everything. Like in that waterfall.

# 77th of Zephyr

Dewclaw Village.  
  
Another long march today. We must've crossed through all of the Iron Marches today, all the way to this quaint fishing village. It's the same one, below the old searing couldron, that was destroyed by the Flame Legion when we last passed through the area. It seems they've now rebuilt, and it is actually a nice place. It languishes by the water, the remnants of the Great Wall visible in the far distance, while the hilly lands around offer for great views. There is actual grass, and meadows here. They built their buildings from steel and iron as before, but they're not the silly drum-houses we've seen elsewhere, but rather built like small lodges, open on all sides, with a high curving roof that gives plenty of space to live in. Not a bad place to rest in.  
  
Spoke to Forgewood about what happened to her after we lost sight of her. A tale of exceptional endurance. She fell, and was eventually captured by Hylek. They dragged her through half of the jungle, along with another man called Menderas, whom apparently nursed Forgewood back to health after she broke her leg. Unfortunately, he died two dozen days before we found Forgewood in that Hylek holy place. More sinister, it seems from her tale that someone in the Vigil was trafficking with the Hylek that captured her. She described a man in Vigil armour parlaying with her captors, and taking away her uniform and weapons. An unsettling revelation. It hints at corruption.  
We should have looked harder. Or we should have found her earlier. Regardless, she persevered and overcame the challenges set before her, guided by better powers.  
In my book, I had noted down Forgewood as dead, and had to cross her out when we found her. An empty number, with no-one to remember. I think it is only just that instead, I will remember Menderas. May he live on through his actions in life, and be remembered with gratitude for the kindness and care he had shown to one of our own in her time of need.  
  
73. Menderas, died in captivity, his kindness never repaid.

# 78th of Zephyr

Fort Marriner.  
  
Day's march all across Ashford, and the Citadel, now back in the embrace of central Kryta. The weather is mild, and the air is a fair bit cleaner than it was marching in across the industrial heartland of the Charr. Tomorrow, we'll be issued leave, and I can take the gate through to Hoelbrak, and right home. Kristen will have gotten my letter already; I hope she's waiting for me. I can't wait to see her, and then to take my boy on my knee and show him the carved Charr skull I brought him. That being said, I might stop by the Priory first, see if Aska and Freyja are still there. I'll see how I feel on the morrow.  
  
Today, though, good enough. When we got back, Lionhead dropped in the Marriner bar, and we had a talk. She and Leif are now living in the Commodre quarter. She looked well, for having a bad leg, though she was a bit ungainly on the walking. I promptly gave her the walking stick I've been carving, now finished for a few days. Turned out well, darkened to a dark red using the tar from the lake. She was pleased with it, I hope. Anyway, she's actually going for setting up a fighting pit in due time, which is... interesting. I think I'll be bringing Kristen and the Jotunling over again in a few days. Last time, it was a good day. Besides, my pay as Knight now is more than sufficient not to worry too much about a few gate trips, that's for sure.  
  
Also saw Azzis. Weird Charr, her. She's been stalking around Lion's Arch, apparently turned Gladium when her warband bit off more than they could chew. I suggested she could always try to re-apply to the Vigil, which promptly set her off to find the Warmaster. I wonder if we'll see her back on duty next tour.  
  
Also, I think I figured out what's been bothering Ilthy. Apparently, someone is claiming to be his sister. Or at least, that's what I deduced from the weird questions he was asking me, and the notion he threw such a fuss over "Garenhoff and Evena" in a little twist with Vatorn not so long ago. I suspect he's planning to visit this 'sister' of his over leave. I cautioned him to be careful about tales like that. Being too naive about such things makes you easy prey.  
  
Anyway, tomorrow I can leave all of that behind for a few days.

# 79th of Zephyr

Ah, Hoelbrak. Leave, at last! Ten days to make up for a season. Not nowhere enough, but I'll make due. We'll all make due.  
  
Left Marriner after we got out order, decided to venture out to the Priory first. Freyj, Grace and Aska are still gracious guests to the dusty scholars you can find within. I gave Aska the little carving Sinclair asked me to give her, and she seemed pleased with the trinket as only a young girl can. She's grown quite well since I last saw her. Grace and Freyj seem to have settled into a more steady pace when it comes to taking care of her. I told Freyj that Leif and Kalla now live on Lion's Arch. Considering the two bairns got well enough along last time, it might be worth having them terrorize Lion's Arch for a bit.  
Anyway, I told them I'd had leave, and will be heading home for a while, and that I'd be looking to raise a hunt to honour the spirits. Freyja said she'd attend, if everything permits, so that's good. I said my goodbyes again, and headed back to the portal in Lion's Arch. It's... interesting to see Freyj grow into something of her own now. I didn't think it would happen so fast, but I can still feel the mild pang of regret at her growing up and, as always, away from me a little as I become more and more a figure that exists in the periphery of her life, when she was the center of mine for so long. Thankfully the hole that leaves in my chest is neither very large, nor impossible to fill.  
  
I got home a little later than I expected, to be greeted by the wonderful caress of the mountain snows. You know it's a good day when the snow falls hard enough to make every step crisp, even on the often-trod pathways between the great spirit lodges of Hoelbrak. My timing must've been auspicious, because the very moment I emerged, packed like a Dolyak, and grinning like a Skritt in Tarir, the great horns sounded in the distance, as if to herald my return.  
Kristen was doubly pleased to find out I was still in one piece, and not hacked to bits or seared like a yak cut following my trek into Hrangmer and Fireheart. I was instantly stunned out of swinging between melancholy and sanguine heroism when I saw her again, dressed in Leopard pelts as befitting a soon-to-be shaman, and soon-to-be mother. Regal, is the word I'd use, though that rarely makes sense in norn. And yet she could've have passed for a queen of the norn, if you were an outsider ignorant of our ways. I told her as much, much to her delight. Sometimes I feel I don't say kind things anymore, and that saddens me.  
I'm actually a little bit drunk, because we broached one the ale casks to celebrate. Well, I did, Kristen was drinking honey milk. Anyway, spirits, she's started to grow out a little now. A little pot belly, carrying a tiny spirits of our own within. I think I actually cried with joy. Let the fools say that it was the drink, but I know that even the mightiest warrior is rendered small next to the miracles of life.  
  
I went to see the Jotunling too. My boy, my beautiful boy! Strong like an oak, even through he's only a small sapling of the great tree he will someday grow to be. He was scared of me a little, because he'd forgotten me, but then he remembered when I lifted him up and held him to my chest. For all her occasional crass carelessness and aloofness, I am thankful of Hrist for this precious gift, even though it was a mere fluke of chance. I love all my children. They give my life a meaning I'm not sure it would otherwise have.  
  
I'll hold the hunt. Kristen'll agree. A great hunt, against the mightiest prey, to ensure the Spirits are sure of our strength, and give me and Kristen all the endurance and fortitude we need to see our child grow up to eclipse even our great legend. The mountains are broad, and filled with danger. I'm sure I'll find something worthy of my sword.  
That reminds me, there will be a moot in Hoelbrak in a few days. I'll take Kristen with me. Maybe the Jotungling too. I was planning on doing that anyway.  
  
But now, before the drink my belly turns my head into lead, I will set to bed.  
'tis good to be home.

# 80th of Zephyr

Hoelbrak.  
  
Spirits, my head feels like it's about to split itself in half like a ripe fruit. I drank too much, and then I drank too little, and then the night left me sore and feeling like my liver is trying to crawl out through my throat. It's made for a wonderful day of sitting around the fire, eating and drinking. I went to get the little one from Helga come noon, and the Jotunling has been making merry with his toys. He's managed to snap bits and pieces off of the wooden heroes he plays with, but he doesn't care much. I dulled some dyes in water, before I set him on a rolled open burlap sack to plod around in. He liked bright colours. Can't really draw anything yet, just scribbles and pours it all out, splashes and drops like coloured rain. Nothing a hot cloth won't wash off, and at least it doesn't reek of stale ail or worse. Who knows, maybe he has a sensitive spirit in a strong body? There is a different, more gentle glory to be found in an artisan or craftsman too. Hah, was not the great Eir Stegalkin a sculptor first and foremost?  
  
But yes, a quiet day in Hoelbrak, as much as that even is possible. I saw Hrist and Hildr too. They're both well. Hrist is still her own incorrigible self, not a care in the world able to arrest her relentless hedonism. That too is a different sort of glory, I'll have to admit, though not sure if that lies on the side of fame or infamy. It lies in the eye of the beholder, I suspect. Hildr was in tow, which is rare, considering. She looks better. Well, not the memory but... clearer, at least. I wonder if the magical waters of the Maguuma Font have actually helped her find some peace. I hope so. Sjöfn, or Hildr, gave as much to the Vigil as those no longer breathing. Perhaps more. She too lost her life, in a sense. At least she seems to take as much joy from the little Jotunling as I do. Small things.  
  
Kristen was in Leopard Lodge for most of the day until late. After I brought the little one back to bed for dusk, I went to watch her do all the shaman things. She'll be a full shaman soon enough. Actually, I find the idea of being married to one strange. Makes me feel old. Always does. I should talk to some of the Elders actually, about a great many things. As I start feeling the weight of responsibility on my shoulders grow ever heavier, I've come to value the wisdom they represent more and more. As youths I listened, but I didn't quite listen. Half-heard. Now, I see that they carry within them hoards of experience that dwarf mine own. I think I'll spend some moments in meditation at Bear shrine tomorrow, if my head has cleared.  
  
In other news, I spoke to some of the rangers that roam around the mountains. There's a rumour of some great beast made out of living stone roaming around the mountains, much, much larger than any of the normal elemantals you encounter near places of power. Legends tell of great frost beasts known as Avalances, that would pose serious threats to even large hunting packs in the Far Shiverpeaks of old. Could it be that one such being has now formed this far south? It would be a worthy prey to hunt. I've asked the hunter to tell others that know about it to come to me. Perhaps sightings? It is a promising lead at least.  
  
Anyhow, now I think I'll clean the last of the water-dye off, before I get some well-earned rest. Or at least get into bed. We'll see about the rest.

# 81st of Zephyr

Hoelbrak. Clearer head.  
Meditation was good. Crackling of the fire to focus the mind, Bear speaking to me in a soft and quiet voice. She speaks of walking through heavy pine forests and through valleys covered thick with snow. No thoughts, just instinct. Wandering. A river of melt runs like a creek, and fish leap out of it against the current. Skelk nestle, and guard their eggs jealously. The sun rises, and turns the white snow silver and gold in the light of dawn.  
It is strength and contentment. Knowing you will stand tall against even the most furious of nature's roars, and are able to roar back in kind. That is Bear's wisdom.  
  
The Elders tell good tales, but I've found I am not yet so staggered by their feats. While several of them make grand claims of personal valour and skill, few can match the sheer colossal weight of experience the years in the Vigil have brought me. It's easy to lose perspective. That, and while I am not in any doubt about my personal skill-at-arms, all of my feats in the Vigil have been accomplished with others at my side. I suppose it makes for a different kind of hero. The other thing is that the elders do help make sense of your troubles. Sometimes it is like being a teenager again, and forgetting that I am neither the first, nor the last, to have lived far away from home, and be plagued by doubts about where my true purpose lies. It's... interesting, at least, to know that I'm never really alone in that sense.  
  
With that in my head, I went to visit Usha. Was good, actually. Feels like we've both aged a few decades in the space of a year, with everything going on, but... we're still friends. And, I suppose, still kin. The cubs are doing well. Must be a difficult thing to watch them grow up, knowing they might leave you for the Citadel and the Fahrar. I'm not sure I could let any of mine walk off that young. At least with Kristen's shaman path, the future seems a little brighter. Usha and I drank a few pints of ale, but not so much to get drunk. Not sure why, but I was not in the mood to cloud the head so soon after Bear's words just yet.  
  
Tomorrow I'll take Kristen and the Jotunling to Lion's Arch. Leave early, maybe visit Kalla. Then, later for the Chapter thing, maybe I can leave the boy with Leif. If not, we'll keep it early, and return home at dusk.  
I suppose we'll see how it goes.

# 82nd of Zephyr

Hoelbrak.  
  
Nice day today. Went out to Lion's Arch with the Jotunling and Kristen, and then later to the party Maeva decided to throw. Even got a few good drinks in before we had to leave again. Couldn't make it too late, the little one needed to sleep quietly. He's too small to sleep away from home yet. Saying that, he'll be about a year old soon. Hah, he and Kristen's child will grow up tied closely together. Makes me wonder if it's a boy or a girl.  
Party was fine, just... not really in the mood to stay long. It was odd to see folks in their off-duty clothes, but I've never had trouble mingling, so... I was mostly there for the drink, and to have Kristen meet the Chapter a little.  
  
Day itself was good. Left around noon, spent a few hours on the beach. I built a scale model of the Vigil Keep out of sand. Then Reuzen swept down like an angry giant, and happily tore it to shreds. He tried to eat some of the sand, and ended up regretting it. I suppose I can't really fault him for trying. At least he didn't try to drink the seawater yet. It's... nice to have some quality time. It makes me dread when leave is over.  
  
Also, when I returned this evening, I heard someone was looking for me about the Avalanche monster. I'll ask around tomorrow, because it's too late for any of that just now. Hopefully, we have ourselves a prey!

# 83rd of Zephyr

Hoelbrak.  
  
A day with Kristen, in Leopard's lodge. Good. Felt like I was in a different time, in a different place. Strange how abnormal normality feels. Suppose I live such an extraordinary life that I'm shocked and stunned when things are quiet and peaceful around me. It makes me wonder if I'll ever grow bored of it, or if I can embrace a life of peace after the wars end. Like Kristen; on the road to shaman and mother, she's trading in a wild life of hunting and adventure for the smaller joys and comforts of family. I'll say, though, that raising a norn child is a trial worthy of the mightiest heroes, if not always valued as such.  
  
Oh, there was one thing, though. A hunter from south of here came to see me. He heard I was looking for the stone monster I mentioned before, and he tells me he saw it wander across the mountain flanks, a hulk of animated andesite and obsidian. He tells me local heroes have tried to break it apart, but their arrows rebound harmless of it's hide, and it uses powerful magic to protect itself.  
Sounds like a worthy prey indeed! I'll send letters, and talk to Kristen. It'll have to be soon, though.

# 84th of Zephyr

Hoelbrak.  
  
Went out south today, see if i could actually find a trace of my fabled prey. The hunter from yesterday told me he managed to chip off only a piece of the creature's rocky hide, so I was careful not to be caught off-guard. A nearby lodge I passed knew of it too, mentioning two young brothers with Dragons painted on their skin had passed by with the intent to hunt and slay it, but that was days ago, and they didn't return. I found an old campfire with some hunting supplies by a cave into the mountains, but little else to speak of aside from a Svanir totem. I fear the youths might have overestimated the strength of their twisted patron, and met an untimely end. It was getting close to dusk, so I didn't think of pressing my luck and further, and came back home.  
Sent out the letters to the Chapter, and others who might have take glory in the hunt. To Freyja, too. No doubt she'll be here come morning. I spoke to Kristen about it too; she will sit out the hunt, and remain in Hoelbrak, while I prove our strength. It would be stupid to risk the baby in a dangerous hunt, after all.  
I wonder who will see fit to join me. I suppose if all else fails, I will have Bear as my companion. We'll see in a few days.  
  
After the hunt, I have arranged for a moot. Either to celebrate our victory or drown our losses. Knut was so kind as to allow me to hold it in the Great Lodge. I can hope that those companions of mine not drawn here for the pleasure of a good hunt, will at least be tempted to partake in the moot. Usha was so kind as to make the arrangements for the drink and food. Might as well spend some of that officer's pay I am now receiving on showing proper norn hospitality.

# 85th of Zephyr

Hoelbrak.  
  
I made the preparations for the hunt tomorrow. Wish I could take a stick of dynamite from the Vigil supplies, but I can't well issue them to myself for a hunt. I'll have to make do with sword, fire, and Bear's strength. Word has gone around that we are setting out for a hunt now, and I wonder who will come to join me from those I've written to.  
Freyja is already here, along with Aska and Grace, but they have all three decided to remain home with Kristen during the hunt, and to keep a careful watch on the children while we're away. Perhaps that's smart, though I would have liked Freyja's sword to be with the hunt, rather than at home. Surprises me, really, I had thought she would never have even blinked twice about committing herself to the pursuit of glory and legend.  
  
Regardless, the day was pleasant enough.  
I had the Jotunling with me while I tended to my weapons and armour. I wonder if one day he'll be able to wear the heavy black and white plates that have kept me so safe in battle. Aska was running amok as well, later in the day, followed by that wolf of hers everywhere she goes. Mind of her own, that's for sure. In another six or seven years, I doubt anyone will be able to stop her from going where she pleases anymore. I keep having to remind myself she's actually family now. Strangely, that just makes me feel more distant than I already am. It's good to be home, but it only just makes me realize how much I am missing. Yeah, I know, 'that' again. Cantankerous old boulder.  
It's worth it, though, by moments.  
  
Tomorrow is the day.

# 86th of Zephyr

Hoelbrak.  
  
Exhausted. Hunt was a success. A good few came to join the pack. We tracked our prey into the mountains. Wasn't an Avalanche, but... some sort of elemental made out of crystal. Immensely powerful. It took all of our combined might to take this one down, and spirits, it still left us sore and hurting afterwards. Plenty of heroics. I'll write more tomorrow, after I've had some sleep.  
For now, I'm happy knowing that we were able to prove our strength in droves today. The Spirits will be watching us closely.

# 87th of Zephyr

Hoelbrak.  
  
Spirits. Okay, I'll go through this in order, because... today will change everything.  
  
First, I have to give a recount of the hunt yesterday. We will have need of the favour we garnered from the spirits in the days ahead, that's for certain.  
We set out looking for an Avalanche in the mountains, but we found something... else. It was an elemental alright, but it wasn't nearly as large as we expected. It was fashioned from a glossy black stone, like obsidian or onyx, and called upon fearsome magic to protect itself from harm. We stumbled into its path, and then gave furious battle with it. Our blades didn't seem to harm it, until Fletcher was able to wrap a part of it in spectral chains. Cheery and Wulfbane we able to shatter part of it, which definitely injured it. Sawyer, who joined us fresh from his recovery at the keep, enveloped it in gnawing stone, which dragged it down. Everyone, Forgewood, Ravenwest, Ilthy, Wulfbane, we were able to pin it to the ground, and rip the lodestone that functioned as its head clean off. By that time, it had used magic to hammer aside Claridge. Bjorn, brave bastard that he is, distracted it long enough for Prydwen to drag her clear, while we struck with the might of the pack, and undid the creature. A great victory against a truly lethal foe. I can see how hunters that were less prepared might have easily succumbed to its powerful magics.  
We collected our injured, and went back to Hoelbrak with the trophies. I've kept the head, a solid lodestone the size of of a small keg, carved with six strange eye-like holes, but no mouth.  
I'm still sore. Some of the magic it used wracked us with searing pain, and left us all hurting. Today's moot was meant to rectify that, to balm healing wounds with good drink and laughter, and to have an opportunity to retell the tale of the hunt.  
  
It was different. We were well underway with the feast in Knut's hall, when we heard a commotion at the entry. It was Braham Eirsson, son of the renowned Eir Stegalkin, who had come to test his strength against the Fang of the Serpent. And, I don't know how, he cracked the tooth. He drew a great bow, and fired a single arrow which burst into flame mid-flight, before hammering home onto the enamel, where it stuck fast. At first I couldn't believe it, but then the crack spread, visible for all to see. Jormag's fang has been cracked; the old prophecy has come true. Braham Eirsson has come, and will lead the norn north against Jormag. We will reclaim our homeland, the greatest hunt my people has ever seen. Perhaps now, all of us, will finally stand united.  
  
It makes things difficult, oh so difficult. I went to see Kristen almost immediately, because this... changes everything. This is no longer just my war, but that of my people, and my family. Kristen was stunned, and elated, until she realised. She's with child. She can't embark on this grand, but extremely perilous endeavour while still carrying our child. Her disappointment was palpable, but she understand. It stings. I've never before felt uncertain about having this child, but... Now I doubt if we were ready. Perhaps we were foolish to think we should bring new life into a time of uncertainty like this. More than anything else, it hurts me that our baby stands between Kristen, and something she should be a part of. There is a thin hope, perhaps, that Braham will take the time and energy to gather the norn, and prepare for this great endeavour, but he is young, and I fear he will act recklessly in the moment, and seek to strike while the anvil is still hot. If Braham he goes north, I will go, and Kristen will stay, with the children. Their lives are too precious to put at risk, even for something such as this.  
On the other hand, perhaps my children will finally get to know the lands of their ancestors again, know the cold touch Far Shiverpeak snows, and the winds that gave my people such strength. The future is filled with uncertainty. There will be tough fighting before it is over, that is for certain.  
  
And the Vigil. Surely, they will go north against Jormag with my people? It will be a difficult choice otherwise. I hope the Pact will not falter, and recognise that if they lend their strength to the norn, they might have an opportunity help us right an ancient wrong, and slay an Elder Dragon in one fell stroke.

# 88th of Zephyr

Hoelbrak.  
  
Went to Lion's Arch today, quickly. Attend a memorial service for the fallen; they've been doing that for four years now, second time I've attended. Last time, we assembled there on duty, now it was on leave. I didn't want to go at first, but I thought I might be able to find the Warmaster. We need to talk about the entire... Well, everything that's happened yesterday. It's strange, the carcking of the Fang has given me a surge of boundless energy I didn't even now I had. I am itching to *do* something. Anything. But, not today, it seems. Warmaster wasn't to be found, and Maeva seemed to be a bit too far gone into the mire of memories and mourning to disturb, so I simply left a note.  
I'll probably speak to them tomorrow.  
  
Now, I just rushed back home, to be with Kristen and the little Jotunling one last evening before I'm supposed to report back on duty. I don't feel like I've spent enough time with my boy, and it seems like I won't be spending much time in the near future either. Both duty and heritage call for me.  
Kristen is doing better, now the news is all settled. There'd a lot of uncertainty. I didn't think it would... rock the foundations of everything we know quite so much, but it has. If Braham leads us north, it will be as great a shock as when Asgeir lead us south, if not greater. There will likely be many great battles, and countless dead before we defeat Jormag. A small, tiny corner of me is happy that Kristen isn't in a position to join that terrifying endeavour. An other laments that we will likely not go through these things side by side. Still, we are two people sharing one legend; if I go north, she will share in all the glory through me. Still, that doesn't mean it'll stop her from venturing north herself as soon as she is well and able.  
  
I should see Freyja, too. I can imagine she is going through similar troubles, with Aska in her care, and Grace on her heart, she must be torn. The far north is no place for a child, even one as headstrong and hardy as young Askavild. I'll need to talk to her about what it means, and what she feels, perhaps it can shape clarity for us both. Tomorrow, before I leave. At least I know that if Hrist goes north, Kristen will care for Reuzen as well as any true mother.  
  
I can't say I'm looking forward to leaving tomorrow noon, but I can't neglect my duties to sit around here, waiting. I'll be eagerly awaiting news of Eirsson's plans, however.

# 89th of Zephyr

For Marriner, Lion's Arch.  
  
Left home yesterday. No news from Braham yet as to what the plan is for the days ahead, but my duty with the Vigil calls me back. Didn't really want to leave Kristen alone at a time where there's so much uncertainty about what comes next for all of us, but I have no choice. That's what discipline means. To do something you don't want to do, because you have to. It is a soldier's virtue to life a disciplined life, and it's en example I must set to everyone. Kristen understand this, thankfully. I hope my son will too, some day, when it matters.  
  
Arrived in Lion's Arch, and immediately got a whole lot of information dumped into my lap. Apparently there's some sort of murder thing going around Lion's Arch. Honestly, who's still surprised about that. City of pirates. A year back, they went about killing Sylvari over the entire Scarlet-thing, spirits alone know what sort of crazy bastard is running amok. Things like that make me glad I live in Hoelbrak. At least when a norn is going to stab you, he'll do it from the front. Even the Svanir wear their allegiances openly, as they should.  
  
We're getting a nice complement of new bodies, and our marching orders are to prepare for a deployment into the Magus Falls. Likely clean-up, salvage and guard-duty for the encampments that still dot the place. Unfortunately, even that sort of back-line work will be extremely taxing on our troops; it barely qualifies as a rest-rotation, especially following the intensive duties we followed through in Fireheart. Seems a bit unfair, really.  
I'm still hoping that Braham will call out for the Vigil to follow him along, and we'll get retasked. If not, the Warmaster is prepared to give me and Astrid leave to follow our people north, but it can only last so long before who-ever replaces us becomes permanent. It's the uncertainty that's the killer. I know beyond a doubt that, if I am offered a chance, I will go north and fight Jormag. I just hope I can take the Chapter with me. Or at least, that I can go and prepare the ground before the Pact is able to turn about and lend their strength to our task. So many things...  
All we can do now is wait, and listen. Braham will make his intentions clear enough before long, and then we'll have some idea of what he expects of everyone, because right now, every norn is watching for his next move.  
  
Ah well. Until that point, I might as well continue my duties. First order is to look at some disciplinary issues laid before me. Forgewood passed on an issue with Ilthy to me that needs my attention, and Astrid and I need to redraw our squads to compensate for the influx and the losses we made. Ensure we have a good, strong core of troops, and then fill out the gaps with new blood. It's something to keep the mind occupied.  
I also need to ready the field armoury for Maguuma. Thankfully, it sounds like a relatively straightforward task packet, so I might run lightly on the siege weaponry, and stock up for soft targets. Who knows, with most of the Mordrem gone, I might turn this into an extended hunting trip. That is, unless the Far Shiverpeaks call for my sword before that.

# 90th of Zephyr

Fort Marriner at season's end.  
  
No news from the north yet.  
Just the usual work out here. Force was reported as injured from the Citadel, and in intensive care after beating off a Flame Legion attack that went for a Fahrar. He might be out for a while, if he even recovers. I hope he does. Force has been a good companion, and about as steady a pillar in the Chapter since I've gotten here. We'll have to make do without, I fear.  
In return, Calder and Lorma are back with the troops. Lorma's recovered from her stab wound, and is now back to eerily skulking around the edges of your vision, just as you usually would. Warmaster's called into question the details of her rank, since she was discharged, and we're essentially forced to re-enlisted her because it's the only real choice we have. Another one to add to the list of items that need to be looked over.  
  
Belmont had some strange water exercise prepared for training the troops today, put their swimming skills to the test. He enlisted some local help from the Quaggans below the water's surface, and had the folks play "catch the quaggan". A bit of a... special one, as far as training went, and I suspect it was more of a disguised pool party than anything else, but at least folks seems energized by it.  
  
I've been beset by a deeper melancholy of spirit that is difficult to shake off. I know in my heart that the news of the cracked Fang should have filled with me with energy, but it's left me empty. I don't feel like I want to be here, in Lion's Arch, but I don't feel like I could've have stayed at home. Everything just... overwhelms me. It sits like a burden on my chest, crushing me. It makes it hard to think of anything else as being important anymore.  
It'll pass, I suppose, but for now I don't think I want to... have much to do with anyone.

# 1st of Phoenix

Marriner.  
  
Spoke with Calder for a long time. Was interesting; talk about culture, what it means to be here, and how norn are different from other people. You sometimes forget the gaps that exist between people, while they mean so much. It defines what we are, and what 'home' means. It actually helped me remember why I'm here, and allowed me to vent some of the uncertainty and boiling anger I had about not being in Hoelbrak.  
  
In Chapter news, Sigra has left. Her inability to speak after the horrors of the White Mantle make that understandable. I sort of liked Sigra, in an aloof kind of way. I wonder if she's aware of the cracked fang. Or if she even cares. Sigra always had strange priorities about things. Brilliant alchemist, though.  
  
Weather's been calm. I think I might abscond on guard duty and swim a little tomorrow. Clear the head.

# 2nd of Phoenix

Marriner.  
  
Spent the day as a recluse. Took a few watches in a row and then spent the free time on the fort's outer ramparts. I like being there, it's relatively quiet, and you can see the ships come in by sea. I should bring Reuzen here sometime, when I have another chance. If I have another chance.  
Dipped into the water for a few minutes, and started diving. Just, down, down, down, until everything was just heavt above me. A moment's serenity in the deep. Then the fear caught me; the idea that there was something even lower than I was, coming up to tear me away from everything. I struggled hard to get back to the surface. It's been a long time since naked panic has been my master, but the deep dark waters still haunt me. Damn those fateful days born out of my hubris.  
It makes me doubt the entire myth we have about breaking the Fang. I understand that these are moments of doubt and despair that come naturally in the face of such uncertainty, but they sow the seeds of doubt. What if it is our hubris that is leading us to our deaths, just as mine has done before? What if we die in the thousands to Jormag's relentless hordes, and instead of restoring our people, we dwindle to paltry ruins and half-heard legends recited dully from paper by human scholars? Jormag is an Elder Dragon. We will have once chance to make right old wrongs, but one chance only. We will meet Jormag, and he will die, or we will forever diminish our people.  
Spirits, I hope that Braham Eirsson is really the one to lead us to this dangerous conclusion, and that the spirits are with us every step of the way.  
  
I miss my son. I didn't spend enough time with him, and now I feel like I never will. Perhaps I'm being melancholic, but it feels like so many doors are closing all of a sudden. I've never felt so mortal, so... whimsical. My mind lingers on death. What will I regret most in the end? How will I be remembered? The future holds no answers.  
They want to send me to this blasted jungle, while my whole world stands at the cusp of change. Madness.

# 3rd of Phoenix

Marriner.  
  
First Crusaders pulled the troops through drop training with gliders from the depot. A lot of rough landings in the water, but nothing that wouldn't stop them from breaking their necks if things were dire. They might not understand right now, but considering the fleet's fate over the Maguuma, we can't be too prepared. And, spirits watch over us to prevent such a thing, if we ever have serious need of gliders, they'll at least have a jump under their belt. That'll count for enough when the time comes, I hope. I think they're going to build upon it further in the next few days.  
Also need to speak to the Lionguard. Sawyer and Ravenwest can't swim, and the Lions have swimming as part of their basic. I'll be trying to get them started while we can. Hopefully they'll be able to at least keep themselves afloat before long. One of the recruits, Track, also offered to put out some time to oversee folks swimming after duty. Good initiative, that.  
  
Got some news from Hoelbrak at least, ironically that news is that there is no news yet. Braham Eirsson's still considering his options. He's proven to be quite considerate with the lot of our people, which helps to pull me out of the black moods I've been having lately.  
We got some new recruits. Elonian woman with the skin like ink, and a hefty norn. Latter brought me the news from home.  
  
Still don't really want to be here, but having things on hand at least keeps me occupied.

# 4th of Phoenix

Marriner.  
  
Had a command meeting today, discussed some important things that happened over leave. Basics are that Claridge and Ilthy found out Vatorn apparently passing on information to the Order of Whispers, or at least someone. This in itself was cause for some consternation, of course, but then Claridge and Lightbringer went about causing a scene that earned them the Tactician's censure. Almost ended up down the drain for a number of careers there. As it stands, Ilthy will be trained by the Kodan, Immovable Thought, rather than Claridge. The Kodan's a lot stricter and more centered, I doubt he'll tolerate much shenanigans from the recruit.  
Claridge, in turn, will be given extra tutelage on the way she goes about in her duties, either by Forgewood if she can spare the effort, or by Maeva directly. Either case, I think that might help Claridge from flailing around. That girl has a tendency to be overly zealous and rigid in her convictions, and that needs to cease. It makes her into an idiot.  
  
Vatorn's a different case. His passing on information might be nothing, or it might be serious enough to have him hanged, depending on what we'll find out. I sincerely hope it's the former, and that he wasn't so stupid to pass on information to someone like the White Mantle. We'll be looking into that, of course.  
  
Other than that, the troops had a swimming lesson, which apparently went well. Good.  
Wish I had time to dip in myself. Reminds me of the time I was here with Kristen and the boy.  
No news from Hoelbrak yet.

# 5th of Phoenix

Bah, they're all useless! All of them Utterly beyond reasoning!  
  
Sometimes I wonder if I work for the Pact, or if I'm a Dolyak herder.

# 6th of Phoenix

Marriner.  
  
So, after wasting *six and half hours* of my day yesterday, trying to get someone from the bloody Order of Whispers to actually pass on the intelligence we need to resolve a security concern, we decided to just interrogate Vatorn the old way. And, lo and behold, after half a threat, he passes on his contact info. Ten minutes later I'm stood with the same spook bint as the day before, only this time she's happily yapping away, and giving me the damned information I was looking for in the first place, and which could have avoided aggravating me to the other side of Tyria! She kept repeating 'compartmentalization' as if that fucking applies to the Vigil in any sense. You'd think they're fighting against us in this bloody war; how are we supposed to keep an eye out for suspicious activities if ninety percent of the Minotaur's cock that goes around is them quadruple-crossing agents.  
  
So yeah, Vatorn's not a hideous traitor bastard, he's just been passing on information on some bandit group he's 'infiltrated'. Honestly, the idea that he'd infiltrate his way anyway is almost laughable, but apparently his story checks out. So, at least he's not been tipping off the White Mantle, because that would have ended poorly. Still, I am thoroughly pissed off at the entire situation. I wish folks left the entire intrigue shtick at home, and just came here and fought bravely. None of all the skulking.  
Bah, black mood. Vitriol and choler reign.  
  
No news from Hoelbrak. Suspiciously quiet, if you ask me, but you can't keep something like an entire people marching off to war secret. It doesn't help the mood though.

# 7th of Phoenix

Marriner. After all the annoyance and confusion of the last few days, it's good to have a moment of quiet here. The troops went through sparring in preparation, and then we talked a little. It's good to mingle with the regulars, can't forget where I started myself. They're good people. A mismatched clump of people from about every walk of life, and we somehow get them to all look and march in the same direction. One could almost call us an army if they squinted well enough.  
  
I'm still not looking forward to deploying, at all. I check my letters every morning to see if there's news about... Well, anything. I always imagined that when the Fang would be cracked, everyone would be swept up and away, like one all-consuming tide, and choke Jormag to death with all of our might. How disappointing reality is. How much more... difficult. A far cry from the heroic sagas. I guess that posterity will iron out a lot of the impurities, and speak as a testament to what we can accomplish instead.  
Perhaps I'm just being impatient.  
  
What lies before is uncertain, as it always is. What is painful is that is revealed how brittle the little family I've been... not building, but accruing, is. Kristen and I live everywhere and no-where. I am a sparse guest at my own table, more absent than present, and only half-aware of everything that happens to anyone. And now this, something which should have brought us all together as a people, seems to be driving wedges between us for the silliest reasons. Maybe we weren't prepared. Spirits, is love really not enough to build on? In my state of agitation, not even Bear answers my questions anymore. I suppose they are more Owl's teachings.  
  
I should rest.

# 8th of Phoenix

Marriner.  
  
Got a letter today from Freyja. Braham's decided not to send everyone north in one fell swoop, and instead has taken his mother's guild, Destiny's Edge, north. Odd, because I thought he'd be part of that other guild, Dragon's Watch. Either case, it means I can rest a little earlier. I have no doubt that if caution was Braham's first move, he will stay the course, and only call us to battle when the time is really there.  
Other news is... more difficult. Apparently my father, David Oddwalker, is in Hoelbrak. Freyja met him, by accident, and recognized the tales he was telling. I'm divided on the news. Frankly, I thought that he had long since wnadered off somewhere and died in a far off country of which I had never heard before. To hear he lives... It's difficult. I'm neither angry nor pleased, really. Part of me is filled with a deep curiosity. I'd like to know him, and asked him a hundred questions. And on the other hand, I find the idea of embracing someone who didn't think twice about leaving me behind repulsive. There's animosity there, and anger I didn't even know I had until now. What if he just leaves again? What if he discovers that he's got a family, and simply doesn't care? Bah.  
If his wanderlust was so strong to pull him away from his own flesh and blood, maybe he should have stayed away in the first place. Is that too harsh a judgement? What's worse is that this is yet another thing that just passes me by. I'm not in Hoelbrak, I'm out here, missing anything and everything, relying on sparse letters from home to stop me from getting totally alienated from the things I love.  
  
These are destructive thoughts that will hurt me more than they will help. I know this, and yet cannot help but think them. How do I keep getting blindsided by these things? First the Serpent's Fang, then my father resurfacing after nearly forty years of... nothing. Talking to Mithra today helped take the mind off of things, but... still.  
  
Bah. Bah! I'll have to find some time to talk to him, I suppose.

# 9th of Phoenix

Marriner.  
  
Little to report. We've announced a final recruitment tour before we deploy in full. We've been getting quite a number of people to re-enlist, but I guess more never hurts. Having a solid company of fighting troops is always good.  
  
Been mostly mulling over yesterday's news. Not really come to any conclusions yet. It's just the same thing I always do when duty forces me to inaction. It sits badly with me, when i'd rather just go do something, and I can't. I rail at the constraints of duty, but I know that if I break that chain, it will destroy what I aspire to be. I tell my recruits often enough that discipline is doing what must be done, despite not liking it. This is still true, of course, and I must set the grandest of examples to my troops. If I forsake that, I might as well resign.  
  
Maybe I should just let things go. I trust Kristen, and I trust Freyja. I should rely on them doing the right thing for themselves. If they needed me to protect them, I'd be home, rather than over here, after all. That's what I need to remember. My duty to them lies in ridding the world of Elder Dragons, not by sitting in the boasting hall and making merry, however pleasurable that is. That I miss my wife and my children while I'm away, and envy others the time they spend with their loved ones just proves that I'm doing the right thing.  
And yes, I suppose I will have to settle my mind, and make peace, however temporary, with my father.

# 10th of Phoenix

Marriner.  
  
Just the usual pre-deployment kit and medical checks. Moments to ponder on the many injuries you've collected over the years, and to consider the protection offered to you by good steel and skill at arms. A small layer of protection, keeping me alive when I should have died.  
Got told to lay off the smoking. I suppose that'll make the pipeweed last longer.  
  
Anyway, day after tomorrow we're off on recruitment tour, and then back into the sweltering oven. Here's hoping not for so long as last time.

# 11th of Phoenix

Divinity's Reach.  
  
Not on recruitment tour. This morning, I was roused and put on high alert before dawn. Within hours, we had to re-draw the tactical and strategic outlook of our entire campaign, as we are now being tasked, as a matter of urgency, to relieve the city of Divinity's Reach from a siege, inflicted upon them by the traitorous forces of the White Mantle.  
  
We arrived here earlier today, and instantly spread out through the city in patrols, attempting to re-assert order along with the Seraph and Shining Blade soldiers still present. There was fighting in the palace district, and they tried to shell the city from the east, where most of the enemy troops seem to be concentrated. Luckily, the humans managed to summon a vast magical shield that has safeguarded the city districts from the worst of the magical artillery. Rumour is that Queen Jennah herself summoned the shield single-handedly, but I find that hard to believe. Likely just a rumour to bolster the morale of the loyalist troops.  
As a result, most of the fighting has not affected the city, but has quickly been repulsed through the east, to Lake Doric. I heard things are bad; White Mantle troops blew one of the dams holding the lake up, and violated the entire region. You can see the smoke from the burning buildings stain the sky through the purple haze of the magical shield.  
There are some looters and worse making use of the chaos, but they will not get far before they are called to justice.  
  
We're trying to assert the true nature of the enemy, before we set out to destroy him. I have no illusions about the force of the enemy; one doesn't lay siege to the human capital lightly. But they will soon realise their mistake. No-one points a sword at the homes of us or ours, and go unpunished. We will strike at them, with all the fury of the Vigil, and rend them apart where they stand for their cowardly attack. Let them face hardened troops, rather than terrified children and the jittering elderly.  
We'll make them pay for their mistake in blood.

# 12th of Phoenix

Lake Doric, or at least, what's left of it. Camped near the Western Divinity Dam, in a military encampment of the Seraph. The walls of the Reach rise to our back, looming over us. The place is an utter mess. They drained the lake, leaving behind collapsed piers and a scattered lake bed with knee-high water that stinks of refuse. On the other shore, smoke hangs over the villages. The Seraph are fighting hard, but the lake makes it very difficult to mount an effective defense. The White Mantle pound this side with magical artillery that trails great plumes of purple fire, and bursts like fireworks, leaving great scorches where they land. They seem to have little effect on the Krytan shield or the curtain walls, however, they just harry the troops and the supplies. Occasionally, one of them will land close by, but most of them don't seem to have the range to effectively shell our camp. Just yet, anyway. That's a concern we'll have to deal with soon.  
  
More immediate is the risk of us getting horrendously sapped by the enemy. We're on an old dock, and with the water drained, it might as well have been a sheer wall. Some collapsed piers still stand, like mangled siege towers, but they are almost collapsed, the wood eaten and rotten by water. So, we're effectively camped atop a wall. So, if I was the White Mantle, I'd sap this place, and put a petard down there big enough to turn this into Doric Crater. Unfortunately for us, there's a huge grate that gives sewer access almost immediately below us. It is a prime target for exploitation. Luckily, the White Mantle have to cross the lake bed right under our noses for them to get there, meaning that at least it's easily guarded. I sent down a belated patrol, half the Chapter is still tied down due to those accursed duty checks, and found White Mantle there already. They're curious, wearing almost theatrical uniforms of white and garish red and orange, some dressed like you'd expect them to come straight from a noble's debauched party. They wield magic as commonly as we do, and their mesmer almost caught us unawares when we approached. We dispatched them quickly. Too slow to savour the revenge, honestly, though I should be happy I don't relish killing much. Despite their presence, they didn't seem to have gotten far into the sewers, as the bars were not disturbed. Slightly more disconcerting was the fact that there are apparently children living in the sewers. We tried to get one of them out, but the kid just stole the chocolate bar Kaila offered her, and ran back in. There might be many more of them down there, probably get access through the sewer system in the Reach itself. The Warmaster considered sending in a detachment about getting them out, but those sewers stretch across the entire Reach. We'd need to deploy the entire Chapter to comb them out systematically, in an extremely uncomfortable and hostile environment. Much as I wish to get those children out of their, I suspect many of them go in there by choice. That, and we have more pressing military matters to attend to, some of which do come into the 'greater good' category. If the White Mantle destroy the Reach, we'll have more to worry about than sewer children. I might get the Quartermaster to deliver food packages, though. That's something we *can* do.  
  
Other things? Aye, there's a weird and ominous red haze drifting over to the east, over a forest. I fear it might be some sort of magical spell seeking to corrupt or perhaps destroy us. We'll have to try and find out what it is sooner rather than later.  
Layfon went through some shock, though I haven't had an opportunity to speak with him yet. He's sneaky, and if he doesn't want to be found, he won't.  
Oh, and we have a new recruit, apparently the son of Vethrir "Ironside" Blackmoor. He's come to 'reclaim the honour his father lost' or something, which... surprises me? Vethrir was a bit of a blunt weapon, but I don't think he was ever dishonourable. Apparently the Warmaster has some reports I should read. I need to find the time.  
  
Anyway, there's a tough battle ahead. At least it's more meaningful than going to the Magus Falls again.

# 13th of Phoenix

Lake Doric.  
  
Fierce fighting today over at a settlement called Saidra's Haven. Used to be a nice lakeside town, now it's a couple of buildings next to a mudslide. The town got attacked by White Mantle in great numbers, and with uncommong ferocity. Their attack was committed and brutal, and we had to fight hard to keep them off of us. Sword section got overrun when they tried to hold the southern edge of the town, and I had to lead Sabre in to relieve them. Luckily, it seems the White Mantle tried to take them alive, so no fatalities. Bad news is that we have several wounded, including Klixxa, who was battered badly. Forgewood was able to conduct an organised fall-back with the wounded while Lance held the town proper. There's few times that I really feel that I wield my squad like a precision weapon, but that was what happened today, and I am pleased to a measure that we were able to weather such a ferocious assault, and still come out with only a few ruffled feathers. Saidra's Haven is still in allied hands, and the White Mantle expended a high cost in lives in their attempt to seize it.  
  
Also ran some of the new recruits through demolitions training, though I honestly think I was too tired by the end of it. Ravenwest's been doing good in assisting me there; if she keeps that up, she'll have a shot at engineering second. Having a few new sappers also helps, we were running painfully low on soldiers willing to get their hands dirty. The new folks seem nice, too. At least, they seem interested and motivated.  
  
Tactical planning is a muck, but I can't write about it much in my field journal. Risk of insurgency is high, and everyone knows writing down sensitive tactical details is stupid. I'll tell about the plans as they happen, while we make ready to expunge this White Mantle scum. There's hard fighting ahead, that will tax us and wear us down. The White Mantle are powerful enemies who don't think twice about using abhorrent weapons and magics against us. We have to be ready for anything, or they'll exploit any opening we give them.  
  
In other news, Devin showed up, wanting to re-enlist. I was too tired to really deal with him, but he seemed genuine. I'll let the Warmaster sort him out.  
And I need to read about whatever happened to Vethrir, because I have a hollow feeling in my stomach I won't like it.

# 14th of Phoenix

Lake Doric.  
  
Bastards ambushed us. They sent us a request asking to link up with a company of Seraph for a scouting operation, but the damned White Mantle were just wearing the uniforms. We marched down near to one of the shipwrecks in the shallow water, and when we were in the open, they engulfed us with terrible magic that would have ripped us apart if not for Blade's counterspells. It happened so fast. I barely had time to draw and swing a sword in response, before all hell broke loose. They threw a bloodstone orb into the middle of us, which exploded and scattered us. By the time we regained our senses, three of us were badly injured, and our attackers had scattered, bar a few. One enemy dead, two prisoners.  
It was a cowardly, but well-executed attack that almost claimed the lives of my troops. The second time Blade has been battered in as many days. I know it's not a personal failure, but it doesn't feel good to lose troops so quickly.  
As I laid there, in the mud, pressed flat against the sodden soil with Fletcher under me, and my shield over, I wondered if I was going to actually die this time. Then the stone exploded, and flooded us with magical energy crackled through my flesh and bones. The pain made me bite my tongue, but it didn't kill me.  
  
Things are hazy after. I pulled back, too battered to continue the fight. One of the soldiers apparently mutilated one of the prisoners, and then deserted when our backs were turned. Probably ran straight through the fire-swept pier, and into the city. Patrol couldn't find them, and honestly my energy was spent fighting off the ambush. When the adrenaline faded, I felt empty. I still do. It feels like a defeat.  
I don't know.  
  
I miss Kristen, and my boy.

# 15th of Phoenix

Still Lake Doric, and an uncommonly early entry. Just after dawn.  
  
I read through the report stack the Warmaster gave me on old Ironside. It's... hard to reconcile with what I knew of the him. The reports heavily imply that Vethrir went berserk on his research project against the destroyers. I knew he was always a fight fire with fire sort of Charr, but spirits alive... Seems he burnt his own troops, and went off on some damned personal vendetta, consumed by power. I don't know how to feel about it.  
Not the first time we've lost an ally to dragons, but...  
I suppose I understand Trebius' reason for being here now.

[continuation of entry]  
Went on patrol, north back to Saidra's Haven. Lashed out and got some bloody vengeance against some White Mantle troops south of there. They were engaging a Seraph patrol, but we managed to repulse them quick enough. They manage to zero in us on our return trip, however, and almost hit us with their magical fire. They also fired a... uh... bloodstone elemental at camp, which we had to fight up close and personal. Harrowing fight, that. It was brittle, but every chunk you crack off of it was alive with crackling energy, and exploded like a small bomb, showering you with razor sharp shards. The armour and mail made sure I didn't get badly injured, but it was utter chaos. This warzone's quickly starting to wear on me, and this dreary camp isn't helping.  
  
I'm tired now, though. Spoke a long time with Caeranis about a number of things. Was good to get a fresh perspective on things.  
Also been worrying about what I read about Vethrir this morning. Trying to reconcile it with what I thought I knew about the man, but that turned out to be wrong. That's strange, because I don't usually find myself to be wrong when it comes to people. It makes me angry, actually. It feels like a betrayal.

# 16th of Phoenix

Lake Doric.  
  
A day at rest, but that's because we're planning to advance the camp away from this little staging post, and on the opposite shore. Apparently the Seraph still hold some of the settlements, and we'll be in a better position to provide direct support from there, rather than look out across the empty lake basin.  
I don't mind the recovery time, gives us a time to rest up, and perhaps even out the squadron strength. At current, all of our First Crusaders are out of order. Klixxa, and Forgewood are injured, Saint Clair and Mithra are also confined to medical for now, and Belmont... well, he just heard that his family's been killed in the fighting, so I doubt he's got his focus sharp. I can't even imagine what the man is going through. I'm fairly sure I'd be berserk with rage if that sort of news came upon me. It only makes me more adamant that we should destroy the White Mantle for the crimes they've committed. Too many blood on their hands to go away unpunished. Spirits willing, Belmont will find some solace in retribution.  
  
On a brighter note, Seleea installed a special routine in her golem, Chum, that allows it to arm-wrestle. Both myself and Ram Shatteredshield tried our hand at it, and spirits it was strong. I lost twice before I was able to even it out, but only justly. I had to ask Bear for blessing in that final effort, and I thought I was going to tear my own arm off before the critter finally gave way. Spirits, but Sel's outdone herself. It was fairly entertaining too, considering the otherwise bleak outlook. Ram tried too, but couldn't get on top of the golem's mechanical strength. I think if Sel takes it to Hoelbrak, and charges for norn to try their strength against the thing, she'll even make a pretty penny. Not that I'm bothered about coin, but still. Officer's pay's been nice enough to keep me and my kin comfortable for a good time.  
  
Either case, we'll be on the move soon. I suppose if anything, the White Mantle have proven to be a satisfying enemy to slay, and the prospect of their extreme censure at the hand of our swords is keeping my mind occupied and focused on the here and the new.

# 17th of Phoenix

Lake Doric. Or rather, apparently this place is called Doric's Landing.  
  
Another rest day.  
Sinclair had the troops run sword and shield drills with the Seraph sergeant hammering the recruits. I think the drill-sergeant found extra joy in pushing the Vigil troops extra. Good enough exercise. Only Ram Shatteredshield came around about pain in his injured arm afterwards. It's an older injury, part of how he got his name. Nothing a good pep-talk wouldn't solve, at least, but still. I'll have to make sure Astrid keeps him on the mid-line, rather than the front where the big armoured Charr usually go. No point in him actually losing an arm to something like this, after all.  
  
Other news; apparently one of the attackers parading as Seraph in the ambush some days ago jumped Sawyer in the midst of the melee, and said: "Father said hello" or something similar to him. Fletcher mentioned it earlier today. In addition, she said that the man's house had burned down some time prior, which... makes me ask a number of questions. It can mean two things to my mind; Sawyer (and Fletcher's, for that matter) father is in league with the White Mantle soldiers we've been fighting, which I suspect is a seriously distressing thought for them. The other is that the White Mantle took the man hostage, and this was their way of letting Sawyer and Fletcher know, though why in the Mists they'd do such a thing in the middle of a battle is beyond me. Considering the ambush, I am also inclined to think that neither of those two have anything to do with it asides from a familial relation. It'd make no sense for them to try and kill their own agents, and if Sawyer or Fletcher wanted to commit sabotage on us, they'd have had a lot better opportunities to do so prior to us entering the battlefield. I should let the Warmaster know ASAP, just as a general intelligence concern.  
  
I hope Kristen and the children are okay, in this time of upheaval. Belmont's loss has been cutting into me by proxy, and I don't dare go talk to him yet. I feel sick at the idea of losing Kristen, and my beautiful little boy to such a cowardly attack. I'd forever blame myself for not being there to defend themselves, and it would consume me. That's a mere inkling of Belmont's anguish. I'm afraid that looking into his eyes will make me feel guilty about having a family.  
I do hope they're safe. Even my da. I do wish to go talk to him now. Loss has a way to... remind us of the importance of family.

# 18th of Phoenix

Doric's Landing.  
  
Tomorrow we're moving out across the lake basin to one of the better fortified Seraph towns, from where we'll start ranging out and striking back at the enemy. Warmaster took the scouts out ahead today, while the rest of us prepared in camp.  
  
Was relatively quiet, asides from some Charr thinking they were clever, and giving us grass to smoke, instead of tobacco. Idiot. Even worse, apparently it's some sort of narcotic, so I ordered them to hand it in. Sometimes I worry about the quality of the Charr recruits they send us. Every now and again you get a solid one, but a lot of them just... there are too many idiosyncratic habits inherited from years of what I'd consider sub-par service with the Legions, often rightfully putting the name of the much better behaved and disciplined Charr soldiers at risk. That, and I'm annoyed they fouled up my pipe.  
  
In more pressing matters, we had Sawyer interrogated about the note from his father, though that was mostly inconclusive. I suspect we'll be stuck at an impasse on the matter until further notice. I mean, generally speaking, it's about as much of a mystery for all of us. We had Calder cast a disjunction, so at least Sawyer's probably not been body-switched with a mesmer or something silly like that.  
Calder also reported irregularities about the Jade constructs we've been fighting, and explained a little about the reason why their presence is a major concern. For one, they were created by the Mursaat, the old gods of the White Mantle, which poses the question if one somehow survived the Krytan Civil War long enough to marshal the White Mantle forces, and also the fact that these creatures are told to have possessed something called spectral agony, which would lay waste to armies, and cripple even the mightiest of heroes. I think we tasted a hint of it when our hunting party cornered our 'Avalanche' over leave, and it laid us low by wracking us with pain. They will prove to be extremely difficult opponents, though it seems that so far, at least, they're relatively rare.  
Unexpected, to say the least. I wonder what else the enemy will draw up against us when we set to battle in the next few days.  
  
I took a page out of Vethrir journal today, and am preparing a special breaching charge command wants to use to blow through the magical shielding surrounding those infernal cannons that keep shelling us. They're protected with arcane magic, so I'm going to turn that right around back to them, and use a charged bloodstone core as the primary payload for the breacher. Considering the immense yield they've shown in the field so far, I'm expecting spectacular results even with a small payload. Odds are we'll see it employed tomorrow, so... Here's hoping it'll work. If not, Occult will have to carry the brunt of the effort in punching through the shielding.

# 19th of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
A strange little town. We moved out across the lake, firmly into enemy territory. It's all wood, built into a nook of steep rocks. They've built it all up on poles, staggered out like terraces. It's a small maze of walkways and staircases leading to various little shacks and hovels. The locals have agreed with providing us with rooms and beds; I suspect plenty of people have left or perished, meaning there are empty beds aplenty for us, while we garrison here. There are thick forests to our north and south, and it's difficult to make sense of the battle lines. One thing is certain, though, and that's we're surrounded by White Mantle. They're to the north, in Fort Evennia, and the scouts saw fires burning from New Loamhurst to the south. Whether or not that means it's been overrun or not is not sure. We'll have to dispatch a patrol to make sure soon. At least we're in immediate striking distance of the enemy.  
  
We conducted the attack on the artillery too, with some success. The magical charge disrupted the arcane barrier well enough for us to crack open the remainder with conventional means, but the White Mantle swarmed us the moment we set off the bomb. It was a bit hectic, but eventually it collapsed, and blew up their cannon with it. It's a strange weapon. A large couldron-shaped block of Jade. I called a culverin in the report. Not sure how it is supposed to work, but I suspect it fires pure bloodstone. The good thing is that Occult was on hand to make datamagic recordings of the detonation, and will likely provide us with some much needed intelligence on the White Mantle's magic. I am loath to keep using bloodstone as a munition, so I hope they find a way to punch through the arcane barrier with more conventional weaponry. We'll see how that passes soon. Klixxa's awake, at least, if not fit for duty.  
  
In other news, apparently Vatorn was back-talking about trying to stab me, and so on and so forth, until Astrid caught him out, and put him in his place. That's the umpteenth time he's been acting out of order, and I'm slowly losing my desire to retain him in this Chapter. With his list of previous offenses and ongoing issues, he'd better watch his step, or I'll have him dishonourably discharged like the cretin he is. My patience for idiots is starting to wear thin.  
  
At least I'm pleased we're making headway. With some luck, we'll be able to tip the balance, and crush the White Mantle in short order. I know it's silly for me to hope for leave already, but there you go. Another seasons and a few moons, and Kristen and I will have our little baby. I will ask for a few days of special leave then, to see whether it's a boy or a girl. I think I like Hejja, for my mother, if it's a girl, or Lars for a boy. I wonder what Kristen'll think. I wonder what she's thinking right now, in the busy lodges of Hoelbrak. The news of the broken Fang must still echo around the mountains. It'll be busy, even as some lose their patience, and venture north. I suspect the Wolfborn will have their hands full; sentiment against the Svanir will not be good. I suspect there'll be plenty of blood on the snows these days. Thankfully my dear wife's as formidable as I am, so I should have nothing to fear. Freyj hasn't written me since last, unfortunately, so I am left in the dark. I wish they wrote more, really, but you know the old, stupid adage. Warriors don't read books. I suspect that also means they don't write letters. Ah well. I wonder if my da's still there, and what he thinks about his grandchildren. I wonder if he cares, and turned out to be a kind man, or if he simply shrugged and moved on. Does he see the same wonder and love as I do?  
I wonder what he thinks of me.  
It makes me sad thinking about these things, especially because I miss my little Jotunling. It will be his second summer soon, almost a whole year old! And I'll miss the most of it. A handful of spare days when the world was briefly safe from being torn apart. I hope I'll do better by Lars or by Hejja, or whatever name we'll end up choosing.

# 20th of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
Very heavy fighting around New Loamhurst. We went there, seeing if the town was in enemy hands, but it wasn't. While we there, there were ever-mounting signs of an impending attack, and sure enough the White Mantle poured out in force. Almost overran us, until we were fighting in the center of a shallow pond, in one big brutal melee. Fletcher and Claridge held their section commands with the First Crusaders injured. They held their positions fairly well. I'm not feeling too good, got thrown around and hammered hard by the enemy. Thankfully, my shield is broad and my armour thick, or I'd have been off much worse for wear.  
We fought them hard, until the attack abated. Then we pulled back the injured and return to the encampment. If another attack hits, hopefully the Seraph will call for reinforcements. We can't let New Loamhurst fall into enemy hands.  
  
Exhausting day. Truly exhausting. Every muscle aches. I'm just going to sleep.

# 21st of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
More fighting today, again in the south. We sent out patrols to the area around New Loamhurst, trying to root out any White Mantle presence. We were tasked with going through an old site of worship for the humans, filled with old statues and with a beautiful natural cavern filled with vivid red flowers and clean water. You could see why they'd think this was a sacred place. It was restful. Then we found the Seraph body, and that broke the spell somewhat. Seems like someone jumped and killed the soldier. Strong, too, punched a dagger straight through the chestpiece. Not once, but several times. No identification tags either. It makes me weary to let people go about on their own. Feels like they'd get picked off just like poor girl was.  
Anyway, the White Mantle showed up soon enough, they tried to swarm the section holding the actual shrine while I was inside with the other. We poured out and combined our forces just in time, and were able to repulse the enemy assault well enough. During, one of my Charr, Track Silentwill got hexed, and ran off. He slipped through the triage, and later, still hexed, tried to assassinate the Warmaster. Might even have worked, if Maeva hand't been stood next to her. She beat him to a pulp quick enough, and we had him chained up for now. I think Calder was able to disjunct the hex, but we'll only know when he wakes up. Mirka's looking into making sure that doesn't happen again. With the amount of mesmers and mages the White Mantle seem to employ, that's prudent.  
  
Lance, meanwhile, got out of that bog. Seems our readings were correct, the cloud hanging over that grove is bloodstone, and it has infected the oakhearts that used to wander there. A pity. I've always respected the venerable creatures, it seems a crime to see them so injured. At least Occult made some readings, and will be able to advise further. The new Sylvari, Caeranis, has been doing a good job along with Calder while Klixxa's still injured.  
  
Entire day costs us more wounded even so. At this rate, Blade will be three people strong. If you think that means I won't commit them to battle, you're wrong. When the destroyers first rose, the norn sent but three heroes, and still stood victorious, after all.  
  
In other news, Vatorn came to apologise for the uncouth behaviour Astrid caught him out on. It did a lot to somewhat improve my opinion of the man, though I still find it in poor taste. He's... well, not really fit for this kind of service, I think. Plus, he sometimes trikes me as unhinged. He's apparently been accusing Ilthy of being a White Mantle agent. Now I agree Ilthy's been acting odd, but that seems a mite extreme. Anyway, I'll talk to Claridge and the Kodan currently tutoring Ilthy about it, maybe they'll have an explanation for the erratic behaviour.  
  
Also spoke to a local priestess here. Blind, but quite perceptive. It was an interesting talk, though you always risk drifting into theology with people like that. Or at least, the norn equivalent of theology. Anyway, it was a nice diversion. I'm tired now, though. Off to another night of old dreams, I suppose, and onto the morrow. Another step closer to returning home.

# 22nd of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
A quiet day. Command meeting earlier today, turns out with all the injured we're getting, we're dropping below operational strength *rapidly*, and we now lack the resources or troop strength to assault Fort Evennia as we had hoped. Rather, we'll have to extend the recovery. Operations around New Loamhurst hopefully helped clearing out some of the White Mantle, but we have to hit for Evennia if we're to wrest control of the region back. And to take the fort, we'll need troops to storm it. Troops we don't currently have.  
Hm.  
  
I hate sitting on my thumbs. I think I'll take the time to train the sappers. Besides, I'm sure the Seraph could use another engine on the siege line. Not our usual tasks, but... well, we'll have to set out observers, and start thinking on how we want to approach cracking this nut. The good thing about taking some extra recovery time, is that we can at least prepare. I just hope the Seraph and us have managed to keep the fighting bottled up, so these poor people are a little safer. At the very least, with us and a detachment of Seraph in the Bazaar, I don't think we're under serious threat of attack. Or at least, not unless they can break the Seraph siege lines and lock us into the Bazaar.  
  
Spirits, what I wouldn't give for a couple of airships with air-to-ground cannons. Alas, the White Mantle's magical cannons are making that prospect seem distant. Just us boots on the ground for this one.

# 23rd of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
Another day at rest. There are sporadic reports from continued fighting all around us. The Seraph keep rotating troops in and out repeatedly, and they're getting as badly battered as we are. They've even deployed more of the Watchknights to the area, to counter the Jade armours. I've heard good things about them so far. I saw them in action briefly before, but never in a warzone like this. Last I knew, they were kept asides to guard the Reach. Well, I mean, saying that, I suppose this does qualify as that. You can still see the city's purple haze on the horizon if the weather's clear. Hardly is these days, a lot of smoke and fires throwing ash into the air, the weather's turned to drizzling rains and half-twilight. Maybe the weather's responding to the bloodstone the White Mantle are dumping in the surrounding area? Who knows.  
  
I left Track out his little box today, seems he's acting normal. I've moved him back to medical, with orders to have Occult and medical examine him before putting him back to normal. Calder disjuncted him already yesterday, but you can never be too sure.  
  
Wonder how things are at home. The usual.

# 24th of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
Ugh. That sums up the day. Ugh.  
Fairly boring training exercise. They managed to piss me off by running right in front of my face, so I tripped up Caeranis mid-run after I warned them. Probably shouldn't have, I kind of like the Sylvari. Ah well.  
Then everything went haywire. First a signal flare over the northern gate pulled us away, but that turned out to be a distraction. Then several Vigil troops mortified me by running off without orders, and throwing the entire jumble into even more of a chaotic mess. The real culprit turned out to be Ilthy Lightbringer. Or rather, the mesmer that's been parading as Ilthy Lightbringer since we bloody got back to duty. She'd lured Vatorn asides with an illusion of some local tail, which the idiot fell for, of course. Gullible idiot. We managed to surround and capture them quick enough, Vatorn escaping with a shallow laceration for his troubles.  
Went to work on interrogation. Did the usual, rattle them pretty badly for a while, then left them standing on a keg for an hour. Gave orders for them not to be disturbed by anyone below the rank of Knight, but Claridge cocked that up massively. More ineptitude. And right after they did quite well on the field with the section, too. Hm.  
Anyway, the prisoner folded like a wet blanket when I came back after half an hour, and answered plenty of my questions.  
  
Most worrying is that they've apparently been with the Chapter since Hoelbrak, undercover. She doesn't know where the real Ilthy is, but he's probably dead, or near to it. White Mantle prisoners have a bad expiration date, apparently. Her entire objective is to kill Vatorn. We dug up some of the information he managed to steal from those criminal groups he had infiltrated, and sure enough, it's filled with White Mantle intelligence. We're still sorting through it, but that suddenly became a lot more relevant. They White Mantle issued a bounty notice on Vatorn's head. It's likely the same bounty that triggered the attack in Fireheart, when that girl tried to run the past the Sentinels at Tuyere. We were holding the separate strands of the plot in our hands, but only know are they finally connected. At least the prisoner's pliable enough. They had plenty of opportunity to feed us misinformation, but I threw in some trap-questions about which I already knew the answers to see if they'd try and fool us. They didn't. As far as I can tell, all of their answers were truthful. Good for them, I suppose. I'll make a note about when we hand them over to the Seraph and the Shining Blade that this one talks. Maybe they'll keep them around as an informer, rather than throwing them on the gallows straight away.  
Oh, and apparently the White Mantle have more troops beyond Fort Evennia too. Centaurs, from Harathi. Sounded like an entire warherd is out here to fight alongside the White Mantle. Not good, but I suppose at least we know how to fight centaurs.  
  
Tiring day.  
I woke up this morning, in a mild haze, forgetting where I was, thinking my bear skin was Kristen. I felt empty when I realized it wasn't. I do miss her. And Reuzen. There are times when I close my eyes, and simply imagine I have him sitting in the palm of my hand, like a little baby. He'll be a year old soon now. Then, before I know it, he'll be the size of a Jotun, and eclisping everything I do, like Freyja, hopefully alongside his brother or sister.

# 25th of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
It's always strange when a busy and trying day is followed by one where most of it is mundane and routine work. At times, it's as if things just sort of... I don't know, as if a day is a bad dream, and then you wake up, and everything just continues as normal. I don't know, it's hard to make sense of it all. I've felt like this after major battles too. The only thing that seems to remember what's happened is the lingering pain and the aches that you feel in your bones and muscles, the chips on the shield and in the sword.  
Anyway, I'm sort of rambling.  
  
Engineers got set to work today. I managed to leverage a local carpenter to give me access to his tools, and then went to lumber a few trees. We'll be working on cutting out beams and and planks and then render them into a trebuchet. I've never built one before, but I have the plans in my Ballistician's folder. Makes me wish we brought mortars and cannon with us, to hammer that fort with modern weapons. Ah well, I suppose a Krytan war will have to be fought with Krytan weapons. A lot of magic, rusty swords and contraptions that like flinging boulders at steep stone walls. I wonder how far our trebuchet will be able to fling a rock. Hah, spirits, I should throw a boulder alongside it. Anyway, we'll need some time to properly fashion a war engine this big, but I'm hoping to have it finished within five days or so. Then we can mount it on wheels, and roll it to the siege line over at Saidra's Haven proper. Let's not have it said that the Vigil engineers sat on their thumbs during a siege.  
Might also be interesting to simply sap the wall the old way, but I'm not sure we'll be able to get close enough to the mesmer-infested citadel without attracting attention, much less if we intend to dig below the high walls of Fort Evennia. The Seraph built a good fort there, that's for certain, just a damn shame they couldn't keep a hold of it.  
  
Anyway, I'm trying not to dwell too much on the chaos and nonsense of yesterday. I've locked the prospect of Ilthy's possible death away in the back of my mind, until we've seized Evennia. Best to tackle each problem as it comes. Cheery and Bloodletter will be working with Occult about taking measures against magical infiltration, so hopefully that'll cease to be a worry soon.  
In truth, all we're doing is waiting. Waiting for our troops to recover their strength, before we bring the enemy to justice. I don't mind. I'll spend the time building a weapon of war that will crush them into a thin paste.

# 26th of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
Lance ran foul of another White Mantle ambush. They went to link up with a Shining Blade informant, but they both got jumped inside some ruins. Several folks in medical, including Astrid. Not sure about the details yet, they onlyjust returned. Apparently there was a Jade construct as well. They had to call in Blade to help them haul back the injured, so I ended up dragging Yevalin and Bjorn along while wearing Bear's skin. Spirits, and we were supposed to recover our losses.  
  
Work on the trebuchet progresses well. The Asura are natural craftsmen so that goes well. Glimlag's a little more hit-or-miss, but he'll learn. Just wish he wouldn't have short-cut some of our planks. We have enough lumber to cover the loss, and we can saw them up in the shorter beams, but still. Another few days, and we'll have an actual siege engine. I need to sit down and make the ratchet and lever, while the troops finish up the bodywork.  
Scout report also came back from Evennia, with a potential weak point. Apparently you can circumvent the main gate by going across a ledge and up onto the bridge connecting the two discreet halves of the fort. Very slim, but it's a thread we can pull on and leverage into an advantage. We have a strategy meeting scheduled today, but with Lance's current losses, I'm not sure if we can carry the assault.  
  
Bah.

# 27th of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
Corpse recovery duty. Literally. We had to go back and clean up the mess Lance made in their ambush site. Interesting place, some ancient tomb set in the side of the mountain, but half-flooded and certainly on the verge of collapse. Apparently they laid heroes to rest here that fought in the Krytan Civil War all those many years ago. Would have been an interesting sight, if not for half-rotting corpses Lance left behind. Mostly White Mantle bodies we heaped up and burnt, as well as one other. Shining Blade or Seraph, I think. We recovered that one, and delivered it to the Seraph here in town. Bit of a waste of effort to deploy a Vigil unit on it, I think, but I suppose it had to be done. At least we didn't get ambushed again.  
  
Trebuchet is progressing well enough. Might need some adjustments on the lever to withstand the stress of firing, but that's about it. Another day or two-three, and we'll be about done. Then we'll have it drawn up to the siege line.  
  
Wish I was home. I've feeling angry a lot these days.

# 28th of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
Villagers gave us a pig. So, with the Quartermasters, we decided to take it all out into the sanctuary cave near the shrine, and hold a little shindig. Nothing major, just an opportunity to unwind and fill their stomach on something other than rations. Went well. I was able to roast the piggy real well, and there was even a keg that had something distantly related to what once might have been ale in it.  
I think most of them appreciate a few hours break away from the stress. Good. Tomorrow, we'll have a command meeting, see where we stand.  
  
Trebuchet almost done. Did a re-work on the mechanism parts that took most the work. I think we'll finish it tomorrow. Spirits, might even start early. Only issue is my apron stinks a little. I used to wrap a body for transport yesterday. I'll need to scrub it thoroughly, tomorrow, before I get to work.  
I'll be happy to finally have this over with. We've been at a deadlock for a while now.

# 29th of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
Command meeting. We've got... something of a plan for the assault now. I won't be so stupid as to write it down here, though, but it'll be a struggle. Siege warfare is an ugly business, especially against clever and dangerous opponents like the White Mantle. I am reminded of the storm of Arah, and the assault in Dragon's Stand. Neither were battles I'll forget soon, hectic clashes were the details of individual actions are rendered down to a single, titanic struggle. We'll see what passes. It's good to have a plan of attack, though. I mentioned it yesterday as well, but I grow tired of sitting by. I wasn't made for protracted sieges.  
  
Cut myself a little in the hand while working on the trebuchet. Nothing major, just a shallow cut. My mind was drifting over to home, and I lost my concentration. Stupid, but it happens.  
We're going to restrict the letters. Pity, I've been considering writing home. Just... I don't know, because I feel like I have to. Not hearing anything, or doing anything, it drives me crazy sometimes. I wish Kristen was here. I wish they were all here, for a small, quiet day like yesterday, before I'm all alone here again.

[margin]  
Most troops in Blade  
are decent, able,  
soldiers. Just these  
two dense blocks  
of concrete keep  
dragging my op-  
inion of my own  
troops down into  
the bloody abyss  
with their persistent  
asanine bullshit  
instead of just doing  
their fucking jobs  
like the soldiers they're  
pretending to be.  
  
Bear, give me  
strength to deal with  
idiots and pompous  
fools.  
  
  
  
  
  
Hejja Tzahrsdottir  
Hejja Kristensdottir  
Lars Tzahrsson  
Lars Kristensson  
  
  
  
  
Death rides forth  
on a coal-back steed  
He wears a dark robe  
When we march out  
in the field  
He likes to gallop his  
horse alongside us.  
None of us see him,  
but we can feel the  
hoofbeats in the  
thudding hammer of  
our hearts.  
  
  
Oh, by the old lake-  
side, where we used  
to go, here is nothing  
left, but the tears we  
wept, and the blood  
we spilled.  
  
  
Little drops of rain  
stain the paper as  
I write. I think of my  
son, and the snow-  
flakes he catches  
in his hair.  
  
  
  
Bear whispers to me  
as I sleep. When I  
wake up, I can't  
remember what  
she said.  
  
  
Little birds fly, as if the  
world has always been  
like this. I wonder if they  
are happy.

# 30th of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
All is quiet. I like it when it's quiet.  
Forgewood's back, so that's good.  
  
My hand hurts. Damn cut keep rubbing awkwardly in my gauntlet. Silly thing.  
Honestly don't feel so good. Bit of a stomach ache, but nothing serious. If it's still here tomorrow, I'll see a medic. For now, though, I'll just keep quiet and sit a little. The town here has plenty of nice overlooks to just... stare out across.  
Lake Doric wears on me. I want to see my family again.

# 31st of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
Finished the trebuchet. We'll need it. Also gave a limited discourse on the need for unit cohesion, and factors for discipline. With such an eclectic unit composition, it stands to reason we have to work extra hard to keep the troops internally cohesive. We have a lot of wastage due the massive operational strain we suffer in our deployments, which makes it ever harder. It's a lot of faces, none of which you want to get to know too well, in case something goes wrong. It's a strange, and not very heroic perspective to take, but then I've found that the tales and stories of glory often omit the sterner parts of duty. I feel like I am an honourable warrior, and I uphold the principles of the Vigil well enough, but it is duty that often troubles me most. I thank the Spirits that the norn have not yet gone north, because it would tear at me. Maybe, if Braham is patient, Kristen and I will have our baby, and then we can all go north. Even better, the Vigil comes with us, and we put the sword to Jormag proper.  
  
But, that's in the future. Right now, we have a dangerous enemy to persecute and bring low. I find it difficult to focus on destroying them, though. They seem like a stepping stone, busywork. I know it's just as, if not more, important that we defeat the White Mantle as any other foe, but my heart is not in it. Hopefully we'll put an end to this rebellion quickly.  
  
Weather's turning a little. Warm, for Kryta, though I suppose we are marching closer to summer. I wonder if the snow might melt a little at home.

# 32nd of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
Tired. Have been looking through some of the material we got from Vatorn... interesting stuff. Tactical maps for almost all of Kryta, inventory indexes that look frightening like ours, training regimes, and more. We've placed him under full protective custody for now, but I have to wonder how much he's actually on our side. The spooks actually tried to send over a protector, but Maeva slapped that out of the water really fast. I don't trust him anymore, that's for certain... And I know that's terrible. I spoke to the Chapter about cohesion, and here I am decrying a soldier of mine as falling patently outside that sense of brotherhood. I wonder what that means... I'm not usually wrong about gut feelings. Or at least, that's what I like telling myself.  
  
Found some wood to carve with, but I just sort of... ruined it. Cut on my hand makes it annoying to hold the blade tightly. It's almost healed, mind, but I means I'm just chipping away the wood, without actually shaping anything worth keeping. Maybe I'll make my son something nice for his first birthday. A clockwork soldier? Something like that.

# 33rd of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
Preparations for the attack ongoing. Quartermasters did a thorough search of the troop's possessions, which took a horribly long time, with most of us simply standing around in a field. Well, we'll get back into the action proper soon enough. Bear will be with me.  
  
Claridge wrote me some sort of apology for something, and placed down *an apology wreath* as if her failing in fulfilling her duties was some sort of personal insult or slight. Laughable, really. Well, fine, she wants to try and gain some favour, she'll get to do it the norn way. I placed a stein in the wreath. But of course, like a sheaf of concrete, Claridge then proceeded to follow me around, no doubt wanting to hold another asanine conversation. Spirits, woman, you laid down an apology wreath, have the good grace to fuck off until you're ready to settle the matter in the way I indicated, or leave me alone. I'm pretty much done trying to explain simple concepts, only for Claridge to completely ignore what I say, and go with her own retarded ideas anyway.  
Blegh. Vitriol. I'd rather have a conversation with a brick. Would probably make a better soldier, too. What a disaster...  
  
Anyway, I shouldn't be so negative. It's just the mood. I don't like being here, and I'm not pleased at being idle for so long. The good news is that we'll finally strike back at the enemy, and hopefully get Fort Evennia out of the way. There's still an entire tribe of hostile centaurs waiting for us somewhere north of us, so we're not done yet regardless. I feel restless, and the combined antics of Claridge and Vatorn are rubbing me in exactly the wrong way to seriously ruin my mood. Nevermind the constant paranoia about mesmers disrupting our encampment... Blegh.  
  
I spend my time thinking about places other than here. It's just another piece of rural Kryta, minus a lake. I suppose it must've been nice once, I suppose, but the constant, pervasive threat reminds me of Orr. You get scared of shadows, and jump at every creak of wood you catch on the wind. It doesn't allow for much rest. I suppose that's why I've been so prickly. Just combat stress. It'd be good to excise those fears in battle.  
Here's hoping I live another day, and bring back a good tale for Kristen and my children.

# 34th of Phoenix

Lakeside Bazaar.  
  
Long day today. Terribly exhausted, but I have to write this down, and make sense of it all.  
We raided Evennia, the fortress, in a lightning assault. Our trebuchet, which the Seraph dragged off, started hurling rocks at the southern part of the keep, while we exploited a gap in the defenses to insert both of our squadrons straight into the center, and park Lance directly on the bridge between the north and south keep. I took Blade to the north keep, and we went into fierce hand-to-hand fighting. We managed to pull two prisoners, both of which... surprised me, but I'll get to them in a moment. Then we swept to the southern keep, and caused a slaughter there. I managed to throw a charge into a building that seemed to store bloodstones, and then another down the fortress well. On the extraction, we also blew the connecting bridge, meaning the Fort is generally untenable long-term. They have no source of water, and the northern keep will have to try and rebuild their access while the Seraph have the siege engines to direct fire onto them.  
The fighting was close quarters and extremely lethal. It's only superior training, the element of surprise and the general chaos that means we got out of the fighting relatively intact. One of us fell a long way down the bridge, but landed lucky, and only broke their ankle. Asides from that, we killed a good equal number of White Mantle troops, and a large amount of Jade constructs. The bone aching weariness wears on you though.  
  
And our prisoners... Well, one is Ilthy, and the other is Sima. I thought that seemed too good to be true, so I had Occult check them. Lucky I did, apparently, because Sima was inches away from dying, badly warped with bloodstone magic. They're both the real deal, though. Spirits alone know how we get so lucky, but... I didn't look too closely at what was inside some of the other buildings. The things the White Mantle are doing... It's unforgivable. I rarely relish killing, but I do today. It was good to let their blood, and to avenge the terrible atrocities of the White Mantle. Occult and medical had to work to save Sima's life, but... signs aren't good. He doesn't remember anything, according to the Warmaster. Ilthy's a gibbering wreck. I can only hope it's all temporary, and they will heal now that they have been freed.  
  
Maeva, too, had her problems today. There was a... haze of bloodstone magic hanging over the Fort. I could feel it. It made my magic come easily, and made the fires burn even hotter than they had ever done before. It was intoxicating. I think that's what it must feel like to be a truly powerful mage, and have the elements at your fingertips. It makes it easy to imagine why the White Mantle use it in copious amounts, and how they've been able to match us blow for blow on the battlefield. Not Maeva, though. I remember last tour in Ascalon, when Maeva had been stabbed with bloodstone, she didn't respond very well. Well, today we had to carry her off asides after her hands started cramping, and she nearly choked the Warmaster to death after giving her a pat on the shoulder. Things got a lot stranger when we put on those two little bracelets the Priory made for her. Literally summoned a magical mist-bank that rendered us blind while we had her outside of camp to cool off. Occult took readings; apparently the bloodstone was causing rising magical overloads, and the bracelets somehow stopped it. They couldn't tell me much more about it, mind, but bloodstone is hardly an everyday material. I had to put Maeva to bed in the end, in the hope that it's only a temporary malaise.  
Always messy, the aftermath of such engagements, but spirits alive.  
  
It's good though. I think the Seraph can mop up the Fort in maybe a season. We didn't break the siege just yet, but we did serious damage. The Fort won't hold. Not anymore. I suspect we'll be assessing our position soon, and then advancing north. There's forests there, and hills, probably infested with the centaur tribes the White Mantle have been rallying against the Krytan Queen. Always another foe.  
I'm glad I'm alive, at least. I should write a letter home, now that the postage is less in peril. I'm surprised every day I don't get a letter from Freyja, telling me the norn are marching against Jormag. Well, who knows, maybe I've misjudged Braham's youth. Patience and caution are not typical hero's traits, but they are laudable, especially when they stem from care. I hope Eirsson understands he holds thousands of norn lives in his hand, mine included. I hope the Spirits give him the wisdom to ensure I get to grow old with my children and Kristen close to me.

# 35th of Phoenix

Red Leaf Retreat.  
  
Advanced camp, all the way to the north of the region. It's a little nook in the rocks here, lying out in the Harvest Cascades. It's a secondary camp, the Seraph took over a fortified mansion down slope of us. We're holding the flank. Fortification isn't so good, just some stakes driven into the ground, but we have a pretty good vantage point through a cave to the south of us. We have a lot of thick wood cover all the way around us. I was thinking of setting the sappers to work there, but the forest is apparently haunted by fairly aggressive spirits. A couple of them tried to attack me while we were doing the defensive survey. Shatteredshield was able to lumber a good few trees anyway, which will go a long way. I've had Seleea set her golemite as a discreet sentry too, so we have some advance warning.  
  
Ilthy and Sima were kept back, they'll be moved to a hospital in the Reach as soon as possible, so they can get better, specialist treatment. They didn't seem to be better when we left. Maeva's still with us, and she seems somewhat more alright. Didn't blow up overnight, so that's good.  
  
We have a Whispers liaison that actually gives us intelligence. It's a small Asura, and apparently it's Seleea's sister, Wrappa. Guess that's alright. I'm not usually comfortable with spooks hanging around, but then Mippl was alright. I guess it's fine as long as they're mostly honest to your face, and leave all the stupid lying behind. I understand that, on some level, that's necessary because what they do, but... egh.  
  
Anyway, aye, haunted forest. That's going to make for chilling nights, and weary sentries, I'll tell you that much. I'm worried about what that means for us as a strategic position. I suspect the scouts will bring us back some information about the surrounding area for now, but at current, we're pretty much in a dark haunted forest, with little idea about where the enemy is really supposed to be. That, and Wrappa told that there's some sort of magical cave with a magic peach tree around, guarded by a nature spirit. I... think they're pulling my leg, but in a forest where the ghosts of the slain attack the living, I won't dismiss it that quickly just yet.  
  
On other matters, Claridge hasn't really came to seek me out with a barrel of ale then, so I suspect they have no idea what a stein in a wreath means. Or even what the ritual means. Spirits, she brought it over to Maeva, a Lion's Arch norn. Spirits spare me from Demorique and Claridge, walking disasters that they are. Anyway, I don't mind. Claridge wanted to settle this "slight", which wasn't even a slight to begin with, like a norn, and then decided to pussy out. I spoke to the Kodan, Immovable Thought, briefly, and he told me that he believes Claridge to be a deeply selfish person who mostly cares about herself, and only pretends to care for others to fuel her own self-righteousness. An interesting view on things. Fairly ironic, coming from a Kodan, if you ask me, but there you go.  
  
At least it's a different view.

# 36th of Phoenix

Red Leaf Retreat.  
  
Still setting up the encampment here, with the trees looming a little more ominously than they did before. Sleeping was a little rough. I think I spooked myself, and kept thinking there was something outside my tent. Doesn't help with the weird dreams you keep having after you've been at war as long as I have, but I suppose that means I can watch the ghosts wander aimlessly through the woods from the vantage. They're somehow less scary when you simply watch them, and don't think too much about what they are, or where they came from. It's sad, in a way. It makes me worry about dying here, and being trapped to wander these forests forever, without ever seeing the Hall of Spirits.  
  
The sun rises slowly over the forest, but when the first light pierces through the leaves, it's a brief, bright moment of beauty out here. The veil of darkness and despair that hangs over us is briefly lifted.  
And then we continue to prepare to shed blood between the trees, and the restless spirits of the fallen. It's almost perverse. I though the forest would be better than sleeping under the angry gaze of Fort Evennia, but I was wrong. Everything here is wrong. I hope that the spirit Wrappa told me about, the one in the cave, is real. That there's something good still lingering in this place that hasn't been twisted by war or tainted by the White Mantle.  
  
I started working on some wood to occupy the mind. It's a piece from the logging that Shatteredshield took down. It's nice to focus on it. I'm going to carve out a Watchknight for my little Jotunling. I hope he likes them.  
I wonder if he misses me.

# 37th of Phoenix

Red Leaf Retreat.  
  
Initial orders are drafted, and issued. We'll make our way out of this haunted forest soon enough.  
Spent most of the day finishing up paperwork, reading through area dispatches. Most of it was old information, but you know. For some reason, they make us read through all of this... Anyway.  
  
I'm not going to waste too much words. I'll find a bucket, a towel and then scrub down before I go get some sleep.

# 38th of Phoenix

Red Leaf Retreat.  
  
All is quiet. The troops had some combat training to be kept busy, after a general instructional about ghosts from the mouth of Caeranis, in Occult. Nothing much, really, but it's something to keep them occupied while we're waiting for the scouts to go out. I'll do the same tomorrow with the engineers, pending proper deployment orders.  
Spoke a bit with Calder, about family, and the way I keep hanging between things. I do miss Kristen terribly. I wish I was there, especially at a time like this. I keep thinking I'm falling short in my role as husband and father, a fact compounded by days spent at the front here where I feel like I'm sitting on my thumbs, waiting for the war-machine of the Vigil and the Seraph to swing around and brings itself to bear on the enemy. I know, somewhere, that this is an enemy that needs to be vanquished, but my heart isn't much into it. Vengeance, I suppose. Vermin to be exterminated, nothing more. My mind is north.  
  
The forests would have been restful, and remind me of sorts of the stately pines outside Hoelbrak, in the Foothills where the thaw water allows the trees to grow strong and tall. Here, the trees are smaller, and their barks are mottled red and brown. But instead of the gentle bray of Dolayk herds, or the lazy grunting of the spirit animals kept at the shrines, these trees ring with the howling wail of angry spirits. It is difficult. Like hearing someone die, slowly. It grates. I've set to stuffing wads of the insulation wool into my ears, so I can get a little sleep at least.

# 39th of Phoenix

Red Leaf Retreat.  
  
Instructed Shatteredshield on the principles of load-bearing columns, in the roughest terms. I wish I had a better way to teach the sappers about principles like these, but I don't, so a simile with a chair and basic concepts of weight has to suffice. If I repeat it often enough, I suppose something will stick. Will it suffice to make the sappers into Ballisticians? Hardly. But something is better than nothing. With enough diligence, they'll be able to get a some practical skills.  
  
Scouts got sent out today, which means we'll likely have objectives set in the morning, before we start pushing back against the enemy. At least it seems like we're winning this battle, albeit slowly. I've heard reports that the Seraph are doing better with besieging Fort Evennia. They're no longer thinking about storming the place at the cost of hundreds of lives, and will instead see if they can't squeeze the defenders out of it in the comings seasons. If I was a tactical officer, that's the exact time I'd ask my centaur allies to try and relieve the pressure, so I have a feeling we'll intercede there. A preemptive strike on the centaur warbands might also be in the cards for us. In fact, that might tie up the campaign, and leave the Seraph to clean up the remaining centaurs and whatever White Mantle troops still in the field. We'll see what the scouts say.  
  
Little wooden waatchknight's coming along. Now working on the detailing. Reuzen'll be happy, I think. It's a good time for Kristen to have a baby, you know. Siblings, even if they're only half ones. Good age, one a year and a bit apart. I wonder how Freyja and Grace are coping with Aska. Spirited girl at a difficult age, and Freyja can be headstrong. Funny. When Freyja was six, I must've been about her age now, too. I suppose she turned alright. It'll be a time of learning, and maturity, for the both of them. I'm surprised by Grace just as much, in a way. Wouldn't have expected her to stick along as long as she did, but I suppose I don't mind being proven wrong again.  
Anyway, I should keep my mind here, and on the present.

# 40th of Phoenix

Red Leaf Retreat.  
  
Scout report came in, seems the centaurs did their best to shore up another old fortification due east of us, through the forest. With the intent of opening the way out towards them, we set out into the forest, investigating possible reasons why the place is haunted halfway to the Mists and back. We set out well enough, looking for some cave supposedly filled with an ancient spirit. We found something alright.  
  
Large open cave, with a single rock sitting in a shallow pool. Around the base, oakhearts slowly trudged through the waters, completely at peace. On the rock there a single, beautiful tree, guarded by a vast nature spirit that reached up and offered us fruits from the tree. They were round and soft, succulent and delicious. It seems the region is rich in hidden nooks and crannies that are hidden sanctuaries where nature still flourishes. I decided not to report to much on it officially, in an effort to preserve the sanctity and balance of the place. I'll talk to the Warmaster about it, of course, but I'd prefer to keep it off of the official records. Some things are best left to flourish without anyone intruding on it. Forgewood seemed to have an exceptional affinity for the area, as she stood close up to the magical tree for a good few minutes, quite possibly communing with the spirits in her own, human way. It was restful, at least. Another gemstone for Tyria to wear in her crown.  
  
Lance fared much worse. Apparently the investigated another risky location, and Belmont got afflicted with some manner of curse. The other troops had to attempt and subdue him as he tried to attack them, which injured a fair number of them in the process. Blade had to help with the extraction. Belmont, Saint Claire and Drakecarver are now in medical with injuries, meaning all of Lance's command structure is eroded. Thankfully, Drakecarver's almost back fit for duty, allow her to sort her squad out. If not, i'm sure the Tactician or the Warmaster can always flex their unit command muscles.  
  
It's been a strange day. I mean, the beautiful tree with its guardian, and the the calm that surrounded it lifted a lot of weight off of my spirit. A reminder that there are things worth preserving and fighting for even out here. Perhaps I underestimate the Krytans. The cave near their shrine, south of here, gave me a similar feelings. If these places were in the mountains, they would become respected place of meditation and peace. Like the Dolyak graveyards, or the Raven rookeries. I turn around the armbrace I wear, from when Kristen and I were bonded to each other, and I wish she was here to see it with me. I'd have brought her pack of one those delicious fruits, but I fear they'd spoil long before she'd have a chance to taste the flesh. That gives me an idea, actually, one with which the Kodan might be able to assist me.  
Hm. Kristen'll be into her third season in a few more days.

# 41st of Phoenix

Red Leaf Retreat.  
  
So, the scouts we spotted out in the field yesterday apparently were cooking up something. The Seraph down the fortification deeper in the forest called us in to bolster their camp against an attack, which we did. The haunted forest doesn't help when you're laid down, trying to figure out if the White Mantle are encroaching on us. As it stands, the White Mantle grunts tried to ambush us, but that whipped back in their face. We had to fall back to the fortification, and withstand a direct storm for a while. Nothing we couldn't handle from an enemy, in fairness, though some of the recruits were bucking a bit at holding the bridgepoint. Kept rushing off to chase down their kills, instead of letting the skirmishers and mages pick them off. Seemed to go well for a while, until a seriously twisted centaur warlock showed up, showering us with great twisters of fire, and throwing us around like we were ragdolls on the drift. We had to rush him down. Thankfully, our armour's well-crafted and warded, so none of us got badly injured. Just a little rattled. Calder later mentioned that the corpse seemed to be as if it had pierced it's own skins with bloodstone shards. I'm not sure if they're getting desperate, or if that's how all the centaurs are. Spirits, the shaman we killed might've been their leader, I have no idea.  
Anyway, the attack on the stronghold in the cascades can mean a couple of things. I'm hoping they're starting to run out of supplies, and this was an attempt to force open our position and perhaps regain some ground. If all goes well, we'll start preparing our counter-attack against the enemy soon. From the reports, it looks to be a vicious battle, but we'll prevail. We're the Vigil, winning against the odds by sheer dint of grit is what we do.  
  
I sort of have a hankering to head back to the cave we found yesterday, and sit in peace with the spirit guardian there. Commune with bear, and just let everything wash away from me. But I can't, and I shouldn't. I spoke to our Kodan. He used to be an ice-shaper when his Sanctuary still floated, so I asked him to encase the peach's core in a little globule of eternal ice. With some luck, it might germinate when I thaw it, and I can plant it somewhere nice. Magic so pure and powerful deserves to take root and grow. I'll have to find a spot away from the mountains, where the climate is mild enough to breath life into it.  
The good thing about the end of the campaign nearing is that leave beckons closer. That's good, I have to give Reuzen his new wooden watchknight, no doubt for him to stick it into his mouth, like he's want to do. Ah, and Kristen. Now that'll be a rare joy to see here again.  
  
But, the campaign's not over yet. I yet remain in the middle of a haunted forest, ringing with the haunting wails of the lost and wandering dead. I suppose after Orr and Ascalon, such things should've stopped bothering me, but I still feel an odd chill run through my veins when I see one of the lost spirits wander between the trees, at the edge of the camp. I sometimes go to sit there, and look out over the overlook. It's gotten a hint of tragedy to it, with the lake itself barely a puddle, and the flames of war camps burning in the distance. The Reach still has the shimmering dome above it, protecting it from any assault. Despite the noble gesture, it stains the horizon like an inkstain, casting a fading smudge of purple light into the night's sky. I prefer the shifting aurora over the mountains, for certain. A little bit of snow won't hurt either, to alternate between the temperate heat of the Krytan sun, and the dismal little rains that sweep by once in a while. Eh. We'll be out of here soon enough.

# 42nd of Phoenix

Red Leaf Retreat.  
  
Some team-building today. Basically have the troops present themselves briefly, and then have questions asked. Bit of a lighter thing, supposed to knit Blade closer together. I do think it worked to a degree. If not, then at least it kept them somewhat busy. We'll need all our wits about for the attacks on the centaur holdings soon enough. Reports paint a bad picture; an uphill slog through a killfield that runs all the way up to the hilltop. We'll need our guardians to be on point, or we'll just be a bunch of corpses on the slopes up to the centaur's camp. We'll figure out the specifics in a tactical meeting soon.  
  
In other news, Vatorn's asked for a temporary reassignment to the Vigil Keep, complaining about terrible headaches. The medics later came to talk to me, he apparently had such vivid nightmares he dislocated his own shoulder. Or at least, that's what I understood from the medical incident report. I have a slight feeling he might have tried to sneak off, and gotten injured in the process, but that's hard to prove. As it stands, Cheery will have him ordered into observation out of medical concerns. I mean, if it's true, I hope it's not permanent for him.  
Maybe it'll be all the wild magic in the air. Dumping that amount of bloodstone into the area is bound to have an effect. Maybe we should've taken him to the tree spirit, give him a little reprieve, but that's too late now.  
Regardless, we'll have to make arrangements to send him down the supply chain as soon as possible.  
  
Let's hope we don't lose anyone. I mean, spirits, odds are always stacked against us, and yet we keep on surviving. I promise I won't die, sweet. They'll have to try a lot harder than this.

# 43rd of Phoenix

Red Leaf retreat.  
  
Making preparations for battle. Washed in a bucket, trimmed the hair on my head, polished the shield and sharpened the sword. Made sure the armour's all shining and fitted well. Suit's old. You can see the stains where fire licked the steel, and all of the straps have been replaced several times by now, but it'll hold. I like to think the smiths took extra care when forging the armour plating, and when they warded the suit. Few things have managed to punch through the plating in the years it's served me. Spirits, if it remains as it is, Reuzen might have use of it when I grow too fat to wear it, or finally decide to retire.  
  
We got a new recruit today. Charr. Looked healthy. Doesn't speak, though, so I had to take a blood oath instead of a spoken vow. Not what I expected, but I suppose I can hardly be surprised about the sort of recruits we get sent. I'll wonder how he'll hold up in the field.  
Shouldn't have cut my right hand, to be fair, but it's shallow. It'll heal quickly enough.  
In all seriousness, though, most of what we do now is wait, before we deploy against the centaurs.

# 44th of Phoenix

Red Leaf Retreat.  
  
More new recruits, Charr. I think Command's aware of our position, and bulking us up before we take the plunge against the enemy. Honestly, that might not be a bad thing. If we're going for a massed assault to storm the watchtower, we'll bloody need the troops. I wish we didn't, but... I don't think there's any other way we end this. Well, I've survived the storm in Dragon's Watch, I'll make sure I come back from this one just as well.  
  
Took out the troops on patrol. Sound some attempt by the White Mantle to set up a cannon on the flank of Saidra's Haven. We wiped them out well enough, no quarter asked, none given. I took some of the new troops out with me, they did fairly well on the field. Not veterans, but they fought well enough. They'll actually be useful, rather than liabilities. One Charr recruit kicked up a fuss about another one using fire magic, but I spoke to him about it. I think it'll be alright short-term, but it can't develop into a serious feud. I'll have to inform their First Crusader, whenever the assignments get finished.  
  
Well, the good thing at least, is that we're almost done in the area. End stages of the campaign, if everything goes to plan. Then I can go plant a kiss on Kristen's belly, and put my boy back on my knee while I tell him stories he doesn't understand yet. Bear'll be with me. She always is.

# 45th of Phoenix

Red Leaf Retreat.  
  
Attack orders have been released formally, we'll be going in for the attack on in two more days. Straight up the center, as it stands, and damn the terrain and enemy positions. We'll be trying to punch through a heavily entrenched position, and eliminating the enemy leadership. We're getting limited Seraph support, but the main weight of the attack will be Vigil. Guess we're the folks you call when you want a door kicked in, just like the Priory and Whispers like to joke.  
As it stands, Klixxa put the troops through some physical exercise to keep them warmed up, and I'll be rehearing demolitions basics with the sapper troops tomorrow afternoon. Everything's prepared. If all goes well, we'll pull out of the area. With the centaurs gone, and the White Mantle fort of Evennia scuttled, the most direct threats against the Reach will be removed, and the Seraph can claim full credit for landing the deathstroke once we've paved the way for them. And then, perhaps, I can get a few days home. We'll see.  
  
The woods are still disturbed. At night, I get terrible nightmares, and I wake to listen to strange voices on the wind, and fleeting footsteps that come closer, and dance around your field of hearing. It would be terrifying, if I couldn't hear the soft crackle of the fire, and the half-whispered jokes of the sentries and the Seraph soldiers that man the perimeter. I like to lie there, too agitated to sleep, and try and discern what the ghosts are saying. I wish I could break whatever curse bound them to the earth, and release them. When I die, Raven will come for my spirit, and guide me away to the Hall of Spirits, while my children and friends will tell tale of who I was. A better fate than those lost and damned wraiths trapped in half-life. Bah.  
I can understand why Vatorn could not sleep well here. My magic is not nearly a quarter as strong as his, and I find it difficult to find rest here.  
  
We'll be done soon, at least. Once more onto the killing fields, my friends, before we put an end to this atrocity. And then, hopefully, north. To Jormag.

# 46th of Phoenix

Red Leaf Retreat.  
  
Last day before the big attack. Made sure the engineers and sappers are equipped to standard with all the ordnance we need. It's just a matter of ensuring we'll have the extra edges we need. And, if courage fails us today, to ensure we'll take as many down with us as we can. I communed with bear, moments ago before I sat down to write my entry. She doesn't answer today, but I can feel her presence. She's there.  
I take some small comfort from her presence, and I think I'll sleep well today.  
  
I keep Kristen, Freyja and Reuzen in my mind, and seek some measure of peace with whatever lies ahead. I don't want to disturb the thought by muddling it with words. There is some peace, finally. I accept the role I have to play tomorrow, no matter the outcome.

# 47th of Phoenix

Red Leaf Retreat.  
  
The storm happened. It was a confused mess of troops scattering and reforming, before scattering again. Moving apart to accommodate the repeated centaur charges, then reforming to keep advancing, all the while with cover from the barriers to keep us safe from the appalling volleys of missile fire that the centaurs layered on us, every step of the way. It was almost surreal. The same sort of chaotic haze that washes over you when the fighting is so intense, that you don't even remember the specifics. Adrenaline takes over, and all the details are turned into a wash. We stormed past the centaurs, and made it all the way up to the slope. There was another war sage, trying to summon vast earth elementals that rose like giant skeletons from the earth, before he tried to smother us with whirling clouds of fire and pain. We killed him. Just... destroyed him. Once we'd cleared the tower, he never stood a chance.  
The retreat was more chaotic. We were cut off by more of the centaurs, and forced to pull back through a different route. We passed through the cave, with the oakhearts and the tree spirit, but they paid us little mind, and I don't think anyone actually noticed the spirit. We were hurried. Thankfully, the centaurs are worse climbers than we are, and we managed to escape soon enough. I didn't like having to pass through the sacred cave again, but I suppose it's a small sacrifice. There was a lot of disorder, though. Troops not paying attention, almost getting panicked. It took some effort to have the Chapter fall back by sections, and for a moment it seemed we'd get overrun, or be forced to retain our position and be besieged. Thankfully, though, that wasn't the case.  
  
I had a bucket of mead with crushed ice, which... spirits, that hit the spot. Made me nostalgic, though. I'm looking forward to stealing a few days to Hoelbrak, eating a minotaur steak, and having actual norn ale to drink, while I have Kristen and the children close. Soon, though. With the centaur leadership gone, we're done here. The Seraph can clean up. The Warmaster's going to pulls us out tomorrow. Not a moment too soon.

# 48th of Phoenix

Divinty's Reach.  
  
As expected, back away from the frontline. Main command apparently decided that the White Mantle and their centaur allies no longer constitute a dire threat to the city itself, merely to the outskirts. That means our main operational objectives, preventing the potential loss of the city, have been fulfilled, and we're off the front. Can't say I'm much displeased with the campaign. We destroyed two major strongpoints, and worked alongside the Seraph to collapse the line with little effort. Another mark in our favour, I suppose.  
  
Now we're back in the Reach, waiting for new orders to come through and tell us where we're going next. The Warmaster took care of the paperwork while Drakecarver and I hit the pub, and had a nice enough conversation with some of the locals. Nothing exceptionally interesting, but I might have a blacksmith that can patch and refurbish the plate armour if we get some leave. If so, I'm dropping it by, and heading over to Hoelbrak.  
I guess I'll know tomorrow when Alleshia hands out the service briefings. Here's hoping all the madness around Lake Doric was relatively contained, and half the world isn't on the brink of being... I don't know, eaten alive.  
  
City's too loud, too cramped, and too hot.  
Ugh.

# 49th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
We got some leave. Not real leave, mind, the soldiers aren't allowed to leave the Reach, but I got special dispensation from the Warmaster herself to go home, at least for one night. I have some blasted command meeting tomorrow, for which I need to return to the Reach. Here's hoping I can steal another day afterwards.  
  
I found Kristen in Leopard's Lodge, swollen and happy like a pumpkin in a Shaemoor field, all glowy with... I don't know how to describe it. She's the most beautiful thing I know, and I want to wrap her in my arms, and never let her go. In fact, it took a deliberate effort to wrench myself away, and take the day's notes. But it helps to order the mind, and organize the thoughts. Stops the nightmares a little.  
I've missed Kristen, badly. And this one night barely provides us any time together. I want to carry her off to the hot springs, to go sailing with her across the bay in Lion's Arch... All manner of things. If I can, I'll carry her up to Hrithbeir's Rest, and we'll look over the mourn, while she weaves snow blossoms into her hair. At least she's been well, despite the added weight. Valharanta has helped her a lot, and she's found the time she's lost hunting valuable to get closer to Leopard. At this point, we might have to have the baby born under Leopard's totem, since she has already seemingly taken up silent watch over Kirsten and the child. I'm pleased, everything seems to point at a good birth so far, with no bad omens to cause any concern. In another season or so, I'll know if it'll be a son or a daughter we've been blessed with.  
  
Speaking of sons, I will go see the Jotunling tomorrow, for as long as I can. Today was too late, and it bodes ill to wake a child when it sleeps fitfully. I'll call on Hirst and Hildr too, see if they are doing well. I'm sure they won't mind me taking the boy out to the Mourn, or the lodges for a small day, before I have to leave again. Ah... always too short.  
But now I'm going to return to that warm, loving embrace, and value every second of it as if it were a century.

# 50th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Command meeting in the Reach went well, though a little bothersome to take me away from home. But, we got two Legion Charr with a request for Vigil troops to assist in a Pact operation in Sparfly. Apparently they've had issues with Risen in the area again, and the Charr have been called in for clean-up. I'll be leading a detachment in to support the troops in securing Fort Cadence, and then continue on in cleaning up the region, with the necessary attention to the Hylek. It's not going to be a long operation, mind, we're getting air support, and dropping in with heavy ordnance packages. I guess the Legions want this done quickly, and brutally. Well, I'm happy to oblige.  
  
Back home, I went to visit the little Jotunling. Hildr was playing with him in the Boasting Hall. The boy's doing well, spirits, he's walking a little, and he even called me da. The feeling that my son knows who I am, is... beyond words. It banished so many fears, and doubts I had about whether or not I was a good father. It fills my heart with joy. It reminds me, I should talk to Kristen about my father. Freyja and Grace are not around, but she has mentioned him in passing, this morning. He's hunting, out in the Foothills, but he'll be back soon. I'll need to find time to talk to him. Spirits. I wonder what he looks like.  
Hildr was doing very well too, compared to how she was before. Her wounds have not healed, but I no longer doubt that she's lucky to be alive. She's working herself back into shape, and plans to come north with all of us, when the time comes. She doesn't understand, but it's a victory against Jormag. Sjöfn, or Hildr, survived a Claw's onslaught, and will live to fight again, proudly. I hope she finds fulfillment in that, and perhaps recover some of what she once was.  
  
Tomorrow, I have no obligations. I'm going to wake early, and get pastry rolls and drake cuts before Kristen wakes up, and then treat her to a surprise. She deserves to be fawned over a little, while she's doing all the heavy lifting. And then, afterwards, I'll work the knots out of her shoulders and back, and carry her up to Hrothbeir's Rest for some well-deserved husband-wife time under the snow cherries. My beautiful lass, how lucky I've been. By far the best thing ever to have come out of Southsun, hah.

# 51st of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Slept long, woke up to find Kristen already awake, pressing my hand to her belly to feel the baby move. I was going to nip out early to get food, and surprise Kristen, but I couldn't bring myself to leave. I just sat there, pressing my hand and ears flat on my wife's belly, and forgot that anything else existed in this world. Our child's stirring, slowly, kicking and moving around inside, waiting for the world to know their name.  
Kristen's just a beautiful as ever. The coils of her tattoo dance and whirl over her body, and seem to cradle her in a permanent embrace. She looks well as a mother, it adds to that certain... aura of matronly authority Valharanta's been fostering in her as a shaman. I saw where she got it from, but I'll come back to that in a moment.  
I did take Kristen out to Hrothbeir's Rest in the afternoon, with a basket of fish and bread from a merchant along the Trade Commons. Spoke about the campaigns and the fighting, the Sparkfly thing, and thousand other little things from our lives when we live apart. It's bittersweet, in the sense that it painfully highlights how far apart we live. My days are spent fighting wars, bleeding from shallow cuts, and thinking about war and slaughter in the same breath as honour and duty. Meanwhile, Kristen is here, in Hoelbrak, where I am only a sporadic guests. I feel guilty for letting a flash of anger spoil what little moments we have alone, but I can't help it. It's the price I must pay in the name of duty. I don't blame the Vigil; it's the Elder Dragons and the threat they pose who are to blame.  
Bah, listen to me, souring my own mood before I go to bed. For shame! There are things on my mind, as there always will be, but Kristen and my children are securely locked away in my heart, whatever may come. That is a truth.  
  
I met Kristen's mother, Skaadi today. She was talking to Kristen when we came back from the Mourn in the afternoon. I mistook her for another Elder first, but once Kristen introduced her, I could see the resemblance. There's a surprising amount of Kristen in Skaadi, like a small window into the future showing me how she'll be in another thirty years, when we're both starting to grey. Skaadi still works for the Order of Whispers, as it stands, but she didn't feel the need to keep that from me. Kristen has inherited many good things from her mother; apparently Skaadi taught her how to hunt and track. Since Kristen's easily the best tracker I know, that is a genuinely impressive feat. Of course, I run the risk of being partial of judgement.  
  
More troubling, and... yet not at all troubling is something else. I met my father today. He didn't look like I imagined him to be, really. He was much smaller, and grayer than I imagined, or even remembered him to be. He's very old, and travel has made him lean. He came to us, Skaadi, Kristen and me, offering us a crystal ball of some kind, that seems to have trapped a small elemental. It whistles and rushes, like a trapped storm. It's a beautiful thing, really. It was a very awkward occasion, namely because I kept wavering on what I wanted to say to him. An angry, molten little core I didn't even know I had just wanted to shout at him, to tell him to leave and never come back, whereas another was overwhelmed with the idea that the small elderly norn before me truly was to me, what I am to my children. I was so ready to be angry, but my father is an old man, with a soft voice and kind eyes. Kristen tells me he looks like me. I think she must see the same thing in him, as I see in Skaadi. He invited me to talk to him in the Great Lodge, and we did. It was strange. He wasn't apologetic, nor did he speak much about the reasons for him leaving. He asked me a lot of things, about Freyja, Reuzen, Kristen. About who I am, and the reasons I am with the Vigil. I just told him the truth, about the love for my children, and the future I fight for. That's when I realized why I've been so angry at him. My da never fought to make the world better for me, while I toil so hard, and sacrifice so much to do exactly that. It feels unfair. Unjust even. It stops me from letting the child who never had a father leap out, and embrace this Elder as if he truly is family. What should I even think? If this a rent between us that will heal with time? Do I even want to give him this chance?  
It's a stupid question, because I know I have to. I cannot well refuse to accept that I have a father who now wishes to know his grandchildren again. What purpose would it serve to send him away?  
  
I don't know. Why is being home so difficult?

# 52nd of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Difficult night. Sleep came slowly, and the turmoil of my thoughts kept me awake. Kristen noticed my agitation, and I told her what I wrote down yesterday. She understand my frustration, at least, and it was good to talk about these things. She told me that such small things should not defeat me. Kirsten, my children, they are gifts to me that I treasure beyond anything else in this world, and which will always come first in my heart. When I forgot that, like after the Orrian campaign, I was lost like a steerless ship. I fret too much about what I miss, and what I don't have, and forget the wonderous gifts and joys that life has already given me. I was always more prone to melancholia than sanguinity; I suppose that comes from a long life where memories were sweeter than the now. But that is the past. I went to see my boy today, and realised that I am blessed. I can go forth, and fight for what I have, not for what I have lost. I am strong like a dire bear, and rugged like a mountain Dolyak. My shield is broad, and my hands can yet hold a sword without wavering. All that, and more, which allow me the privilege of fighting for everything I hold dear. Then to come home and my son take his first steps, and speak his first words, to be able to press an ear to my wife's belly, and hear the sounds of life stir, it is worth it.  
What my father means in all this, I can't tell yet. His is as of yet a stranger to me, even though it is clear this causes him much anguish. He comes to speak to me, and I see in his eyes that he regrets things in his heart that he cannot yet voice. To me, it is like standing next to a fire that is burning too hot. One moment, I want to punch him, the other I want to hug him. He asks me things, tales, of battle, about my children, the Spirits, and I tell him small tales of people I've lost, of the places I've been. I told him about Kristen, of course. About Freyja. Women I've loved. And about the small moment of lost lust, when I lost my bearing, and ended up in Hrist's bed. It piqued me talk about it. I wonder if that's what I was to him. Just an accident along the road. Spirits, I can't imagine not caring for the little Jotunling, even though I have no feelings for Hrist. He's my bloody son.  
Bah, see. It agitates me even now. The old fool. I wish he'd just staid away on his travels. I don't understand why he's returned.  
  
On a different note, before I grow to irritated to sleep fitfully, the Chapter passed by Hoelbrak today, which means that I'm leaving on the morrow, back on recruitment tour. Today was fairly calm, though I heard that there was a ruckus in one of Blade's sections. I'll read up the reports on the specifics tomorrow afternoon, and see if it needs to be addressed or not. There was the usual mercenaries' moot, which attracted some familiar faces from a Charr warband, along whom we fought in Ascalon. Their Centurion recognised me, from when we battled those Ogres, and we exchanged some words. Most of it went well, asides from some boisterous folks almost picking fights where they shouldn't. Overall, it was a decent enough moot, though the Charr seemed to provide the majority of the sport. The local mercenary group's apparently been trying to venture north, with limited success. I don't know why they're trying to speed ahead of everyone else; it's not like we've been trying to push the frontier for years now, with little effect. Well, at least none of them got killed. We'll need their swords when Braham truly calls us north.  
Anyway, I'll have to prepare to depart tomorrow, and say goodbye to everyone. Back to war.

# 53rd of Phoenix

The Grove.  
  
Woke up. Made sure I had my equipment packed and ready to depart, so I could stay in until the very last second. Kristen helped me put on the armour, which felt oddly... ceremonial. It was like a proper goodbye, until the next time I return. I have the frozen peach pit, and told her to find a spot in the Foothills, and then try to see it'll sprout. Maybe she can Skaadi, or even da, take her out. I'm surprised the lass doesn't go stir crazy in here. I went to visit Reuzen right before I left, and gave him the watchknight toy I was working on. It's strange to see him grow up in spurts. I'll wonder what he'll look like my next leave.  
  
I mustered the troops out, and we moved over to the Grove. We passed by Trahearne's monument, and spent a moment a silence for the fallen, before going to the Vigil billet there and sending out the people on patrols. I gave them some leeway to make a good impression, which seemed to have worked fairly well. Only note I got was from Lightbringer, Ilthy's kin, about them not doing a proper salute before dismissal. I put Caeranis and Prydwen in charge, because it's their home turf. A little bit of a more casual approach tends to do better with people, especially Sylvari. That way, they can pose questions, and our folks can answer the questions. There was a tavern that was pleasant enough, and allowed me some good talking. A few recruits, too, but mostly people that had their paperwork pre-signed, so they're not locals. We'll see.  
  
Also a Skritt wandered into the post, trying to sell leaves, claiming they were magical. One of our newer recruits give the Skritt ten silvers for one, apparently because of sheer lack of appreciation for the value of the coinage. Well, I suppose we won't put him with the Quartermasters, for certain. Fletcher dealt with the Skritt, she apparently kept some shiny trinkets for exactly such an occasion. Guess it pays to be prepared.  
  
Anyway, we'll be off to the Black Citadel tomorrow. Not my favourite place, but I might take the time to prepare a weapons package in the armoury, while we're right in the weapons production facility. We'll see.

# 54th of Phoenix

The Black Citadel.  
  
The Grove is beautiful at dawn. I found a spot overlooking the bay of the Tarnished Coast, and watched the sun come up with eating a tin of good old tinned beef and some cheese from back home. A poor substitute for a proper norn meal, but it's good. The sort of moment I'd wish I could share with someone. I actually considered waking up Astrid, maybe, but no, that would've been too strange. This is a sort of thing you share with a loved one, or to keep it for yourself. I reminded me of watching the sun rise in Orr, over Caer Shadowfain. I guess that, in some way, the Pale Tree was with me, even though I find it strange to think that everything around me is part of some single creature. It makes me wonder about those corrupted trees we saw in the Magus Falls, and whether or not those were ever intelligent or... vibrant as the Pale Tree is. I think I would like to see her sometimes. The avatar, that is. I suppose I did already see 'her'.  
  
Anyway, marched off to the Black Citadel soon after, and took up position at the usual Centerhouse, which is more like an armoury depot. Doesn't matter. I drafted an equipment package for the Sparkfly operation, all things that should be easily requisitioned straight from the stocks, and sent to the Vigil Keep for pick-up. Saves me a whole lot of problems with paperwork by just going straight to the stockpiles.  
  
Troops also took a walk around town. Went to see the Great Smelter, and the Gladium canton, before overlooking the old Ascalonian ruins. There's good tales to be found, if you look hard enough. The great warhorn Stormcaller sits there, a trophy in an almost forgotten corner of the Citadel. It is probably the single most impressive thing in the city; more so than the Iron Legion tanks, the ugly knob of the command core, or the slagworks. No, of all the things that carry real weight, it's the old Ascalonian horn that once quenched the fires of the encroaching Charr soldiers, before they fought hard and bloody skirmishes in the streets of the cities of Rin and Nolani. Now, they're only memories, rendered more heroic and valiant in defeat than they could ever be in victory. It's a small taste of how those few Ascalonians still feel about their past; it's similar to our tales about the Far Shiverpeaks, before Jormag rose. The tales Gunnar Poundfist, and Olaf Olafsson, of Jora and Svanir, and the heroic deeds they describe in places that are now long lost to us. I should ask my father to tell me about his parents, if he remembers their tales. He must've seen many things. Before I left Hoelbrak, I asked him where he got the strange orb he gave to Kristen and me, and he explained he got it off of a very old Angchu Tengu, years ago. It's a Canthan thing, apparently, containing a whisper of the wind that turned half of the land to stone, almost five hundred years ago. I wish I had had a better look at it before I left. The soft sounds it made, like a whisper... I hope Kristen keeps it close. Relics like that bring good.  
  
But I digress. The day was relatively quiet. No new incidents, or recruits for that matter. Only got a brief visit from the same Blood Legion Centurion I met in Hoelbrak, now apparently back in the Citadel. Seemed like an easy enough conversation, asides from the usual barbs being thrown around. Legion Charr holding officer ranks are easy enough to figure out. They just want to assert dominance over everything they see. Not usually an issue for me to keep up with that though, Bear's given the strength, aye, but I always like to think Raven sneaks some wit in there to trip up my opponents. That's why I'm so good at boasting. Anyway, no issue from the Charr, just your usual muscle flexing.  
Did see Force though. Sad to say he looked like a heap of piss; lost half his bulk! At least he's back on his feet, and getting stronger, after what that damned Flame Legion band tried. Apparently the Fahrar they attacked kept Force and Arca's cubs, so that explains something about his spontaneous heroics. Good. Father should fight for his children.  
Hm.  
Force'll be building up some strength again, and then hopefully rejoin us in the field. Good, because I could use an extra hand keeping the recruits in check. The ground is thinly populated with able soldiers; they tend to die or rotate out before we get any truly grizzled veterans. Spirits, my 'veteran Crusader' include Claridge, Fletcher and Demorique. Hardly a foundation to build a war on, if you ask me. Not that I won't trust them to do their jobs, is that I don't trust them to do much beyond that. Except maybe Fletcher, though she lacks imagination. We'll see.  
  
Tomorrow we're off to Rata Sum. That'll be another joyful experience, I'm sure. At least I'll sleep better there, than I will here. My bedroll's propped up the side of a bombard, and a stack of armed shells with enough yield to crater a mountain. Coupled with the constant bloody racket of cranes and grinding gears, it'll make Rally Point in Orr sound like a place of peace and quiet.

# 55th of Phoenix

Rata Sum.  
  
Left the Black Citadel early enough, when there was still a cloud of low-hanging smog making life difficult, and smelling up the place of rank oils and burning metal. Glad to leave it behind.  
Rata Sum's... different, but not really better. Always feels a little claustrophobic, sitting in that metal cube. Only the open balconies and relatively high ceilings make it a little bearable. I allowed Mistarrow to lead the patrol out, which apparently went fine, with the minor issues that can be expected. They were the only ones to volunteer for the patrol, though, so I guess that's well-deserved.  
  
Attracted a number of new volunteers, curiously, most of them seem to be Sylvari. I guess they followed us here from the Grove. Can't be bad, though, if they last. Also got a visit from a progeny, interested in explosives. He spent a while, talking to the soldiers, and asking questions about what they did. I gave him a practice kit from the sapper supplies to play around with, it's healthy for children to develop a passion early. In a few years, he might grow up to become a Vigil Ballistician. As far as I'm concerned, that's another recruit gained for us, just for the future.  
  
Asides from that, Rata Sum is the usual sight. A steep drop off the side, and a magnificent view off of the flanks, over the coastline. If the mist from the jungle would clear, I'd wager you'd see the distant form of the Pale Tree too, if you squinted hard enough. Alas, no such luck. Rata Sum's not too high for the insects to be a bother, though it remains relatively dry, and airy throughout the region. I'll sleep near the edge, I think, with my head outwards so the breeze can tickle my scalp a little. That'll stop me from sweating too much in the climate. No ooze-booze this time around, though, thankfully.

# 56th of Phoenix

Divinity's Reach.  
  
Moved back over here, after leaving Rata Sum. Didn't have any major issues while leaving, which is a minor miracle all in of itself. Portal back to Divinity's Reach, for whatever reasons, before we set out patrols throughout the city. Nothing useful in terms of actual people, as is to be expected, but there was a man from the Eldvin Monastery handing out ale samples which really helped to slacken the thirst in the weather. I don't remember much of the patrols, honestly, I was mostly looking forwards to returning to the Hall, and taking off the armour plating.  
  
One of the recruits went out to Claypool town, with the Warmaster's permission, in order to say goodbye to the people there, and have a new warbow created. Man's a norn, which made me surprised that he had bunked out in Queensdale of all places, but I suppose the place is as good for hunting as any place, if you don't mind hunting small game. Makes me realize I forgot to bring in the armour for refit. I was too focused on going home, I completely forgot about the smith's offer. Damn it... Maybe next time, then. I'll just have to make do until I can have it all passed for refit. No time now, I'm pulling the detachment out for operations to Sparkfly in a few days, and from there we'll have to hit the ground running. No chance I got there without armour, not after what happened last time, with the cannon. Tiny metal disk saved my life from a cannonball then, after all.  
Anyway, the rest of the Chapter's going to work in the new folks while we're off hitting the bogs. Probably station them out Marriner or the Keep while we're cleaning out Risen. Hopefully we'll return without too much issue, a few days later.  
  
All this city stuff, it's clogging. Big cities are for other people. Spirits, I think Hoelbraks gets crowded sometimes, let alone places like the bloody Reach. Anyway, tomorrow we're off to... Ebonhawke, I think? Maybe the Warmaster's going to make use of that to skip off, and leave us to bunk out in the Vanguard barracks. Hopefully the pub's still open.

# 57th of Phoenix

Ebonhawke.  
  
Stressful day. Honestly, it didn't start so bad. Or, well... I mean, there was a drunk Charr outside on the promenade, who attacked a random passer-by in the morning. With a stick he pulled down from a tree. Thankfully, we stopped him easily enough, and he was escorted to the Seraph. I had the Lightbringer girl, Ilthy's sister, take him, along with Crawley, who has a history with the Seraph. Seemingly they got everything in order, because the Seraph sent some folks along to collect the unfortunate victim, and the weapons we confiscated. The victim, just a middle-aged man, had a nasty bump on the head that'll bother him for a few days, but should heal eventually. Thankfully skulls are thick bones to crack, even for a Charr.  
With all that just behind our backs, I took the folks who were up early out for a 'patrol' out in Shaemoor. We just sort of sat down next to a brook, put our feet into the rushing water, and unwound a little bit. Call it mandated relaxation. I spoke about the children, and Freyja, and what they mean to me, too. Been a while since I could open up like that. I don't think about Freyja's mother much anymore, truth be told, it's been so long. But I remember her. Not how she looked much, mind, but other, little things. How she laughed, and put her head in my arm when I told her a tail. Kristen and I love each other too, but it's a different, more mature kind of love. Freyja and I, were just... young, I suppose. Everything was romantic, and larger than life. With Kristen, we ourselves hold sizeable legends, and we've seen enough wonderous and terrifying things to enjoy the smaller things for what they are. I love them both, but Freyja is long faded into memory, while Kristen is alive and well. Thankfully.  
  
Anyway, we got back to the billet soon enough. I spoke to the Warmaster before the line-up, and she said my da came to talk to her in Hoelbrak, after I went back home. Apparently he asked her about me, and wanted to know about me. The Warmaster thinks I should not let a chance to reunite with my father let go past me. She speaks from a different standpoint of course. She values what she's lost, whereas I cannot see what I'm being offered. Didn't I pose not so long ago that I forget to value what I have? Well, then, I suppose I should consider allowing my father to reach out to me. That is, if by the time leave is over, he's still around Hoelbrak. I suppose if he just takes off, as he did before, the problem will have sorted itself out.  
  
Regardless, we packed out kit, and marched out over to Ebonhawke in good order. I took out a patrol, and had the folks look out at the great walls, and the gate to the Crystal Desert. I think it's important to keep the folks aware of where they are, and what they do. Lance didn't fare so well. They got attacked by some folks with grenades. There was a skirmish, in which Sinclair got injured, and a number of the Separatists killed. We found the bodies on the way home, and were startled, until we got word that Lance already cleaned out the attackers.  
Got worse later, when we were milling around the yard. One of the new recruits spotted movement on the rooftops opposite, and sure enough, there's a sniper firing rounds at us the moment I see them. Thankfully, I called for cover early, and no-one got shot. Like a fool, I'd laid off the heavy plating and the shield, just to get dragged into a gunfight. Reminds me to bring out the old rifle from the stores. Anyway, I recovered soon enough and set to surrounding the building block on which our sniper was nestled, hopefully preventing him from fleeing. We got a few potshots off, but despite our best efforts, they seemed to have managed in slipping the net. A few inventive recruits even scaled the rooftops, but they didn't find anything. Damned shame, or we'd have had the Vanguard strung them up. Fools. Shooting at Vigil soldiers... Shows you how asanine the Ascalonians can get over things. Well, some of them anyway. Alleshia's alright.  
  
Can't wait to be out of this dismal city. Tomorrow, we're heading for Lion's Arch, and the day after we're getting an airdrop straight into Sparkfly. Well, the detachment, at any rate. Heard something about the rest of the Chapter getting lucky on the deployment for the training, though no specifics. Wonder where they're getting sent.  
Wished I had Kristen with me at the little brook, this morning. That would've been nice.

# 58th of Phoenix

Fort Marriner.  
  
Spent most of the day at the Keep though. Secured the ordnance package, and ensured all the equipment is ready for airlift tomorrow, and then us along with it. From there, we'll fly over to Sparkfly, and commence operations in earnest. Operational objectives will be to cull the risen, and support the Legion warbands operating in the region in securing the area. We're likely going to see some action against more remnants of Zhaitan's spawn, though we're bringing a lot of materiel to the fore. I don't think we'll have too much of a headache dealing with them, but you never know. Either case, this is a job for the Chapter's veterans, while the recruits and greenhorns get some team-time in. Some of them need it. One of our recruits needs to be taught how to fight from scratch. I've put another, more experienced, recruit on the task. Should give them an opportunity to bond, and hopefully they'll learn quick.  
  
Anyway, I got back later in the evening, and spoke with some of the troops. Shatteredshield specifically. Good soldier. He's got the right mindset for Vigil work. In some ways, he reminds me a little of Force, but somehow... sadder. If he stays on, he'll do well.  
We've gotten a massive influx of new faces this tour, which is a promising prospect. Here's hoping the lot of them stay on and last more than a tour each. Some of them are promising. I'd be nice to get some new blood in the ranks, that's for certain.  
  
I took a swim in the bay, before I went to bed. Water was good. Cold. In this heat, that was welcome. Better than washing out in a bucket anyway, that's for certain.

# 59th of Phoenix

For Cadence.  
  
Exhausting day. Marched to the Keep, and embarked on the rickety Iron Legion warship for a long transit trip to Fort Trinity. Just the detachment and some Charr from Splinter and Havoc warband. Not bad people, all in all, just... well, always have that tension when you're in close proximity, working alongside each other without knowing one another. Either case, that tension sort of broke when we caught the attention of some icebrood griffons flying past the Steamspurs. Spirits alone know what they were doing this far south. Either case, they tried to worm their way onto the ship, and dropped a few icebrood critters on the foredeck. There was a brief but vivid skirmish in which I nearly got shoved off of the decking to my death. There was tremendous chaos as we tried to repel boarders in close proximity, while the gun decks were blasting out canister shot at the circling critters. Brutally short, thankfully, and in our favour. Asides from my near brush with death at getting kicked in the back by an onrushing icebrood warrior, we were able to force the enemy to back off without much issue. In the case of the boarders, by hitching them overboard.  
  
Either case, we landed in Fort Trinity in the early afternoon, and then spent the rest of day in a march through the Sparkfly bogs, making sure we were soaked in sweat, and tired by the time we even got near Fort Cadence. Of course, we were going in on foot to clear out the risen, while a group of Splinter warband rode a submarine up the deeper rivers, and got all of our heavy weaponry landed on the bank opposite of Cadence.  
Worryingly, the risen were all over the place. We passed close to the Zintl holy place, but all the outskirt villages were overrun, and crawling with undead. A pity we didn't have an area of operations secure yet, or I would've given the order to drive them off. Unfortunately, the Hylek will have to wait until we enough light to commence operations in clearing their villages from dragonspawn. But I'm getting ahead of myself.  
  
We advanced on Cadence well enough, and found much of the Fort overrun with risen. They were sluggish and slow, however, and we were able to storm the outer defenses promptly, and run them out. By the time the risen started retaliating in earnest, we had already seized most of the fortifications along. Still, they pulled a dead ship up from the depths of the bay, and proceeded to shell us with bloated dead things. With our heavy guns still on the other bank, we had to scramble and return fire with whatever weaponry we still found on the embankment. A couple of trebuchets were still operable, and we were flinging chunks of mossy rock in the direction of the dead ship sure enough, until we landed a couple of boulders center, and sunk the bastard. We had to remain to hold the beach against any risen washing up until the Iron Legion folks finally arrived with the equipment. They set up machine-guns on two of the watchtowers, which has suddenly turned the beach into a killing field. I'm pleased to let them scythe down anything that comes too close, gives the detachment troops time to shore up the Cadence's old parapet, and set up camp before night. Tomorrow, we'll have to set out patrols on relief operations into the Zintl grounds, and our perimeter.  
The Splinter Legionnaire confided in me that we might be looking another sunless dragon stirring in the waters. It'd explain the surge in numbers and presence again. Spirits, we were here not so long ago, culling risen just the same. Doesn't seem to have helped much, they just keep coming back. Well, this time we've got all the heavy equipment we need. If there's a dragon stirring, we'll blow a hole in it.  
  
Anyway, I'm tired. The flight and the march were punishing, and I need to be up at first light to get some relief forces to those Hylek.

# 60th of Phoenix

Fort Cadence.  
  
Familiar sights today. As promised, I set the detachment out to the Zintl Holy Grounds as soon as there was enough light to conduct operations. The place still endures. The risen have just become part of the way of life here, the Hylek warriors honing their skills by fighting bravely against an ever-present threat. Normally, the sun-champions and warriors are more than able to protect their own people, but a little extra help from the Vigil does well to lighten their load. Operations around the region were straightforward, mostly relying on the Hylek defenses to draw the Orrian dead into easy killing fields. The risen here aren't co-ordinated, they just trickle in, small groups, sometimes only in pairs. That doesn't sound very threatening, but the pressure is constant. Ever few seconds, another one shambles into view somewhere. Calder and Caeranis seem to think the large crystal lodestone which crests the Zintl temple here might be an ancient Orrian artifact, from before the Cataclysm, and that its powerful magical nature is constantly attracting the risen to it. It'd explain the risen presence here, certainly. Even so, there's very little we can to resolve it. Removing the stone is absolutely out of the question, since it is likely to incense the natives. The temple there is practically keeping the entire village together, and the different tribes within at some sort of peace. It's one for the Priory or the Order of Whispers to solve. At any rate, we culled a vast amount of risen, hopefully ensuring that there's at least a temporary reprieve for the Hylek people.  
  
Over in Fort Cadence, the Charr have been at work ensuring the place is as serviceable as possible. We're only using the outer walls, as the actual bastion is haunted thoroughly by specters that become violent when you approach, and whom we do not have the time, resources or inclination to properly dislodge. They're mostly gearing it up the Iron Legion way, that is to say, by putting down heavy guns on every approach. It'll be good enough for the few days we're slated to be in the region. Though saying that, it feels like we might be here long than expected. Not that I would mind terribly, this part of Sparkfly has a specific natural beauty to it. Asides from the humidity and the heat, of course.  
  
Hah, spirits, I remember Kristen camping along with us in the Zintl Holy Grounds. I'd bring early breakfast over, just for her, while the other soldiers loafed about. A curious courtship, I suppose. We went on to fight a Sunless dragon together, nearer to Fort Trinity. I picked her up afterwards, and carried her around sat on my shoulder in celebration. We'd proven we were equals, so that's the real start of our combined legend. It sounds romantic, in a way, both we both stank of death and sweat, and it became so unbearably hot at night that we had to sit outside for a bit. Luckily it was well into the night, and no-one cam looking to see two naked and very sweaty norn gasping for air because they'd been hot-housing a single-person tent. That'd have been even worse than that time I made the Warmaster drop her apple in Southsun.  
  
You know, being out here, in the bogs, I always think back about the tale of Hejja and the Oddwalker. I need to stop myself from wondering in about too much, because I always have that sudden, peculiar jolt of remembering that I could probably simply ask da about how true the tale is. Freyja said she'd spoken to him about it in that letter she sent, a while back, and that it apparently illuminated a great many things for her. I should ask him when I get back, if only to state my own, terrible, curiosity to hear the tale told by someone who was actually there to remember it.  
  
Anyway, I'm getting distracted. The heat is tiring, and I should go to sleep. I heard from the Splinter Legionnaire that we're due south, past the Zintl grounds for a patrol of sorts. Guess it's the next stage of our operations plan rolling into motion.

# 61st of Phoenix

Fabled Djannor.  
  
Excitement today. Waband and the detachment conducted a lengthy march south from Fort Cadence to the megalaser battery out here, in the Splintered Coast. With the reports about more dragons stirring in the deep, it only makes sense to have the weapon post doubly secured. Like in the north, at Eartshake, it keeps dragons from simply making their way inland without being opposed. Before we departed, Splinter took special care to dismantle the bones of the dead ships out in the bay. That way, at least, it'll take some time for them to pull themselves together again.  
  
Then we left off for a lengthy march, linking up with some Asuran Krewe that factors into Splinter warband's plan. The exact details are classified according to the Legionnaire, much to my chagrin. They're not a regular group, at least, that much is obvious. They are, however, heavily armed and quite sizeable. Well, as long as they're on our side, I won't complain too loudly about Asura being strange.  
  
As we approached the area, we got signal in that a sunless dragon was actually engaging the battery troops as we spoke, though it disengaged before we were able to close the distance, and provide direct support. We have now pitched an improvised camp to the north of the artillery line, and are in position to reinforce it at a moment's notice. Thankfully, asides from some ornery Krait attacking the energy collector lab powering the laser batteries, we've been able to hold them off with little issue. The Krait are agitated by the build-up of magical energy and keep harrying us. If we find time, I might need to set out a patrol to force them to cease.  
Right now, though, we wait for reinforcements and hope the dragon doesn't force a battle before we have more troops to bulk the line a bit.  
  
Funny. We passed through the same cave we were camped at when Kristen and I slew the other dragon, more than a year ago. Oh, how she'd wish to be here, if she could.

# 62nd of Phoenix

Fabled Djannor.  
  
Got slashed. Or stabbed. I don't know. Some heavy Krait bastard snaked around my leg, dragged me down, and tried to disembowel me. That was, of course, right before I took Bear's form and tore his head clean off. I would've rammed it up his arse if I knew Krait anatomy better, but here I am. People were fussing about it being potentially poisoned, but it was the adrenaline shakedown that did me in. Nearly knocked me out cold, and gave me the shakes. Lahla patched up the wound as best as she could, but it stings like no-one's business, and I keep wanting to scratch at it. Well, I know better than to actually do such, but still.  
  
I sent Lahla out as patrol lead today, which she did well enough. Ventured out int the tangle to our north, ensure there weren't too many hidden surprises. A few risen, and what looks like a ship graveyard. At least three ships sunk down in a nook. One of the patrols near the Hylek village reported seeing something large in the water; might be a Leviathan, or some other Orrian horror that dwells in the water, dragging down vessels. It's hard to say.  
  
We missed the dragon flying by again. We were on patrol, heard it roar, but by the time we were back at the gun line, it was gone. I set out the troop patrol, which is when the Krait attacked the lab again. Got caught out on my own, coming back from the battery, and it took the troops a moment to march up and assist.So, now I've got a gash down the side. Well, I'll have to grin through the pain, because I need to have my armour back on, and be ready for the fight as soon as that dragon hits. It won't be good for me, but the folks need to see me at the front. Half of them haven't fought a dragon before, and they'll need to rally around something.  
  
Strange. I don't feel fear, I'm just... tired.

# 63rd of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Exhausted. Drained to my last drop. That's how I feel. The rent in my side itches and burns, like a hot poker pressed to the wound. That damn Charr... Well, it's my own fault, really. I decided to go against my medic's counsel, and take the field anyway, with an unhealed rent in my side. With a dragon on the loose, we needed folks to be held firmly in hand, or they'd start to fret and panic. Only other soldier with us that had seen a Sunless dragon was Claridge, maybe Calder. Anyway, I took to the field. For a while, it looked like it'd be a quiet day, until this great glossy black bastard flopped up from the ocean waters like some sort of nightmare made flesh. We fought the risen hard, and kept the pressure on our dragon friend for what seemed like half an eternity, until the megalaser struck the critter true. Then it was simply a matter of making sure it stayed down. Fighting in a bloody swap, that's what it was, with great clouds of noxious fumes sweeping the terrain like banks of fog. I must've ripped my stitches pretty early on, because my padding is mired in blood. It stinks like a latrine. The moment I got in, the medic had it carried off to be boiled first, and then patched up by the armoury smiths. But I'm getting ahead of myself.  
  
We killed the dragon well enough. Big critter collapsed down range of the laser, and those weird Asura took it apart for some project of theirs. I went along and broke free a section of bone, straight from the spine. It's much bigger than the fragment I got before. This might serve for something much more elaborate, though I don't know what yet. I feel to weak to do much carving anyway.  
Casualties are light. Yevalin was in a bad state, and had to be pulled out with a chopper back to Trinity, ahead of the column. Lahla isn't injured, but they apparently found her trembling under her shield. She told me she got jumbled during the charge, and was afraid she'd get trampled. Well, I won't mention it in the dispatches at least, so that's something.  
  
I stumbled back to the Asuran lab we've been basing out of, and one of the warband medics 'treated me' by cauterizing the cut with a hot knife, and then stapling the burnt flesh together with some metal loops. Thankfully the medic here gave me a pretty solid painkiller shot, which is probably why I'm not feeling so stellar. Even though the numbness, it burns like it's in fire.  
  
Our relief arrived soon enough, and we got the go ahead to march out. Seems our rapid strike again Fort Cadence, and the combat efforts around the Fabjed Djannor did well enough to accomplish our objectives. The march back to Trinity was agony, but the flight home went well enough. I just sat down, and tried to move as little possible. Being able to finally disembark at the Vigil Keep was... a relief. I dismissed the troops, gave them two days of leave to kick back, before we're due back in Marriner. I'd go see Kristen, but I doubt I can move much. Or at all, right now. Holding the pencil is an effort, and it feels like I'll feint if I sit it too fast. I keep waiting for the nurse to come by, so I can ask for some water.

# 64th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Ill. Woke up, still felt drained.Nurse said there was something wrong, so they called the doctor over. Spent a while looking around, but then they had me carried off to another room, deeper inside the Keep, with a large oaken door. It's cooler here, but somehow I feel like I'm suffocating. The rooms crawls around me, as it wants to swallow me whole. Like a box. I want to get out, but I can't sit up.  
My fingers hurt from writing.

# 65th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Everything I do is a challenge. Sores on my body hurt. Like something trying to eat through the flesh. I think I'm going to die like this. I've never felt so weak. Doctors keep seeing me while wearing their masks. I know what it means. I want to see Kristen before I die, but I don't think they'll let me see her. I don't think she should.  
Spirits, everything just...  
I ask Bear for help, and I can feel hear. She fights for me, tooth and claw. Sometimes it feels like she is all keeping me aloft. I need to stop writing. Agony.

# 66th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Things getting worse. Coughing now. Doctor tells me not to move too much.  
I think there's someone else here too, also sick. Yevalin, nearby ward. I asked.  
Dragon corruption? That makes no sense. They would've killed me already if it was dragon corruption.

# 67th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
A lot of people today. One of Splinter warband, and some Asura. Took blood samples. Apparently they have their own sick and injured. Think it might be a magical disease. Was nice to have visitors, even if they had masks one. One cast a spell that filled the tent with magical snow. That was nice. I'd like to go outside, but they won't let me, obviously. Feel like I'm tired all the time. Good news is that they seem to think a way to cure me, so... not dying. Thank Bear for keeping me alive until now, then. I ate a little, but it's difficult to swallow.  
Bah. Sickness.

# 68th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Sores got worse. Turned black. As if the flesh's decaying. Hurts a lot. I won't write much. Coughing a lot. Doesn't feel like they're going to cure me. I wonder how long it'll take. They make me roll from side to side a little to prevent bedsores, and they bring me a bucket when I nature calls.  
I don't like being here. I hope they find something soon. I'd like to stretch my legs. Feel strong again.

# 69th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Been quiet. Alone a lot with my own thoughts. There's a specific kind of calm about being ill that comes in between the bouts of coughing and general misery. At least I'm tired, so I can sleep a lot. I asked for a book to read, but they only have the same old tactical books. I mean, they speak boldly of battle, and war, but they look feeling. It's a pity I didn't bring that book the Warmaster gave me, about the tall norn. Now that's a good story.  
  
It'd be nice to get better. Chapter's due a deployment, but the doctor only tells me they're in Kryta. Well, could be worse, I suppose. Hopefully Klixxa is keeping folks together in the field while I'm here, wasting away. Maybe they'll send me a card. I've considered writing Kristen, but I don't want her to worry. Or worse, come and visit. I don't want anyone to see me like this. Not even the people here, at the keep. I guess that quarantine is a blessing in disguise. Anyway, my hand's cramping. Maybe tomorrow things will be better. I'm afraid I'll stay like this for ever.

# 70th of Phoenix

Durmand Priory.  
  
Late. Medics had me brought over to the Priory late in the evening. Took the gate through to Trinity, and then straight back. Strange to travel across half the continent twice in ten minutes. Thank the Asura for that one, I guess.  
Regardless, I'm on a bed in a larger dormitory now. They took me over and used a little device to. They say it'll cure me, and that I'll start feeling better in a few days. Now I'm mostly tired of travelling. The Priory is nice though. I wonder if Freyja is around here, with Aska and Grace. That'd be nice. I think we're still under observation, but I'll ask anyway.  
  
I can smell the library from here. The smell of paper and ink. It's dusty. I can see why Freyja liked it. I wish I could look around and see it. With Bear's strength, I'll get the chance before I leave.

# 71st of Phoenix

Durmand Priory.  
  
Feeling better already. Whatever treatment they tried, it seems to be working. Feels less like there's a Jotun sat on my chest, and the sores have stopped nagging quite as acutely. I hope that, maybe, I can stretch my legs and little, maybe even go for a little walk around the room. Bear willing, my strength will return to me soon, and I can return to the Chapter. Here's hoping the lads and lasses didn't get into a bad pinch without someone to haul them out. But then again, last I heard, the troops got Southsun R&R, without any Karka. Doesn't sound half bad, after the chaos of Lake Doric.  
  
Either way, the coughing's lessened, and I feel less like I'm going to feint every time I try to sit up straight. I asked about Freyja, but they say they can't let anyone in unless they know I'm not ill anymore. So, I speak with the others here a bit, or listen to them talk. Maybe in a few days, they'll let Freyj and Aska come visit. That'd be nice.

# 72nd of Phoenix

Durmand Priory.  
  
Things are going better. Listening to the Charr patients rattle on about their Legion business can be a little dull, so I've started telling my own war stories. Not as brutal as some of the Legion tales, but more exotic by far.  
Doctors still come in and take blood samples every day, but they say we're not getting sick again. We're not allowed to touch anyone, though. Safety precautions, and all that.  
  
I've managed to get a nicer book to read from the library, because I asked. It's about old Dwarven tales, like the Tome of Rubicon, and their war with the Stone Summit. They're a strange people. Or, rather were. I wonder if I'll see the fabled Ogden Stonehealer while I'm here? It'd be interesting to see, a being as old as they are, made of living stone. With my luck, he'll be fond of "stony expression" and "chiseled jaw" puns, or something.  
  
Anyway, doctors say they'll keep me here another few days, just to be absolutely sure. Well, I guess I'll read slowly.

# 73rd of Phoenix

Priory.  
  
Pleasant day. I was allowed to move into a smaller room, adjacent. A small study, I think, with a desk and a bed that's too small. I sleep on the ground here, and use the bed frame like a shelf. Not as intended, but better than nothing. Freyj came to see, though she was told not to comer to close. Aska wanted to come too, but we don't want to risk her getting sick. They're doing well, though. Freyj tells me they've been here for a while now, her, Aska and Grace, while the little one learns to read and write. She's taken well to books, which is good. Freyj takes her out down below, into the mountains for hunting and such, along with Grace. Freyja's changed, in a good way. It's good to see her embrace responsibility and grow out of being a girl, and into a warrior with her own legend and burdens. On the other hand, seeing her grow away from me is a little... I don't know, strange? It seems like the small days of Freyja bumbling about the bakery are long gone. Now, I have Kristen, and the Jotunling, while she has Grace and Aska.  
Still, I love her very much, and it gladdened my heart to see her.

# 74th of Phoenix

Priory.  
  
Helo granpi!  
I am Askawild bleu woof!!!!  
Grase sayd i could wriete here to say hello she say you are s i c k and that I cant come to show you my new bow. Is krisien in there wit you?? Freya lets me go hunt now, so you dont have to be mad's at me anymore for the ice wirm anymore. Next time i can go wit you, and ill shoot's all of the ~~prai~~ wirms.  
If you tell me real quite where your room is, ill sneak in, so you dont need to be sad becaus your re sick! Golm and I are like wolf in sheeps, noone can see us if we are snakey!  
Kisss Askavild

# 75th of Phoenix

Claypool.  
  
Long, long day.  
Got woken up by the Priory people, telling me that my observation period was over, and that I should pack my stuff and return to the Chapter. When I was told they were supposedly camped right outside Shaemoor, I didn't really feel the need to hurry much, considering I'd be out through Lion's Arch and then the Reach in about half an hour.  
Anyway, I had them bring me over to Freyj, Aska and Grace, and I spent a good three hours of the morning shooting arrows with the little lass, and telling war stories. Bright child, that, but capricious. Freyja tells me she's a regular queen of mischief. Good! At that age, she should. I'm sure Lalowa would be pleased to know her daughter's living through a happy life, raining snowballs down on unsuspecting novices, and building snow-camps on the slopes outside.  
  
Anyway, I set off in the afternoon to the Reach, and to Shaemoor. Hefting the full pack and the armour really impressed on me how weak I've become since Sparkfly. It could've been worse, but the walk to Shaemoor was more tiring than I expected. Of course, when I arrive there, the local elder tells me they just moved over to Claypool. Bah! I had to rest for a good hour before I was able to continue the hike. I hope Bear's strength returns in full soon, because it'll be needed if we're at war. Thankfully, Queensdale is calm, and I doubt we'll see much serious fighting. There's supposedly bandits throughout the region, working for the White Mantle, but with the back of the offensive broken in Lake Doric, I doubt we'll be fighting pitched battles. Pays to check for insurgency, though.  
  
Anyway, the Chapter's still in good shape. A couple of new faces, and a couple of old ones. Athy and Mithra have returned to the Chapter, which is good. I've got some paperwork to run through, seems we had some personnel changes in last few days that I need to check up on. Overall, people seemed pleased that I returned, which was gratifying. It's good to be back among the troops.  
  
I'm tired. It's making me stilted. It was a good day. Seeing Aska fire arrows at a tree stump, stretching my legs, and returning to... well, my other family, was refreshing. Being locked in a room with only your thoughts tends to make you overthink. The simple joys of family and friends.  
Ah, it's good to be back.

# 76th of Phoenix

Claypool.  
  
Normal operations resumed, though that hardly means anything. We're essentially a sledgehammer used to crack a nut. Squad went out today, and killed a couple of ruffians hiding in some cave. Might have been White Mantle, might not have been. Spirits, they might just have been a couple of down on their luck idiots unfortunate enough to run into a detachment of Vigil troopers, rather than a Seraph patrol. Not sure what we hope to achieve her, but at least it promises to be an easy going deployment. Kryta's pleasant enough as countrysides go. Summer warm means I'm constantly sweating, and there's too many inspects at night, but it's not as bad as some places I've been. Besides, the little brooks and rivers that run through the land help for cooling down.  
  
Got an alert earlier, about some missing kid. Worried me that, but apparently the lad was just hiding somewhere as part of some game or other. Should've gotten a cuff around the ear, really, but it's just children. I doubt they even understand what it means for us to be here. We're just shiny soldiers for them to gawk at. I suppose I should be thankful that there's corners in the world where that's still possible.  
  
Paperwork's still waiting for me. I saw that Force got a return transfer too. Good man. Or, well, Charr. A few disciplinary note drafts too, including one for Iluoana. Disappointing, that. We're already seeing folks drop out. Figures. A lot of our new recruits realise within the first handful of days that this is a lot harder, tedious and strenuous than they had imagined. I mean, all of these folks think they'll turn into heroes overnight, but they don't understand it doesn't work like that. We fight ugly battles no-one else can fight. We endure hardships that others can't. We don't waste away our days in comfortable ale houses, boasting of what we *could* do, instead we remain steadfast with the knowledge of what we *have done*.  
  
Anyway, still a little weak. Might have jumped the gun on getting straight back onto the battlefield.

# 77th of Phoenix

Claypool.  
  
Usual operations. Didn't partake, since I've decided that me falling over mid-battle might be a lot worse than letting Klixxa and Forgewood do their job. As it stands, Forgewood was able to flush out some more bandits hiding in the countryside, as well as securing some runestone for Occult from a troll's lair. Not really military work, in truth. The Seraph and the legions of mercenary guilds at the Reach should be filling their pockets, but apparently we're the ones called to serve. In any case, I don't mind. Kryta is relatively quiet down here, and I find Queensdale to be relaxing. The locals have a large windmill, and I've slowly fallen in love with simply watching the coloured sails on the sweeps lazily spin around. I toyed with the idea of making one in the mountains, but one blizzard would rip it to shreds. Nevermind that I doubt any good grain will grow that far north, so what would I grind down? It was hard enough getting good barley for bread when I was in Hoelbrak.  
  
It's been going better. I run a small distance every morning, and I've set to lifting practice weights to see if my strength returns. Pity the food's not better, I feel like a couple slabs of minotaur steak would help. Ah well, can't have it all.  
Spoke with Maeva a bit, which is always a little curious. Not bad, though. Also, one of our norn recruits apparently was being bothered by a local? Brave man. Foolish man. Either case, if it happens again, I'll be giving them a stern talking to, as well as alerting the mayor or local elder about his trespasses. Honestly, I'm surprised she didn't just crack his jaw. I mean, it'd be bad for her to go about hitting civilians, but some of them really deserve it.  
Anyway, we'll see what passes tomorrow.

# 78th of Phoenix

Claypool.  
  
Nothing important to note. Some allegation of thievery against Demorique and a recruit called Betzler turned out to be minor misunderstandings. Nothing worth even making a fuss over.  
Oh, and the Whisper's sent us someone, on a mission. No name, just "blue". Norn lass, warlike looking. Wonder what the mission is, but I suppose the Warmaster'll let me know if it's important. Always with the secrecy...  
  
Oh, and Iluoana had a visit from some other Sylvari; apparently two lovers that have now broken apart. Not sure what I had to say, so I just pulled the conversation off into a whole different direction, based on the notion she tried to kick Sinclair in the family jewels during a spar. Yeah, one of 'those' days. Anyway, it seemed to distract well enough.  
  
I'm sort of tired. Small headache. It'll pass, might just not have drunk enough water today.

# 79th of Phoenix

Claypool.  
  
Another quiet day of watching the wind move the sails, sitting back, and imagining the entire countryside isn't crawling with bandits and separatists. It's an easy enough illusion to uphold, and I can see why the Krytans here can fall into a certain sense of false security. But, this is not a place where you can wander the fields alone at night. There are too many eyes watching, and too many wicked hearts that would prey upon fools and unfortunates for no other reason than they can. I can only hope that the deaths we cause, brutal as they are, serve a larger purpose. Killing these... people, these bandits... it's like cutting off an infected limb to save the body. We are excising part of ourselves to keep the whole alive. The question is, how high or high low do you apply the blade? My mind understands that not all that fall astray of our uncaring swords are guilty. It is a simple truth that my heart tries to lock away, to preserve my sanity and my honour. But I know better. The blood of innocents runs just as crimson as those who deserve their censure. Is the man aiming a gun at me just a wayward child, pressed into a corner and forced to defend himself, or is he a rapist and a murderer? How can I know? If I hesitate, the bullet may rend me away from my family and friends, so I strike. Fire consumes his body, in the same moment that the steel splits him in twain. I am left with the pieces, and tell myself that I am doing my duty.  
It doesn't matter. Svanir, Inquest, bandits, White Mantle, Grawl, Hylek, Ogres, Courtiers, anything. Knut Whitebear has the right of it, you know. He still judges the individual by their deeds, rather than the label put on them by others.  
Well, no, actually. Knut is wise, and I have great envy that he maintains true to the way things have always been; where a warrior stands or falls by their own deeds. But that way of thinking is running out of time. In the wars I've seen, in the battles I've fought, taking a moment to judge means death. If you start doubting if your enemy is truly your enemy, how can you wage a war? It is an ugly truth.  
I wish we wouldn't be out here. This is work for the Seraph, and mercenaries. I'd rather fight dragons. At least with dragons, the evil is naked and clear for all to see.  
  
You know, it's only two more moons about, until the baby's due. I hope everything will go well, and that the Spirits truly favour us with a healthy child, and a good birth. We have both done so much to prove our worth. We deserve this boon, this bond. Our gift to the future.  
I wonder if da is still around.

# 80th of Phoenix

Claypool.  
  
Another day of little consequence. Watching the mill's sails go around and around, until all you can see is whirling colours, and a sense that you've dropped off of the face of the earth, and are slowly falling into the sky. If you think it hard enough, you can actually feel the depth of the limitless ocean that hangs over our head. You can see the clouds, like vast islands drifting overhead, waiting to catch you if you can only make yourself fall upwards high enough. The sails, they're brightly coloured, and when the sun shines through them, they tint the colour of the grass into a kaleidoscope of riotous colours, dancing, and dancing. It's beautiful.  
  
Soldiers did a surprise exercise, ended up with smacking about a couple of people. No serious injuries, though. I gave them all eggs, which they're supposed to keep intact. An old little exercise about responsibility and care. I'll have my own little egg to carry around again, soon enough. I remember being so afraid to drop Freyja when she was still small. I thought that she'd just crack like an egg, so I I put her in a wicker egg basket, and carried her around like that instead. I don't quite now what happened to it when she outgrew it. Just one of those many things that I used to have, but have been swallowed by time and memory.

# 81st of Phoenix

Claypool.  
  
Last day we're here. We're set to move off due east, back towards the monastery that I once visited with Kristen... how long as is that now? She still wore her hair in the long braid, and I think she still called herself Wolfsbane. I probably kept record in my journal somewhere...  
Ah, here... 22nd of Scion, must've been the 1328. That was before the Sparkfly tour. Of course, Xeyia, or well, Irma now, was there with us. It wasn't something we planned, just roads leading in the same direction. Xeyia and I were talking the road from the Reach to Lion's Arch, back through Kessex. Kristen came with us, and when we passed the bogs, we went into the swamps to hear how bad the old tales about it being haunted really were. I remember killing some mewling shadow creature, about the size of a minotaur pup. I wasn't impressed. We had good ale at the monastery afterwards. Huh...  
Well, we're heading back there. The reports from Occult and Scouting have been... interesting. They describe shadow creatures sure enough, but they're apparently much larger and much more terrible than the malformed shade we encountered in 1328. I wonder if the magic seeping into the world is the cause of it? Anyway, it sounds like something interesting, at least. I'll have to see how much Alleshia's going to allow us to enjoy the local brew. Spirits, maybe there's even something out there that's actually worth us fighting it.  
  
Anyway, today was stale. Sinclair abused the troops, including pelting them with... manure? Or something foul, anyway. Many of the recruits were fuming. Well, guess getting slathered in dung together is one way to cement a group feeling. They'll get there, eventually.

# 82nd of Phoenix

Eldvin Monastery.  
  
Moved camp, into the monastery I mentioned yesterday. A nice and peaceful place, or at least it should be. I was out checking the perimeter with some of the sappers, when there was a general alert raised by troops of Occult. We rallied in the courtyard, and soon enough, portals formed out of thin air, and the yard was flooded with mist-beings made of living shadow. There was chaos for a brief moment, before the troops rallied and cast the otherworldly creatures back from where they came. Still, they injured two of ours, and there's a persistent threat that the portals might reappear and swarm us. We've set out sentries and checkpoints around the building. No exterior force could really root us out from this position, but if these... Mist creatures tear more rents in time and space... Well, it's a lot harder to defend a position if the enemy appears inside our fortifications. The place itself is sound enough, just... well, it's inhabited by priests, not soldiers. They've let fruit trees grow out in front of the battlements, and the courtyard is clogged with farm plots and racks of vineyard. It's a beautiful place, lovingly tended, with plants and blooms hanging from every corner. The smell of hops is strong on the wind, and it makes me thirsty. It's easy to ignore the palpable sense of being threatened, if not for the traces of battle still visible. It seems a shame to fight in such a lovingly tended garden, but we were not given a choice. I hope this is something we can resolve. Honestly, it sounds more like a job for the Priory. We'll see if our Occult team's up to it.  
  
Ah, we'll see. Peculiar talk with Bjorn and Ilu. Turns out the former's relationship with the Tactician is a lot more complicated than I'd assumed, and the later... well... she's still got a lot to learn about life, and what it stands for. Curious people, these Sylvari.

# 83rd of Phoenix

Eldvin Monastery.  
  
Disastrous day. We went out on perimeter patrols, close up some gaps to our north, before we venture deeper into the swampland. Blade's task was easy, if not conflicting. Reports of local skritt burrows reacting aggressively to the presence of the local Krytans got us tasked with literal bloody pest control. An insult, that, both to us, and the skritt that made their home in that little cave. We went in, and aye, the skritt were violent enough, throwing stones, and discharging crude and ineffective firearms in us, probably in a feeble attempt to protect their homes. We tried to reason with them first, but it seemed clear once we were closer inside their burrows they weren't going to leave on their own accord. We... we started to throw down their shinies, and lit fires to the wood debris inside. The idea was to force them to leave, without being forced to kill them. I understand that this merely displaced the problem, but... I don't know. I don't want to be the sort of man that strides into another's home, and demands he leave. And yet, that's exactly who I am. And for what? Because some skritt steal tools from the lumberyard. And snap! Best send a squad of soldiers to burn down the village, and massacre everyone in it! I refuse to be that callous. I can't.  
And yet I burnt their houses down.  
It doesn't matter that it is *justified*, it's simply not *right*.  
  
That's not the worst of it, of course. We were in the middle of effecting out terrible duty, when we saw a series of signal flares come from further north. Not one, but three distress flares fired in short order, which bloody well gave us a sign of how dire the situation was. The distance wasn't so great, but it seemed to take us forever to actually close the gap. We found Lance fighting... something, on the bank of a shallow brook. It used to be a man, but spirits... it was fast, and dreadfully strong. It created a powerful force field that blocked us out at first, and nearly knocked my teeth out when I tried to push through, but then this... warrior, this being, it came out at us, and very nearly killed all of us. It was chaos. Spirits, I was actually afraid for a moment, before we pushed back and eventually ground it down. But the aftermath... We've got half a dozen wounded, some of which are so near dead I thank Raven for giving us the speed to reach Lance before it killed them all. One of Lance's soldiers, a relatively new recruit, Elisabeth Grady, died as the result of her injuries. Bear, I don't know what it was, asides from the White Mantle emblem we found stitched across it, and the powerful reek of bloodstone magic. It suddenly became clear why we, the Vigil, and not the Seraph or some mercenaries are out here. The White Mantle are down, but not out yet, and they still have fearsome weapons at their disposal. Bear will give us the strength to defeat them, but I was mistaken to grow some complacent.  
Things were bad, as they always were, and we had to organize medical transport for more injured than we could carry. Didn't help that recruit Iluoana decided to give orders for medical evacuation despite being countermanded twice. Lost my nerve, and shouted her down. Probably didn't deserve it, but Spirits... I'm glad we got all the injured out alive. Too many were getting flagged as red. Shit, Crawley and Alevyne are still in a bad spot. I wince at every sound outside, afraid they're coming to tell me one of them took a turn for the worst, and died. I hope not. I hope they live.  
  
And Grady. Spirits, I don't even know the name too well. So far for caring about every one of your soldiers, Tzahr. Another one dead, with barely a memory to keep alive. This isn't what I wanted it to be. Damn it! Why aren't you alive, to tell me something about yourself?! I never wanted this war to be one of blank names, inscribed in some tombstone, without any real meaning to it. How can the sacrifice be worth it, if there are no tales to tell, no memory to keep alive? I want to stand behind the monuments to the victorious fallen, and I want to be able to speak with pride and heart about who they used to be. Is that who will be, Grady? My stark reminder that not all death is glorious? Bah.  
  
87. Elisabeth Grady, succumbed to her wounds.

# 84th of Phoenix

Eldvin Monastery.  
  
Right.  
We deployed into the bog. We talked with some Priory folks about the bloody portals appearing, and they decided they'd draw out the nexus of whatever malign magic is causing it, and, with out help, expunge it, thus hopefully ending the threat.  
The bog was... a bad idea. Everything got mired down in sucking mud, while the gas-hoods made it difficult to see anything beyond a small circle. We moved in from a small Priory camp, and spent about an hour digging through the bog, trying to get the Priory's equipment to work, while they started whatever magical greeblies they had planned. Of course, the two Priory Explorers we were supposed to link up with turned up dead, eaten by Skelk, and half of the bog was teeming with tortured spirits and other, nastier things that lurked in the corner of your eye. Eventually, the Priory signaled us that they were about ready to start and then...  
Spirits, it was huge. Towering over us, like of the great ice carvings outside the lodges in Hoelbrak, but made out of pure shadow, and the howling screams of a thousand doomed souls. It was like looking into the abyss of the Underworld itself, but, impossibly, brought out to this side of the veil. It screeched, and nightmarish minions swarmed from portals spawning around it. We fought desperately with them, putting good Tyrian steel through half formed incorporeal bodies that heaved with fangs and claws. Magical fire consumed them, until there was nothing left but our fears. The Priory worked hard though, and with our assistance, they were able to cast this... daemon back into the Mists. I can only hope it stays there, and never attempts to return to our world. I shudder at the thought.  
  
It didn't go flawlessly for us. More wounded, and another dead. Jazzmine Weyers, another name I barely know. She died in the line of battle, at least, which is about all we can ask. Frayed nerves, though. Recruit Iluoana did the idiot thing of walking to our debrief line up, and announcing straight up that Weyers was dead. As if morale needed another kick in the stomach after a hard day like yesterday. Astrid and the Warmaster are strained. So am I, truth be told, we got battered hard, two days straight. Morale low as a result, and half of Lance squad is in medical. That means more work and more responsibility for Blade and me. I try and keep cool outwardly, but inside, I am roiling with emotions. Anger, grief, vengeance, all mix up into a potent cocktail that I work hard to keep down. The old meditation tricks work. They funnel my wild emotions into a resolve that's hard as steel. We'll keep going, whatever happens.  
  
Ah, and Vatorn. The man got a thoroughly shouted at by Astrid after he gave Crawley tea. Something which wasn't a good idea, considering the latter was in medical, severely injured. I think she wasn't supposed to be eating or drinking too much. Either way, I think Drakecarver vented her frustration on about the past few days on him, and the boy nearly cracked. I spoke to him a little, try and reaffirm the will and drive he needs to have to continue fighting in this endless war. I hope I succeeded a little. Drakecarver was right, of course, he shouldn't have been in medical giving people tea without a medic's consent, but I suspect it was... hm... peal of thunder over a clear sky. Can hardly blame him for reacting adversely for being told he nearly killed someone with a cup of tea, right? Anyway, funerary rites tomorrow.  
Two bodies, this time. Always too much.  
  
88. Jazzmine Weyers, died in battle.

# 85th of Phoenix

Eldvin Monastery.  
  
Funerary rites today. Everything is calm, asides from Crawley ripping up some stitches, and needing an immediate hand. Caused a little bit of a fuss about who's allowed in medical and who isn't, but considering she was bleeding pretty badly, I think I did the right thing by barging in and administering first aid. Apparently the fire and the smoke outside, from the funeral pyres, upset her badly. No matter. She'll live.  
  
The rest of the day was quiet, thankfully. A little morose. I talked a bit to the troops, but my heart wasn't really in it.  
After two days of powering through things, everything is just sort of empty, and dull. It'll pass, sure enough, like a cloud of rain passing over. For now, we endure the torrent.

# 86th of Phoenix

Eldvin Monastery.  
  
Rear echelon work today, which meant being away from Eldvin itself, and working the supply line. Only just got back in, but it seems everything is slowly getting in order. The Vigil fights, people die, the world keeps turning. Not a surprise, of course, just the way things are.  
  
Day itself was dull, just passing on reports, and collecting statements about the state of supply. Logistics is one of those beautiful things the only command the Quartermasters ever have to deal with. Spirits, if they knew the amount of effort required to keep an army like this in the field as long as we do, they've have a damn sight more respect for the paperwork. We might be getting a better mark of rations soon, replacing the old cardboard we've been eating for years now. If not for fresh forage, all of our teeth would've fallen out, I wager.  
  
Regardless, quiet days, which probably means redeployment relatively soon. No more nightmarish portals, and no White Mantle at all spotted, so another few days and I figure we'll call the area secure, and be done with it, before we continue our line of march.  
  
Season's end almost, now. They pass by so fast.

# 87th of Phoenix

Eldvin Monastery.  
  
Still here, everything still sort of quiet. I ran the folks through triage training, which went well enough. It's depressing to see how few of them read their field manuals, though. Simple principles written down about what to do in first aid, and still people don't know what they're doing. Anyway, hopefully they'll do better in future, now that they actually know what the word triage even means.  
Spirits alive, they're just sending us these airheads, fresh from the recruiting station, with no experience. Not even basic battlefield protocols. It's a bloody miracle they don't get butchered to a man! Bah. Makes me wish I was a First Crusader again, so I'd get to drill the basics into them every morning. That way, at least, people would have an inkling of what they're actually doing. It's agitating.  
  
At least the folks went foraging later in the day, and they brought back some good food. Not only that, but some unsung hero actually managed to skip away a bottle of the local wine for me, which was perfect to was everything down. The fermented grape stuff they call wine's pretty decent, if a peculiar taste.  
That... actually gives me an idea. Pay's due soon, I should arrange with the Quartermasters for a cask of the stuff to be sent to Kristen, as a surprise. She can't drink it yet, but it'll keep until after the little one's born for certain. What a lovely idea.  
  
Ah, I do miss snow. Kryta is quaint, but the endless meadows and green fields lose their allure soon enough. Country's too flat by a mile.

# 88th of Phoenix

Eldvin Monastery.  
  
Feeling listless. Another day of small talk without any real substance, though some of the soldiers are nice enough. Doesn't really help the feeling that we're sitting in a lull, while there's still White Mantle out there. I know we're waiting for our wounded to recover, but Spirits... The words I spoke to Iluoana today ring true to my own ears. An idle mind wanders in dark places.  
I've been told before melancholy is my ruling humour.  
  
Well, anyway, we're not done yet. Plans for the days ahead seem to take us onward, and further along Kryta. In better news, dispatches mention troops managed to track down and kill Caudecus, the traitor minister, and leader of the White Mantle. I suppose that's why we're here, hunting down any remnants before they go to ground. So far, that's been limited to the occasional clash, asides from that... thing that killed Grady. Here's hoping their leader dying has broken their resolve, rather than make him into a martyr.  
We'll see soon enough. We'll be at the forefront of it all, after all. As usual.

# 89th of Phoenix

Eldvin Monastery.  
  
Fighting centaurs today. They have a relatively small presence to the east of here, likely entering the region through the contested gap between Gendarren and Harathi. Curiously comforting to fight centaurs, after all the skulking about. A straight enemy, that I do not lament drawing swords on. Putting a couple of their braying warriors to the sword is a good reminder of what soldiering is about at the core. Troops were a little disorganized, but not so much that they caused me grief. Just a minor vein of irritation. It'll pass.  
  
Anyway, aye, we've got a few operations against the ponies in the books, which will hopefully keep those troops ready for duty busy, while the sick and injured recover in Eldvin. Truth be told, it's Seraph work, like I complained about earlier in the tour, but I'd rather have our rookies cut their teeth on predictable centaurs than on White Mantle scum. No bloodstone critters in among the ponies today either, so hopefully we're just dealing with some upstart warchief trying to trample over some peasants, and not much else. One of these days, the Krytans and the ponies will finally sign a peace treaty, and this butcher's work will stop. Until then, well, they'll learn the hard way that charging a norn twice their mass doesn't work out in their favour.  
  
Some talk in camp too. Recruit Silverhide, Charr, talked about new faces, and how difficult it is to try and take a personal interest in every single soldier. Oh, also, there was some sapling running around the place. Apparently his mentor was killed, and he decided to sneak out of the Grove, and go travelling. Iluoana took a personal interest; I think she'll point him in the right direction. Young fellow like that, they're fully grown men with the naivety of children. Best not let them wander around aimlessly, I figure.  
  
Now, before I close my eyes, I think of home, and all the beautiful things that will make it worthwhile to wake up and meet another day in the morning. Spirits willing, I'll dream of home.

# 90th of Phoenix

Eldvin Monastery.  
  
Last season's day, before we march into Scion 1330. A season which, with the blessing of the Spirits, leave with another son or a daughter to cherish in my heart. I have considered the arrangements for what I mentioned some days before, and will task the Quartermasters with setting out and fulfilling that duty in my name. Not a moment too soon either, since we'll be moving our encampment again come the morrow.  
  
On that specific note, we destroyed the last centaur camp in the region pulling out a number of captives, though none of them seemed exceptionally worse for wear, asides from the usual exhaustion and privations that captivity usually brings. After some of the things we've seen and heard in Harathi, that is a weight lifted from an anxious heart. There's only so much sheer cruelty one can witness before it starts warping and affecting your sanity. Spirits, if anything, the Nightmare Court are living proof of the truth of that statement. No, our captives were healthy, by and large, and will recover quickly, thank the Spirits. It's a good feeling to know we did something truly good. "Protect the innocent".  
And as a result, the region's quieted down again, all immediate threats firmly squashed by military might. The Vigil way, as painful and difficult as it is.  
  
I'll miss this place. Like Claypool's whirling, colourful sails, there is something peaceful and restful here. Not just the place, but the monks, and the lazy way they go about gardening and tending for the fat grapes that grow on their vines, and the fine grains they brew into strong drink. It's... close to a perfect peace. It seems almost rude for us to be here, with our blustering selves, and carefully bound violence just waiting to be unleashed. It doesn't seem right to keep a force of destruction in a place that seeks, in everything it does, to nurture.  
It makes me wonder about that old question about norn legends; it is sometimes much, much harder to be a renowned creator than it is a renowned destroyer. Rarely, one will be both.  
I think Vanholm would've liked that idea.

# 1st of Scion

Outskirts of Beetletun.  
  
As expected, we've moved camp over to Beetletun. Entire town is on lockdown, following the death of Caudecus inside. Apparently there's still ongoing fighting close by, which is very probably why we've been sent here. Now we wait while tactical planning happens, the details of which I can obviously not write down because of security reasons. Still. Things might get ugly.  
  
Strange, because to the outside, the little town remains as idyllic as ever, including two statues of the traitor minister. I'd think they'd have torn those two down as a symbolic gesture, at least. I suspect there might be a rather large number of people inside the town with suspect loyalties these days, having lived in the shadow of the man's influence for so long. I can only hope that the Shining Blade deals with them fairly. I have no desire to be part of a witch hunt, though thankfully we'll be spared that specific task.  
  
I'm hoping our efforts here will make the rest of the tour easier to finish up. I'd like to be home by mid-season, but that might be a fantasy.

# 2nd of Scion

Beetletun outskirts.  
  
Put Embersong through some paces for swordfighting this morning. The usual issues with a new learner, not sure how much progress they'll make. Still, they're learning something. It contrasts painfully with how little actual formal training a lot of our troops have. At some levels, we're more like a militia hardened into shape by sheer conviction and experience, rather than the well-drilled army the Vigil should be. It's tempting to throw a stern gaze over at our First Crusaders, but that's not fair either. We have maybe ten days of rest for every season of field duty, whereas the opposite should've been true for a healthy army. It makes it painfully obvious how understaffed we still are. Veteran brigades get worn smooth in operational erosion. Our 'training' consists of lumping recruits into a theater of battle alongside with hardened veterans, and hoping the former live long enough to pick up the tricks of the latter. I don't agree with the sentiment, in truth. I spend long days in the old Marriner fort, getting the specifics of good soldiering hammered into me.  
  
Anyway, day's passed on rest. There's some concern about the townsfolk, but nothing that warrants my direct attention. I've got a special briefing inside the town tomorrow, which will take most of the day. Let's hope they have good news for us.  
  
Until then, it's small talk with the troops, and hard tack.

# 3rd of Scion

Beetletun outskirts.  
  
Entire day spent in deliberation with Shining Blade and Seraph officers, about the situation surrounding the mansion up there. Doesn't exactly paint a pretty picture. A kill-team went in and burned through some defenses, before killing Caudecus. After-action report was pretty... well... there were jade constructs encountered, as well as Caudecus ingesting a good load of bloodstone, which probably means we're not looking at your regular old bandits. The entire place is lousy with traps and hidden passages, and it seems the Seraph haven't been up to snuff to perform a full sector-by-sector sweep of the entire building and the outlying hills north of the domain. The bottom line is that the place is still crawling with bandits, and it's essentially a siege. The reported bloodstone critters and jade constructs are making the humans reluctant to commit without serious back-up, so that's why we've been sectioned to the position. I'd argue for leveling the place, but the Shining Blade are adamant about keeping collateral to a minimum. They're hoping to retrieve intelligence that will help them track down the last remaining groups. I can understand their concern. Here's hoping we're ready to lay out part.  
  
Seems I missed another fresh forage meal today. Blame the humans for keeping me locked inside Beetletun for the entire day. Bah.

# 4th of Scion

Beetletun outskirts.  
  
Another day of patient waiting, while we hope the bandits inside that cursed mansion either starve, or consider surrender. At least, that's the way the Shining Blade are putting it. My gut feeling, however, tells me that the negotiators are wasting their time, and all we achieve is giving the fanatics more time to dig in. More time to lay traps that we might run into the moment we'll finally be ordered in to conduct our destructive clean-up operations. Not that I'm troubled overly by the prospect, mind, we've weathered worse storms and come out through the other side.  
  
Things like that make me feel like a grizzled veteran, and I'm always surprised to note that I am. I've seen too much in the last five years. It all starts flowing into one, self-contained whole. Standing on the swaying deck of an air-ship in transit, yelling over the din of battle, worrying that our position is about to be overrun, swimming desperately away from whatever lurks in the deeps below you, trying to lay still so the coughing doesn't hurt too much... A million sensations, all distilled down to "the war". The Great War. The Dragon Wars. This war.  
  
It's a good thing I'm the one fighting it. The old Vigil sentiment, some must fight, so that all can be free... It is so true at the core. Not in the way that we must fight because others are not willing, but that we, the proud few, are the ones that *can* fight. We fight for everyone. We endure these hardships, this rough companionship, and these bleak periods of sudden mourning so that others don't.  
I'm glad to be here, Kristen. It means that our children won't have to. You know this, of course. Thank you for reminding me.

# 5th of Scion

Beetletun outskirts.  
  
Hot today. Krytan weather always is, but Spirits, this temperate climate is gnawing at me. If I wasn't decked out in armour most of the day, I'd be blackened by the unrelenting sun. In fairness, the plating doesn't help, as it makes me boil inside. No choice, as it stands. Taking it on and off without help would take much, much too long in a crisis situation, and with these White Mantle folks, I prefer being ready for battle at a moment's notice. The Kodan keeps telling me that heat is just a discomfort of the body, and that the mind should rise above it. Well, the only thing rising from me is the smell of stale sweat sticking to the inside of my armour padding. It smells very... well, "me" for lack of a better word. It's familiar, though I should probably put more thought into proper cleaning. I take a tin of water every morning to trim the hair and beard, and a bucket every few days to scrub down the rest, but I hardly get time to give the armour padding a boil, and to scour the mail. You know, I heard tales that humans sometimes take squires onto campaign, with the sole goal of helping them maintain their equipment, and armour them. I'd like a squire. Maybe I should ask Alleshia about it.   
  
Embersong gave me a gift for the baby, a jet black carving of a bear. A nice totem to receive as a gift, that's for certain. One of the Sylvari recruits draped a leaf over it too, which was once owned by a friend of his, one Athame. He said that she'd have appreciated being part of child's blessing. I can understand the sentiment well enough. I'll keep it with me, until I have time to go home again. The day's fast approaching! I can only hope fate ensures leave falls on the ordained days, as I'd very much like to be there. If not, well, I'll have to convince the Warmaster to give me a few days again.

# 6th of Scion

Beetletun outskirts.  
  
Still warm, but getting slightly milder.  
Troops went on special survival exercises today, out in the wilderness. Warmaster's idea, had them camp out in the Queen's forest. They had to mock up an encampment, and bring it to full readiness. Embersong and Vatorn got deployment leads, and... did a good job. They succeeded in ironing out decent positions with little tools given, and managed to organize a respectful encampment about which I only had a few small remarks. I know I tend to hammer at how *un*prepared our soldiers are, but I have a penchant for the dramatic hyperbole, especially after a big blunder has been made. Today, however, our folks did well.  
  
Spoke with Inkblott, that is to say, Saana, about a number of small things. Still remember the day when I didn't have to worry about anything beyond myself. Time's changed a lot of that for me, and it becomes easy to forget that some really don't have any other reason to be here beyond the fact that they can, and therefore are. Meanwhile, everything I do is in the name of something that falls beyond merely myself. Not everything is self-evident.  
  
Anyway, we're still waiting for the humans to give us the go ahead, before we swoop in. Until that time, it's busy-work and waiting games. At least we're not getting shelled.

# 7th of Scion

Outskirts of Beetletun.  
  
Formation training today. Or well, me hammering basic principles back into them, in the hope some of it sticks. Hopefully, they'll integrate their lesson into their knowledge base, and we'll see them doing better in the field. If not, I'll suppose I'll spend more time gnashing my teeth, turning my knuckles white, and saying early goodbyes to people I didn't know well enough.  
Bleak. Very bleak. I'm going to talk to Warmaster. We need more training time. Right now, we're just sending good people to die before their time. Our veterans are pulling their weight, but Spirits, we can't keep this up. Some of these folks barely know anything beyond individual combat skills. It'll save them in a fight, but it'll kill them during a battle. We can't be fighting a dozen individual skirmishes. We need to be one, single, armoured fist.  
  
Blegh! At least Inkblott and Skogknoðr are still ensuring proper forage is at hand, which means I've now eaten better in the last three days than I have in the entire last season combined. It's good though, recruit putting the time in to hunt, keeps them busy.  
  
We're expecting to hear a verdict from the human HQ in Beetletun tomorrow morning. Might be we're going in tomorrow or the day after, might be we're here for another length of time, depending on the negotiations and the intelligence. I wouldn't be surprised if the Shining Blade put in some infiltrators, and are leaning on them to effect something. Anyway, they're playing it close to their chest, which I can't blame them for. I'll hear tomorrow.

# 8th of Scion

Outskirts of Beetletun.  
  
Well, the kill order came in early this morning as expected, so we sent several assault teams in. I had expected to have taken lead myself, but the command staff was held back on request of the humans. Instead, I spent the night assisting the local commanders in tearing the mansion apart on a tactical level. A lot of moving parts with this one, and no small amount of bandits. The mansion is... too large, really. There was a small army of bandits and loyalists still holed up inside. They were soundly beaten to a pulp by the attack teams, but not without serious injuries being inflicted on ours. No deaths, but spirits, we'll need some recovery time.  
I've spent the whole evening with the command staff, trying to clean up any loose threads, but most of our assault troops are out and back to camp by now. Some prisoners too, but we'll be waiting for proper reports from the team leads before we've got a firm grip on the situation.  
  
I'm very tired now, though. I'll see again tomorrow.

# 9th of Scion

Outskirts of Beetletun.  
  
Entire day of paperwork and reports. Aftermath of yesterday's storm's made sure our hands have been full. A good number of our soldiers are injured, to a greater or a lesser degree, some with injuries that might take some time to heal up. Thankfully, the Warmaster already put in a request to get us back to Marriner, both to recover from our injuries, and to put in some much needed training time to get everyone back up to standard.  
  
Reading through the reports, though, it seems the room-to-room fighting was ferocious. Not even the Seraph had a clear image of how many bandits were inside, but looking at what I'm reading here, they were right to call in reinforcements. Spirits, there's an entire underground tunnel network, complete with living quarters and supplies. A small army of hardcore bandits were riding out the siege, hoping they could make the Seraph and Shining Blade bleed for every inch of ground they took. Without our guardians and shock tactics, they might have extracted a much bloodier tool... Even so, no deaths, and the humans are pleased with our actions, by and large. I'll mark it down as a victory. Pity I didn't get to swing a sword, or snatch a rug up for a trophy, but you can't have it all.  
  
Small number of prisoners, too. Mostly injured who then got captured alive, though some might still expire before we get anything of value out of them, despite the attention of our medics. An odd bunch. One is apparently connected to Vatorn, while another apparently attempted to engineer an escape earlier today by using a pig as a mount. Skogknoðr shot it out from under them, but there was an incident with a suspicious liquid that's got Occult busy. Never a dull day.  
Either case, we're due to march back towards Lion's Arch in a day or two, after which we'll be on a recovery rota. Call it leave in disguise, with some training thrown into the mix for good measure.  
  
Oh, yeah, Crawley and Betzler decided to finally admit that, yes, they're in love, etc, etc. So I signed off on that. You know, for all the bustle I make about wishing Kristen was here along with me, I really couldn't imagine fighting in the Vigil with Kristen around. Spirits, I have little enough time as it is, and all I do is write in my journal. I just wouldn't be able to do her justice! Ah, in fairness, the wait is always worth it. I might only see her once or twice in a season, but I'll swear she's only gotten more beautiful every time I see her. Like seeing the sun rise after a long, long night.

# 10th of Scion

Outskirts of Beetletun.  
  
Still aftermath, though things have died down a little. Engineers were asked to repair the famer's barn we commandeered to keep our prisoners in, after yesterday's bizarre break-out attempt. Ravenwest put Carmine Embersong to it, and did an acceptable job of it. Considering the amount of times I've been asked if it's alright to kill and eat some of the farmer's livestock, I'm surprised by how... intact the entire place is. I swear, some of our soldiers don't understand the concept of property. They see a farm animal, and they just think it's alright to snatch it off the field, and turn it into supper! Bah! If someone catches you attempting to rustle cattle in the mountains, you're lucky if you don't lose a hand, or worse, for your trouble. Anyway, as long as they can keep their murderous hunger in check long enough for us to march off, we'll be fine. Otherwise... well, I suppose I could always force the compensation costs from their pay.  
  
Looking forwards to heading over to Lion's Arch. Hopefully find the time to see how Lionhead is doing, and send word to Freyja that we're at barracks, so they can drop by once and again. Usually not too hard to get exception on your posting while you're in Marriner; I'll have to see if I can get Alleshia in a good mood, and see how I play my cards. Probably won't get away with a trip over to Hoelbrak, but if Tzahr can't get to the wife, maybe the wife can get to the Tzahr! Perhaps a little bit of sea air will be good for her. I'll draft a letter once we arrive in Lion's Arch, and I know more about the exact terms of our deployment. No point if we're only there for a few days, after all.  
  
I'll be glad to be out from under this ridiculous brick of overcompensation Caudecus built for himself. Spirits...

# 11th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Marched back, got two days of soft leave. I was going to write a letter to Kristen, but I went out for a drink with the troops, and now I'm tired, despite taking it easy. Well, okay, maybe the keg-skewer at the end was a little overkill, that stuff really came down when I sat down to write.  
I'll do it tomorrow.  
Just have to drink my entire waterskin before I lay down, or I'll wake with rolling thunder in the head.

# 12th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Freyj visited, after I called on a favour and had a runner sent up to the Priory. Lionhead joined us, and we had a drink and ate some of the daily catch, so fresh from the water I'm surprised it wasn't still moving. Gloriously good eating though, that. We get good river salmon and crawdad in the mountains, but Spirits, the deep-water fish they catch outside the bay here is something else.  
Sent my letter to Kristen too, which she'll hopefully receive before too long. It's not that far of a trip, so I hope she feels good enough to come and visit, even if it's briefly.  
  
For the rest; lazy. Been sitting in the shaded recess of a small pub out in the Commodore's quarter, overlooking the town. It's warm, but the shade and the breeze make it bearable. That, and I left my armour in the care of an armourer for refit. Not just a polish and a sheen, but a proper refit. Time to work out the dents, and have some of the most weathered plating reforged. I was tempted to sit and watch them work, but it'll take more than a day's work to refit an entire suit of armour my size, plus the extra's I've asked them to put in. I'm back down to wearing loose linen and cotton, which makes me feel light as a feather. Takes humans to make a fabric that's so thin you might as well not wear anything, but I'm not complaining.

# 13th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Duties resume. Warmaster decided to take the lot out to Caledon through the gates for some first-hand experience with the risen that sometimes wash up along the shores there. Pity my armour was in for refit, or I'd have joined, but I decided walking into Caledon wearing nothing but a shirt and a pair of brass balls was tempting fate a little more than usual. It'd have been one of those "the day he didn't wear his armour" tales, and I was having none of it.  
  
As it stands, I sat out most of the day in Marriner, not doing much asides from talk a little here and there. Some good ideas for lodge-building, though I think I might need to reconsider the scale of my ideas. Hollowing out a mountain might be a more strenuous task than I anticipated. At least, that is, if I don't prepare myself adequately for it. Perhaps just sticking to great timbers is enough. Hm! Either case, whenever I decided to do such will be a very time consuming ordeal. I guess that means it'll have to wait until after the dragons are all dead? I'm not sure if that's realistic, but I'm dreaming anyway. I'd like to make something... worthwhile. Something my descendants will look back on with pride.  
Like Hrothbeir and his glacier.

# 14th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Lucky day today. Warmaster took the folks out to the Shiverpeaks to get a proper eye on some Svanir. My armour's still in for refit, so I managed to slip away before things got too hectic, and spent an hour and a bit in Hoelbrak, for a surprise visit to my dearly beloved. The honoured Speaker of Snow Leopard will have to forgive me robbing her of a student for a small hour, but by the Spirits, it was good to see her. I picked her up and put her on my shoulder, just like old times. Lass' gotten heavier, but that's no surprise. Moments where you wish you could make every minute last a lifetime. It's hard to describe, but it felt strange leaving, knowing that next time she'd likely be holding our son or daughter in her arms. The prospect is... divine, almost. Like seeing Bear's face for the first time.

# 15th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Warmaster took the troops out to Metrica today. Some folks apparently needed to get some first hand experience with Destroyers, while the veterans were sent to follow up on some Inquest materiel we found in Caudecus' old manor. Tying up a loose end outside of the Seraph's and Shining Blade's jurisdiction, so to speak. Meanwhile, the recruits went to a failed laboratory ground, where some folks found traces of Destroyers in the past. That turned out to be a miscalculation on the Warmaster's part, as there was a lot of them, and in serious numbers too. Almost swarmed us when we probed the area too deeply. Coupled with the troops dragging their feet on the fallback, and the intense heat of an exposed vein of mountain's blood, things got hectic. I had to call on Bear's strength to swat away the last few attackers while the last few remaining troops fell back. I lost my temper. The idea of getting dragged down and burnt to a cinder due to some common Destroyers in a training exercise gone awry bucked itched me badly. Shouted down at the troops for their inability to disengage. We have a few with burn wounds, hopefully nothing serious.  
  
I'm not sure what the idea was, but it's one hell of a way to get first contact with some Destroyers.  
I spoke to the Warmaster too. She'll see about granting me some small leave around the 50th, so I can go home and hopefully be there for the baby being born. Well, I hope our son or daughter isn't planning to arrive early or late. It'd be a shame to have to miss being there.

# 16th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
A day to wind down after all the chaos from yesterday. I got some leave signed over by the Warmaster, for which I'm very pleased. Now we just hope that the Spirits keep an eye out, and nature agrees to let everything go smoothly. It's hard to think the day is almost there; less than half a season away, give or take a few. Has it really already been three whole seasons since?  
  
Anyway, asides from that bit of good news, things have remained quiet here. Wood-knead passed along another carving she made. She might have some of Stegalkin's blood in her somewhere, because that lass works wood as easily as I breath. I don't mind, though, another thing to keep aside until the day comes that I finally settle down a spot for the lodge. I've been accumulating a small hoard of trophies and gifts now. Not an issue I've ever thought I'd have, in fairness. You think the Skaalds have a tale about a hero who complained about having "too much glory"? That'd be a curious one, perhaps with a wise lesson buried deep within somewhere.  
  
Odd dream about Destroyer-geese laying weird fire eggs that tried to light me on fire when I wanted to make an omelette. I shouldn't go to sleep hungry next time.

# 17th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Another calm day, we're just taking it all easy for a few days, before we get back to grips with training. A few rest days are good. I can feel it in the muscles of my back and neck. They slowly stop being hard bricks, and soften slowly. You notice it from sleeping on a soft bed. It's like sinking away into a snow drift slowly.  
Sleeping's always a bit rough, five years of soldiering and adventuring has ensured not every moon's passage goes by uneventful. The shamans and Speakers back home say dreams are sometimes visions from the Spirits, and that one should pay careful attention to what happens in them. I try, but most of the time, I wake up, and everything fades away. I vaguely remember the general nature of things, but nothing specific. Sometimes I wake up, and I know I was fighting something, or trying to get to something desperately, but I can rarely remember what or why. I wonder sometimes why this is. Used to be I thought it was because the Spirits looked ill on me, but since I now hold Bear's favour, I doubt that very much. Bear sometimes speaks to me in words carried on the wind, or feelings of clarity. Never in dreams though. I wonder if there are things in my dreams that even scare the Spirits away from visiting?  
  
In other news, there was a bit of a tiff between Iluoana and the Warmaster, apparently because the former decided to confess her love to Sima after a drunk binge during our small period of leave. Can imagine that stings, considering Sima and Alleshia have a storied history as companions in arms. Only pity is that Sima's memories got scrambled by the White Mantle and their damned bloodstone. Seems a bit unfair to jump the man, considering he barely knows anything. Nevermind that the situation seems to have suddenly surfaced out of no-where. Spirits, it was only in Claypool that Iluoana broke with her other lover. To top it off, I got an officer's notice that her and Embersong also requested a relationship permission? They're lucky they didn't come to me, because considering what I've just written down, I would have refused that outright. That bloody Sylvari needs to get her head out her ass, and stop letting herself be guided by her emotions. She's been claiming she doesn't want to allow her emotions to impact her duties, but she's been doing the exact inverse so far. First she resigns from medical over some nonsensical idea of inadequacy, and now they're apparently going on a serial rebound binge? I'll have to bring the situation up to the Warmaster, as I am exceptionally displeased with the entire affair. I will not allow promising soldiers to be ruined by one recruit's overbearing sense self-pity. She will do better, or she can go back home to Caledon.  
Bah. Sometimes I feel like we should simply suspend the entire relationship regulation, and tell people to keep their parts in their pants until leave. I'd imagine there'd be riots.  
  
On a brighter note, the armour's been back from refit for a couple of days now, and the work seems to be stellar. I paid premium for it, but having the inner bracing refurbished and the padding replaced is making wearing the old suit of armour a real treat. There's some minor fitting discomforts that eased away after a few hours of wear, but overall it's much better. A second skin, in so far that the plated steel can accommodate. Not only that, but I paid the smith extra for enchantment services and some runic inscriptions that cost me a fair amount of coin. First proper use I've had of two years of pay, and I think it's well spent. The armour is what keeps me alive, after all. Anyway, I'll have it sent to the Quartermasters proper now I've worn it in. The armourer said he'd take it in for any extra modifications, but he did fine work as it is.

# 18th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
So, a training day ended up spiraling out of control. Not because of anything to do with the training, but rather because Demorique, for whatever reason, decided to try and slash his wrists. Thankfully he was found in time, and is now in medical. It caused a ruckus, though. Fort was raised to high alert, likely still because of his status as a target for White Mantle killers. Even so, it seems this was his own doing. I suspect that recent events in Queensdale, where Vatorn was tasked to a mission that went a little awry, have taxed him. The report stated that he encountered someone he knew, and went into a veritable killing frenzy. That, in turn, was reason for a recent demotion on his part, back to recruit. Any of that could be a contributing factor. I won't ever understand folks who try to take their own life. Seems so... pointless to do. As if you deliberately forget that each night is followed by dawn. Foolish.  
I suspect we'll cart him over to the Keep. We can't deal with this sort of thing. You need a shaman, and a long communion with the Spirits to chase that kind of folly away.  
  
Spirits, at least he didn't think to dive off of Phoenix Roost...

# 19th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Well, aftermath of yesterday's debacle has been somewhat muted. Nothing of note really happened. A new face from the recruitment offices. Vatorn's in medical, being... well, I assume he's acting like anyone would act after they were found trying to kill themselves, and then being strapped to a bed. As soon as he's stable, I hope we transfer him over to better care. The rest is still quiet.  
  
I talked to the Warmaster, and we've rescinded the special permission given to recruits Iluoana and Embersong. I had to do a bit of explaining, obviously, but they've both accepted the notion. They have to sit this one out at least thirty days, after which we'll see. If they're still adamant at that point, good for them. Until then, however, they can reflect on whether or not they want to continue down this path they've chosen. Folks tend to forget how easy it is to suddenly latch onto someone, and then think they're your entire world. Doubly so if they're relatively young, and don't yet understand that good things require time. Certainty is a very difficult thing to gain. It reminds me of those young lovers who insist they will love each other forever. Oh, how wrong they usually are. That's why I made sure Kristen and I were going forward on the same path.  
In any case, Iluoana insisted I read their fieldbook as recompense, which I suppose I'll get to eventually. Not sure what they expect me to divine from their writing, but it's a minor indulgence. Just need to find the time.

# 20th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Troops had sensory-deprivation training, in a mild form. They were forced to fight in smoke, laid down with grenades. The effect was appropriate enough, though the debrief was a little long-winded. Good for the troops to experience it, though. That sort of magical hex is common enough, and can be one of the easiest ways a caster can take out even a well-trained soldier with relatively little effort. Maybe the troops now at least have an inkling of what it might be like, and are more prepared as a result. We've still got more training lined up before we hit the field again, so I'm hoping we can get overall readiness up by a serious degree. Not enough to cover all the bases, but hopefully enough to cover the most important ones.  
  
Spoke to Trebius at some length, about the technicalities of the Skaalds and the cultural significance. He didn't quite seem to wrap his head around some of the things I told him, but that's because he's a Charr. It reminded me of hearing the tales as a kid, especially the more complex ones that took years to refine and form. They would be so complex in their imagery, that they were almost like gibberish. But, you'd still hear the poetic harmony in the words, and the rolling imagery they would conjure would be enough to listen to a good Skaald for hours. I'll try and explain those beautiful parts of my people's culture to Chainheart, for better or for worse. If anything, I should be honoured he holds an interest at all. Many Charr just discard anything that isn't theirs as useless.  
  
I read Iluoana's journal earlier today, in a single sitting. Not sure what she expected me to find, except what I thought I would. It's the... well, illusion of uniqueness. It's that time when the young lover raises his head to the sky and howls: "No-one can understand my anguish", without understanding that his trials and travails are identical to those suffered by thousands of others before him, just as thousands more will feel the same anguish claw around their hearts in due time. She's simply fluctuating. Life has challenged her with rough weather, and she momentarily forgot that no storm lasts forever. But, thankfully, she seems to be regaining her stability a little.  
She asked me about equality with norn, as if I wouldn't understand the subtext of what she was really asking for. I suppose forcing the break between her and Wood-Knead has only galvanized their determination to prove me wrong. I suppose I should have expected that, but in the end, what harm will it do? If she wishes to try and forge a bond of equality, she's welcome to try.  
  
Before all of that, though, I went for a long swim out in the bay. I spoke to some of the soldiers lingering by the beach, including a new recruit, and ended up giving a long, rambling lecture on soldier's morality, and the way we should considering all our actions against our principles. Thankfully, though, it seems not to have fallen on deaf ears, even though I was almost entirely naked, and paddling around in the shallow water at the time.  
I found a small natural hollow formed behind the waterfall, where I was able to meditate for a long time, and commune with Bear. She did not speak today, but I could feel her strong and reassuring presence. Bear still grants me her boon, and honours me with her presence and attention. It is good to know I am still worthy of her many gifts, and that I have not disappointed her teachings. I honoured the other Spirits too, though their presence were more fleeting. Snow Leopard purrs in kinship, which I take to be a good sign for Kristen and I. Not so long now before I am allowed to go home for a few days. I will take my time then, to see my son, my newborn child, my wife, and perhaps also my own father. I feel it will be good to take the birth as a moment of forging bonds, rather than breaking them.  
  
It was a pleasant evening, talking to the folks. Some of them seem to have gained insights from what I told them. I hope they employ them wisely.  
Sometimes I wonder if perhaps, in a way, I am the Chapter's shaman.

# 21st of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
More training at Marriner, this time a capture the flag team-game. It went well enough, though neither team managed to score. Wood-knead had a minor issue with some of her underwear tearing, and causing her to be in a bit of an awkward spot, but that was resolved easily enough. More troubling was that Alevyne apparently lashed out and punched Iluoana in the face. Not a major issue to my mind, but Astrid clamped down on it and gave the girl a full season of punitive cleaning in medical. I don't see why we should go to such extremes, but it was her exercise, so I'll let it stand. Wouldn't do to undermine my fellow Knights authority.  
So, yes, training continues. Never always of it, of course, like any-one who's been a First Crusader in their life will tell you, but better than none. There was some display of tactical awareness too, which is good, since that's what these games are meant to encourage. Most of them are competent fighters, but they lack in wider battlefield awareness and tactical sensibilities. It means fighting in groups is so much more difficult. It's like teaching a group of lions to act like wolves. That's what'll get us killed. The sudden loss of unit cohesion, and an over-reliance on the Knights for tactical directives. In small skirmishes like we've been doing, we can struggle past the pain, but in a real war, a dragon war, we'd be overrun and killed. Spirits, sometimes I'm afraid the same will happen to the norn if we go north to Jormag. I don't doubt we'll kill the dragon, and reclaim our homes, but I fear the amount of good lives it will cost.  
  
I spoke to Shatteredshield as well. Seems he's determined to face his erstwhile superiors in the Bane for what they made him to. He's been carrying that burden with him for a while, so it's good that he's decided to finish it. I immediately offered my sword-arm, of course. The avenging hero there to set right an old grievance? How could I not. They will sing of it in tales, and Shatteredshield is an honourable warrior who deserves good allies to stand at his side. Spirits, I don't doubt others would stand alongside him if he asked, but he's proud, and this is a matter of honour. Kristen would come too, if I asked her. Either case, I would be happy to show those Charr how a Vigil Knight from the mountains fights. They'll understand with a lot more clarity why their invasion of the Shiverpeaks ground to a bloody halt in the opening faces. Maybe I should ask Trebius about some of these things tomorrow, when we're done talking about the Skaldic verse forms. He actually wrote a piece of alliterative verse that wasn't half-bad for a first-try, though he's still a long way off from being anywhere near a Skaald, but he's learning. Still, it's hard to get the norn mindset into his Charr brain. But I'll try. Spirits willing, I'll even pass on something of value.

# 22nd of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Long day today. Astrid took the the troops out to a special request from the Priory out in Lornar's Pass. With the troops stationed over at Marriner, that put us as first response. Just those damned steam-creatures Scarlet unleashed near the big lake there causing a problem. Usually, the Priory scholars have it well in hand while they study the critters, but sometimes they lit slip their control a little. Of course, a relatively long march and a sudden climate shift was rough on the troops. Wasn't so routine in the end either, fighting over frozen like at the height of Scion's season is a little... Well, the fear that the ice'd crack underfoot was real, especially when some of those metal hulks started smalling down with all their weight. Slippery slopes! Literally. There were also some Dregde further on the northern side of the lake, but they didn't seem to cause any major issues just yet. More interesting was a sort of half-cave we found, with two huge statues of roaring drakes. So old, the only people who could've made them must've been the Dwarves. Odd, I didn't hear about them before. I wonder if they were bared following a snowslide or such. It's hard to tell, but they were already almost buried in snow and ice.  
More concerning where the reports of the other task groups. They found a statue of the human god Grenth, along with spirits and Aatxe prowling around. Force mentioned there was a portal too, which he seems to think is connected to the same portal that once send me sprawling through half of Tryia, from Ascalon to Lornar's Pass. I think that one spat me out a bit further south, but it can't be a coincidence that we've found another portal here, right? Occult'll file a full report for us, I suspect, which might cast some light on the situation. Whether or not it's related to the steam-creatures showing more activity than usual is hard to divine without knowing the full story. I suspect I'll hear about it soon enough.  
  
Calder and Iluoana continue exploring the boundaries of the latter's weird magical connection. I am starkly reminded of Maeva and her wild powers, and I wonder if they're related. If anything, it's made me wary of the dangers that such unchecked magic can unleash. There was a visitor, one of Embersong's kinsmen, so it turned out, who came by to try and help. I haven't had the time to talk to the recruit about the results yet, but I hope progress is being made. Calder already put channeling sigils on Ilu's hands, which are supposed to help. Sometimes I realise how little I know of things like magic. Either case, Embersong's kin left her a beautiful darksteel sword that's made me quite envious. Not that my own blade hasn't served me well, of course, but I can't help but acknowledge good craftsmanship.  
  
Also a little scrap between Sawyer, Cheery and one of the new recruits, Rodent. Apparently Rodent tried to man-handle Sawyer over some equipment dispute, where the latter mist-formed away. I saw that last bit happen. Cheery then jumped on the defensive, and I had to give a stern reminder to them that none of that was good conduct. I'm not going to draft a disciplinary note on it, however, not for something so petty. Either case, I hope that's the last I'll hear of it. The Rodent lass came up to me and Skylark, and suggested we get an airship, as if it was nothing. I'm not sure if she was serious or not either, which... worries me.  
  
Continued my... well, lessons, of a sort, with Trebius, and he told me about Charr duels on the Bane in return. I might start exploring the actual technical elements of of the metric structure, though I'm not sure he'll be able to wrap his head around them. He seemed interested enough about the kennings and the poetic value they held for story tellers. I'll need to find if I can't find any good examples of lordly verse for him to ponder over, before we take apart the many, many rules that compose them.  
What he told me about the Bane, though... Well, it certainly paints Ram's position as an interesting one. An honour-duel, in the truest fashion to be resolved under the eyes of your peers; be it for their amusement or otherwise. A meld between a personal vengeance and pit-fighting.  
  
During the day, I also spoke at length with Octavia Skylark. Her twin sister has since also signed up, and telling the two apart is a little bothersome. I ended up speaking about Freyj and Aska, and then recounting Lalowa's tale, as well as that of Asgeir Dragonrender. She really doesn't know much about norn, or our culture, but luckily, sharing tales is one thing we do well. I hope I did Old Blue justice with my telling.  
I know I should share more tales of the fallen with my comrades, to honour the many fallen. The tales of the dead are difficult to spread, when you're busy living yourself. It makes me respect the Skaalds and the shamans more; to make memory and wisdom their life must be strange. Do human priests feel the same?  
  
Passing back into Lornar's Pass today made me long for home. I will need to let Kristen now I have ten precious days of leave to spend with her and the baby, so we can make the very most of every second there. It will be a long and difficult wait for these last days to pass. Every morning, I wake up and wonder if today's the day our baby will be born. I desperately hope the little one will have the patience to wait to venture on into this world until I'm there, by Kristen's side. Those ten days... they seem so little. So sparse for something so important. Oh, and how difficult it will be to leave... Every time I stand before that portal, I resent it from tearing me away from everything I love. And then, after a moment of reflection, I'll remember that they're also the exact reason I will step through that portal anyway.

# 23rd of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Calm today. Scouts had specialist training today, which meant they were south of the city, in the Bloodtide region for most of the day. Not that I mind, having well-trained scouts means more reliable battlefield intelligence. Some days ago, during one of Astrid's exercises, I mentioned that all warfare is based on deception. Piercing the enemy's veil of secrecy, as the scouts are supposed to do, is a great way of not getting yourself horribly killed.  
  
I took the time to catch up with recruit Iluoana on a number of things. For one, her Mist magic seems to be temporarily muzzled while they get to grip with what it actually means. As I've remarked before, it's not the first time we've had these sort of spontaneous magical manifestations, but still. I remember having to sandbag Maeva's tent because we were afraid she was going to explode. Can never be too careful. She's also, as I expected, already broken off the relationship with wood-knead, which... well, I guess there should be some small sense of self-satisfaction at being vindicated in my cynicism, but I'm not sure how I feel about it. Sylvari are always strange with their extreme emotions. They seem to feel everything so much deeper, and rawer than the rest of us do. Either case, the recruit seems to have regained some of her composure. I hope that it lasts.  
  
When wood-knead returned from scouting, I also put her through her paces for swordwork. She's doing very good. She's picked up parrying dagger too, and that's really stepped up the pacing. In our spar, while I was armed with longsword, she almost got the better of me, until we managed to force it down to a draw. No doubt she'll eventually beat me in that match-up. We'll have to start putting in practice with sword and parrying daggers evenly matched, and perhaps sword and shield long term. We'll make sure the basics are all in there, then we can go over to half-handing and thunder stroke. I have to say, she's doing an excellent job so far. On par with soldiers like Crawley and Shatteredshield when it comes to long-term prospects, as soon as they get their seniority requirements filled. Embersong's a case of... just being on guard, all the time. We spoke a little, no unpleasantly, about the reasons for this. Apparently she got jumped by Svanir back in the mountains, and not in a good way. I suspect as much from what she told me before, but it's still something else to just hear it said aloud. There's a killing-grudge she carries with her, related to it. Apparently she came close to fulfilling it while the Warmaster was training them in the Foothills. Must've been frustrating.  
Anyway, she keeps up the good work here, now, and she'll go far.  
  
In the late evening, a bunch of the troops went and took a dive. That was good; water helped to wash away a lot of the sweat, and it was also just good for the company. Embersong and Inkblot joined as well, which of course did well enough for the view. Ah, if I was not a married man! There's something wonderful about the female body, in a way that I appreciate deeply. Not just as a man, of course, that'd be crass, but also as carver and a poet. Seeing the well-defined form of the body, shaped so by years of experienced, hardened and weathered, yet still supple and yielding. Like the best grain of wood. I am most starkly reminded of this when I trace my fingers over the red ink colouring my beautiful Kristen's skin. It merely embellishes what it is already there, following the line of her jaw, neck, shoulders, spine, and hips. Drawing the eye, not to the intricate knotwork etched into the skin, but to the soft curves and graceful lines that give them their true meaning. Ah, wood knead and Inkblot are both beautiful young women, scars and all, no-one will deny that, but only my truly well-beloved can make me lose myself like that.  
  
See? Even the memory is enough.  
Regardless, Embersong fished up some things from the shallows, including a norn skull and what looks like a thoroughly rusted handgun. More interestingly is a pare of heavily corroded dog-tags, which I suppose I should clean up. It's not surprising, really. So many battles have been fought over Lion's Arch, I can imagine the bay floor is littered with relics and junk in equal measure. Spirits, on that beach alone! It was here where we stood in 1325, neatly arrayed to welcome the Orrians on the shore, and cast them beck into sea. The General herself was there that day, and so was I. Only five years ago, and yet I was so much younger then than those five paltry years could ever hope to encompass. It seems almost like an entirely different lifetime. But yes, I was there. Right before the Pact was formed, when Marriner was still a loose pile of bricks, and the only thing I knew about fighting was what old Roar-Caster had taught me before he had died. Hah. I wonder what he would have said now, when I'm the one teaching the soldiers how to fight.  
  
I wonder if he ever considered I would one day surpass him. Spirits, I wonder that about my children every day, and I really hope they will.

# 24th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Tired now. Not really a long day, but there was a buzz of activity, and some special briefing work. Apparently we'll be hosting some festival thing here in Lion's Arch in a few days. Part of some morale-improving campaign. I'm not exactly jumping at the occasion, but that's mostly because it seems like a lot of work heaped on top of our regular duties. I suppose it'll be good, though. A bit like a moot.  
  
Nothing outside the usual today, though. New recruit, apparently Darin Darkbow's uncle. The man himself came by some days ago to give us a heads-up, but I don't see it was needed. His uncle's a bit haggard, but seems alright. Another face in the constant flux that is our roster. At least most of our turnover is still "exhaustion / other" rather than "death". I'd wish for more dependable soldiers, but I know well enough how exhausting it is. Still, every now and again you get some promising names on the roster. Been a relatively good recruitment wave, even though we've already lost about half of them. The other half's pretty solid, however.  
  
Tomorrow's First Crusader day for the boots, followed by a rest day, and two days of exercise I'm to oversee personally. Shouldn't be a major issue. I'm wagering they won't exactly enjoy it, but maybe they'll learn a thing or two.  
  
Still need to write Kristen. The blank paper stares at me, and nothing I can think of comes even close to encompassing what I want to tell her. Ironic that I'm teaching a Charr about the oldest traditions of our warrior-poets, but yet I am unable to wrangle a simple letter. I hate it. I feel like I should be able to write something touching and profound, but nothing that comes to me is adequate.  
Bah. Bah!

*Frost covered fronds,*  
*the fall-ice of Scion,*  
*weaved delicate strands;*  
*cold wreathed memories.*  
*Dawn's eye blinked aloft*  
*the land Deldrimor called.*  
*Snow ran here still like water*  
*yielded soft in summer's wind.*  
  
*Dwarven heralds called then:*  
*'See here, stout folk, arrive*  
*in horned helm clad!'*  
*They knew and named him*  
*the northern giant's kin.*  
*Of Bear's great might*  
*and bolder blood;*  
*Harthacnut Great Horn.*

# 25th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Spent the good majority of the day getting paperwork in order. This Dragon Bash festival requires a vast amount of preparation, and spending the entire day getting permits and other none-sense from the Lionguard and the Captain's Council was tiring. Some of the officers will only help you if you bribe them on the sly, while others will take offense at the notion, and only add more obstructions to your path. My patience wasn't made for that sort of ordeal. Anyway, I don't want to dwell on those lost hours any more than I have to. Even writing about it annoys me.  
  
Troops got put through more training. Scouts getting more exercise in, while apparently Bjorn took the rest to practice against some kind of sparring-golem. Apparently a rather aggressive model. A pity, I would've enjoyed fighting one of the Asuran's better constructs. Some of them are actually challenging to fight.  
  
Twenty more days until leave.  
I hope Kristen's well, still. I miss her.

*Before their mighty king*  
*they brought him forth.*  
*Warm welcomed then still*  
*were even the waning renown'd.*  
*'Hail, northernling,' spoke he,*  
*'South of Norrheart arst thou.*  
*In Dwarven lands mine,*  
*Deldrimor's kingly realm.'*  
  
*Spoke then Harthacnut:*  
*'Forth the hunt came,*  
*King of Southern Peaks,*  
*Spirit-guided was I here.*  
*Bear's voice, dream-kissed,*  
*of great beasts told.*  
*Of shadow-light malice*  
*and sword-sharpen'd claw.'*

# 26th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Working the Aerodrome today. Or, well, the armoury stocks there. I need to bring the engineers through some extra paces, I think, but I'm not sure if I'll have the chance. This party is eating into everything. I didn't expect to be grumpy about it, but I am a little. I should work on having a more positive outlook. It'll be good for the troops to get a moot under their belt before we're sent back into cleaning out the Krytan hills.  
  
Actually, I still need to write Kristen to tell her I've got leave, maybe she'll want to come by and attend the Dragon Bash too. With a feat name like hers, I'm sure she'll find an opportunity to celebrate.

# 27th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Not a good day. Botched the training. I was planning on doing section exercises, but the turn out was poor, and we didn't have the numbers for it. Instead, I gave a lengthy but fairly erratic lecture on virtue and good soldiering. Rubbish. Well, not rubbish, all true things, but it's a mindset thing. If I've changed anyone's mindset by orating to them today, I'll be surprised.  
  
Later fell asleep on the yard wall, until bloody Aava Irongrip walks up to me and yells in my ear. Made me start so badly, I jumped off the wall on the wrong side, and took a tumble down four meters onto a boulder in the lower yard. Now I've got a bruise the size of a warship on my side, and my back hurts. So, medic's keeping me in a day, just to make sure my spine's not shattered into a million bits or something.  
  
Wrote to Kristen; I hated the letter. It felt so inadequate.  
I want to go home.

# 28th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
So, nothing broke, just bruised my everything a little. Didn't sleep too well, because I kept trying to roll onto my side, and woke myself up. Urgh. I got a little lost in the head during the afternoon, and ended up building a sand castle. I was talking to my helmet, pretending it was my son. Not sure how or why, but... it sort of felt like waking up from a fever dream afterwards, and I just felt alone, and far away from home, and everything I love. Spirits, I've been homesick before, but... It'll pass. Another score or so days, and I'll get some leave, to see Kristen. To my children. Seems it'll be much-needed.  
  
Training went well, though. I borrowed the one Asura Bjorn had contact with. It's one of our former soldiers, now working with the Pact. A dark little Asura with all the airs and flairs of the very worst of their kind. Still, they're working with a rather large Krewe contracted to the Pact for a wide variety of materiel concerns. It's attached to research and development, and with the Pact's funding behind it, they're cranking out some impressive materiel. For the training, they rolled out some high-powered holographic projectors that were able to render hard-light projections for training purposes. We split the Chapter into discrete groups, one fighting icebrood, the other destroyers. It was a fairly accurate rendition of super-lethal battlefield conditions like those encountered during the very worst battles against the dragons. I only observed the destroyer group, but it was an impressive display. Forgewood made some tactical choices with questionable outcomes; Crawley's tactical insight was superior on the occasion, but the open bucking of authority was problematic. Forgewood's issued a warning notice, which is somewhat understandable, even if it presents the worst of both worlds. The issue might be situational. Crawley's Falchion, maybe she'll perform better under Force. If not, we'll have to either approach it as a disciplinary issue and curb the outbursts, or we'll have to see about putting her in command of some troops more often. Still. There is such a thing as being undermining authority.  
  
On the other group's side, apparently the detachment left behind Rodent and Wood-knead, despite them calling out that they were not clear at the end of the exercise. They got bludgeoned a little by the projections, and needed some assistance, but the rest apparently just walked off without notice. Since apparently Seleea had group command, Sinclair will be having a word with her. Good. Not really a mistake we should be making.  
  
Regardless, it seems that everything went well, and a lot of the soldiers got some valuable approximation of exactly how dangerous a serious fight can get. Even small errors in tactical insight will wipe out an entire squad. I don't think folks understood that properly before, but they should do now. Not the kindest lesson, but again... I can only hope every little grain of insight may eventually add up to a weight large enough to outbalance the cost of their lives.  
  
Dragon Bash festival tomorrow, though. I suppose it will be nice to relax a little.  
I hope Kristen can come.

# 29th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Dragon Bash! And Kristen came from Hoelbrak!  
But only for a little while. Time is forever our greatest enemy.  
As such, I will not waste many words on the little book.  
  
It was, is, a good day.

# 30th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Spent a wonderful day with Kristen, just locked away in our own little world. You see others do it sometimes; they just carve away a chunk of the world for themselves, and everything that's happening outside of it simply ceases to matter. It's a good feeling, one that I really can only find in those very rare moments of deep connection. Besides Kristen and my children, only Bear herself is able to entrance me so thoroughly. Hah, that reminds me of something the lass said yesterday, during the Dragon's Bash. She asked if I was getting lost in her again. Hah. She knows me too well, my dearest wife.  
Sleep was a little disturbed, because the baby was kicking. I didn't mind. It was a rare moment of feeling at home away from home. To be exactly where I wanted to be. Spirits, Kristen's bump has grown so much, she's become ponderous and heavy. It also makes me irrationally afraid that the baby'll be early, and I'll miss it. But, I have good faith in the Spirits and my luck. Another fifteen days, and I'll be in Hoelbrak. Ten days! Ten days.  
  
The rest of the day passed in relative calm. I was sad to see Kristen go home without me, but she has duties to attend, just as much as I do. Snow Leopard's lodge could not have asked for a better keeper. But then, I am biased.  
Dragon Bash festival continued, though the streets were empty, and the crowds were relatively muted. Still, I enjoyed myself well enough, even if I think folks might have misjudged the amount of popular sentiment still present in the people. It's depressing to see that a celebration of the dragons' defeat is met mostly with apathy and detached curiosity, rather than with the grand gestures of victory we'd have come to expect. Eh. I suppose we take our true rewards from the deed.  
  
Smash the dragon, indeed.

# 31st of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Dragon Bash's over. Was, again, somewhat a quiet day. I think maybe one day would've been enough, rather than drag it out. Anyway, it was nice to have a few days off, though I wouldn't exactly call it a few days if "no work".  
Still, Kristen visited, and I was able to relax a mite and just... take things easy. I think fighting wars has given me a special appreciation for the quiet, and the calm things in life. Or perhaps I was always like this. I used to listen to the fire in the ovens, trying to see of I could hear the bread rise. The sound mingled with the wind outside, and the odd noises of Hoelbrak's lodges, and the slow rustle of Freyja turning a page while she was reading.  
  
I feel old, sometimes.

# 32nd of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Nothing to write down today. Equipment was checked, I grew bored, walked around, got even more bored.  
Only thing of note was Jorund pass by; wolf-kin's still alive, at least, and doesn't look much worse for wear. He had stories to share, as usual, and we told the newer recruits about the Orrian tour of '28. Some good memories, some darker. I suppose it's strange to think back about the time I lugged Jorund halfway across the Cursed Shore, while he was bleeding like a stuck pig. I remember smelling coppery, and finding dried flakes of blood all over me for days after. I'd been to Orr before, of course, but it was such a... I don't know how to call it. Catharsis? Orr pushed me up against a lot of things, unleashing a torrent of feelings about who I am and what I wanted, before it finally all came to a head in Southsun. Another strange place that cost me my rank, and became a milestone for me finding my way again. Since then, I have done my best to reforge my life into something worthy of being remembered.

# 33rd of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Orders come through tomorrow, likely back into Kryta proper, to finish the job. We got some time on reserves in, trained the troops, and now they're pretty good to go again. Not that a few bandit remnants will be anything to write home about, but I suppose it's perfect for the folks to sharpen their claws against. I guess I'll hear on the morrow where exactly we're getting committed. Money's on Kessex, of course, or Brisban. Who knows?  
  
Anyway, today was essentially just the extension of all of us lazying about. Maeva was around, pushing people's buttons, and got Embersong very pissed off. To the point I had to tell her to keep her sword in her scabbard, and then had to tell them off for being a hothead. Tactician was out of line just as well, but the reaction wasn't appropriate either. It's a disappointment to see that sort of petty weakness drift to the fore, especially in someone who has the hallmarks for turning out into a decent soldiers. I can understand the standpoint though, and sometimes Maeva should really just shut her trap. What kind of an idiot insults a recruit to the point of drawn steel, and then gloats while a subaltern reins them in? Spirits, if it wouldn't have ruined wood-knead's career, I might almost have just let her throw a punch. But, of course, that's not proper officer conduct, made all the more visible by the stark fucking contrast it was cast in.  
Bah.  
  
That reminds me, I need to pull Forgewood and Crawley asides when I have an opportunity, as well as Iluoana. The former about their little pseudo-insubordination nonesense, in order to iron it flat, and resolve that for the benefit of both, and the latter concerning something Cheery reported to me earlier. Apparently the lass has wilted, which implies some rather hefty emotional trauma. At the very least, that deserves a counselling session with the unit commander. I'll have to see it done. Preferably sooner rather than later, too.

# 34th of Scion

Hoelbrak.  
  
So, the orders packet came through, and it seems that Operation Penitent, as it were, has come to a sudden halt. The Shining Blade and the Seraph really kicked into gear, and have been taking out the White Mantle and their cronies where-ever they were hiding. Seems the Queen took the attack on the city personal. Anyway, our deployment's been recalled, and we've all been given fourteen days of leave. Following a period of training at Marriner, that's almost like an extended holiday, hah! Not that I will complain. I've been walking around with a grin ever since I read the dispatches this morning.  
  
Of course, once the Warmaster gave a small speech, and sent the troops packing, I hightailed it straight to Hoelbrak, and swooped into Snow Leopard lodge, where I must've spent a good three hours waiting for Kristen to finish a communion session with Valharantha while I looked into ale mugs, and swapped stories with passing folks. So, aye, I'm a little tipsy. So, I thought, why not spend some time writing down the words in the journal, that way you won't have worry your mind about it later! A good idea, that. It's nice being home, Spirits, though I'm still a Bear in a cat's den. You'd think that I'd spend more time in Bear's Lodge, watching Ursel grump about in that bearskin of his, rather than Snow Leopard's lodge, but eh. I'll take my boy Reuzen out to the foothills tomorrow, and catch a big fish to offer up at Bear's shrine. That way I'm out of Kristen's hair while she goes about shaman-ing, and I get some time with my boy. Spirits, the temptation to rush off and find him right now is strong, but it is getting too late, and Kristen is almost done, I think. I'm going to pick her up, cover in kisses, and then carry her over to Hrothbeir's rest to watch the sun set down over the Mourn. And I'll tell her a hundred stories, about the foes we've fought, and the friends we've lost, until we both fall asleep, and wake up the next morning, covered in snow and cherry petals.

# 35th of Scion

Hoelbrak.  
  
What a good day. Woke up with the most pleasant of hangovers; the sort that mostly just is a dull ache behind the eyes, and is mingled with good memories of the day before. Brisk morning air cleared the head, as I went to get some rolls and fish roe for breakfast. A small new stall caught my eye too, sold fried Dolyak patties smothered in cheese, worked by a cheery man whose father is Rancher over in Snowden, closer to Gendarran. I bought four of them for Kristen, along with a jug of warm herbal tea. Of course, Kristen was already awake by the time I got back, and we ate overlooking the waking lodge. She's got a good appetite, the lass, for being a fair bit daintier than I am, baby or no. Good, let her eat for two or more. I'd say she'd look good with a little more fat on her, but I don't doubt she'll run it all off again once she's able to prowl the mountains again without having to worry about tripping over her own belly. Can't blame her.  
  
Anyway, I let sweet get to her shaman-work, and set out to find my boy out over Hrist's place. Same old over there, of course. Lad's doing good; really good. He's standing on his own now, and can even walk a little, though he still does prefer being carried. Can't blame him, even in the mild snow, he's still knee-deep. I've missed him, though. More than I had imagined. I realized when I came closer to the lodge, and I became more and more impatient to cross those last few meters. It was an active force of will that prevented me from just dashing over, and crashing through the door. Oh, but what a wonderful moment to see him again; my little Jotunling. I took the laddie out up on my shoulder, and set off to the Foothills. Through sheer luck, I ended up running into da as well. He was surprised to know I was back, and genuinely looked a little hurt at first. I think he thought I was trying to avoid him, or didn't think to come find him when I returned. I know things have been strained, but in that small moment, with my own son on my shoulder, I think I saw myself in him. So, I asked him if he'd like to join us, and he did.  
We spent a good chunk over the noon and the hours after out past the forests, near the rivers. We let Reuzen plod around in the shallow water, throwing around stones and rocks while we spoke and told stories. Da's an old man, and some of the things he's seen are astounding. Tales from when Knut was a young hero, and when Orr had only just risen. He spoke of his father, Hafnir Ettin-Arm, my grandsire, and the amazing feats of other epic heroes of that time. Not second-hand tales, but actual things he remembered, in astounding detail. I think he was born a hundred years too early, or he might have become one of the greatest explorer in the world. Unfortunately, just like I discovered myself, Tyria has been a difficult place to travel until the Pact built airships, and started killing the great evils that have kept ancient trade routes closed off. He seemed to be aware of this, of course, and remarked to me how I had probably seen more in five years of warring in the Pact than he had in thirty years of travel. Recounting Orr, and the Magus Falls, I will have to concede that perhaps I have seen more exotic places than he has. Still, the man's sheer experience is monolithic. Hah, he spoke of Ebonhawke as a peaceful and tranquil place, and when I asked him why he thought of it, he simply told me that the the first time he saw the Ascalonian walls, Kryta had a king, and the Charr and the humans were still in a war that would last more than twenty years. It's... well, he seems to be able to put things in a different perspective. He makes me feel young, which is not something that happens often anymore.  
But I digress; the afternoon passed quite well. Da and I made stakes from pine branches, and used them to spear fish in the upstream. Da kept the little laddie on his shoulders while he did, and we managed to get a good few river bass. We set apart half the catch as an offering for Bear, which we gave up at her shrine, before we gutted the rest, and roasted them over a fire and a tale. Near dusk, da made shadowplay with the flames, much to the amusement of laddie, 'till he grew tired and fell asleep.  
A fond memory of the day, I think. For all of us.  
  
After I brought the laddie back to his crib, I went out to spend out the rest of the evening with a mug of ale in Leopard's Shrine, until Kristen was done with her duties to Valharantha. I didn't expect much company, but Skaadi was there, as were several of the Chapter's recruits. Like always, there's a few lost sheep who have nowhere to really spend the time, so they come to Hoelbrak, spend an evening getting drunk, and enjoying the good hospitality of Knut Whitebear. Can't blame them. Wood-knead and Inkblot were there, as were Bovine and Iluoana. Embersong put a bottle of good whiskey forwards, with which we drank numerous hails to friend, family and fallen alike. Ilu also brought along a few gifts for the baby, though it seems she took a joke about bringing the baby a weapon very seriously. So, now I have two very strange but beautiful Sylvari-made weapons in my lap. One's an axe, and the other a sword. Both have hilts and furnishings made out of hardened vines, and the blades are an almost crystal-like hard material that looks like it's roughly cut blue glass, except far harder. They're beautiful things alright, though the intricacy of their craftsmanship is lost on me. The sword was apparently once wielded by a Warden captain of some description, and has a history attached to it. I have a mind to have a craftsman mount both of them on the carving Renn gave me a while back, of the Foothills. Together, they could make a good wall ornament. I'll see what Kristen thinks of it.  
Asides from that, the evening passed well. Bovine got drunk, and Skaadi was in a good enough mood. I like her; Kristen resembles her in a fair few ways. Spirits, if Kristen'll age like her ma, she's set to look good well until her triple digits. Not like me, of course. Everyone knows that I'm just slowly going to turn more and more into a rock as I grow old, until I'm so grey and cantankerous, they'll roll me into a river.  
  
... I really fancy another one of those yak patties, you know.

# 36th of Scion

Hoelbrak.  
  
A quiet day. After morning, I got a small brush and a small pouch of pigment from a trader, which I mixed with water, before I unleashed the laddie into the entire mixture. He looked like a happy little Grawl, daubed in paint. I'll admit I must've looked like I fell into a dyer's vat myself. No mind though, I warmed some water afterwards, and the stuff washed right off. I'll let the other folks wonder what to do with "purple snow" though.  
Brought the boy back relatively early after that, and went to call on Usha and the brewery. That was alright. Not as cordial as I expected, or as it used to be, but pleasant enough. We opened a keggie, and sat out the beer garden overlooking the Might and Main while we reminisced about the old times. They're good memories, but you could feel we've slowly drifted apart a little over everything that's been happening. It's a certain weariness of spirit, too. Usha felt tired. Not physically, but in general. It's far cry from her usual belligerence, though I suppose she's getting older now for a Charr. Maybe that's it? I guess norn of my and Kristen's age still see as many opportunities in life ahead of us as we see behind us. Strange. I should've asked her if that's what it was.  
  
Anyway, I got back to Leopard's Lodge late enough to find Kristen already done with her teachings. I'd saved a small bottle of the waterpaint, so I painted all manner of faces and critters on Kristen's bump, using the tiny brush to give form to the might hero living inside, waiting to be born. My brushwork is crude at best, but I like to think everything done with love has some merit to it. I think it's going to be a girl.

*At King's court then feasted,*  
*kindred Dwarf and northern guest.*  
*Hung above the warrior's table,*  
*hardwood handle and deftly bladed;*  
*Of deepest metal mined and delved,*  
*the dread Jotunskr, giant-slayer!*  
*Honey mead and mountain ale*  
*of hardest folk turned softer clay.*  
  
*Heroic Harthacnut fell boasting,*  
*heaving Jotunskr from its mount.*  
*'Swear I here for all to hear,*  
*may song and saga well recall!*  
*This blade here will fell my prey,*  
*bloodless and on virgin snow!'*  
*On then declared Harthacnut,*  
*his deeds and feats 'till dawn.*

# 37th of Scion

Hoelbrak.  
  
A day of little things. Got more of the Dolyak meatballs for breakfast. I'll admit, I made an excuse to go get some, and got a few more than we really would eat in the morning alone. They might be a new favourite of mine. There's just something good about the cheese and the seasoning of the meat that keeps coming back to you. Kristen doesn't complain, she's happy to have a hungry husband who likes to eat where he wakes in the morning. Not very civil, or clean for that matter, but intimate and amusing. Not sure if she'll forgive me another "cheesy balls in bed" joke, though.  
  
Left the Jotunling at home today, and instead went tracking with da. Following our fishing day out in the Foothills, seemed like a good idea to stretch the legs and pass the day. Besides, I think I am warming to idea of having da around now and again. Besides, there were some questions I wanted to ask him, that I've been going over in my head these past few days. One of those was what happened with ma and him, and why I never knew him. He told me a tale I'd heard before in some form or another before, about Hejja and what happened. It's strange to hear the story of how circumstances conspired to make my own existence possible, but there it was. He seemed sad to retell the story, but I persisted, even as we made headway through the snows. He told me how he was caught unawares in a bog, but managed to charm his way out of the situation and into what would become my mother's arms. How a moment's bond between them grew into something larger and deeper, until fate run afoul of them, and Hejja passed away. He told me how he could not bear to look at me without pain in his heart, and in a moment of despair, he brought me away, and tried to disappear forever. I can't say I understand what he did, but I think the only reason he came back now is that he must've regretted his choices then. I think that, at the very least, I can accept that what happened, happened, and that it is in neither of our hands to change the past. He is not a bad man, and I can feel the sorrow he carries around with him like a mantle. Perhaps it is merely age, but he moves as if everything is brittle, and may crumble under his touch if he is not careful.  
We didn't talk much for a while after, and spent our time tracking a large skelk through a stretch of moraine. It was only after da shot the critter, and we were walking back that we spoke again. This time, about Braham Eirsson, and Jormag. Da came home from his travels when he heard the fang was cracked, but it seems the reality of it is that his strength is waning, and he has no intent to continue north, whenever the call goes out. I told him that, of course, Kristen and myself would head north, likely along with most of the warriors and hunters who can. We agreed that when the times comes, he will stay and watch the children, while we go to reclaim our homeland. It's actually a relief. In my heart, I think I would greatly resent leaving behind my children to the kindness of the Elders and strangers. It does right that they stay with kin. Besides, I sense that in some way, he seeks to make amends. I can live with that.  
  
Anyway, it was a... well, special day. Makes one think. I told Kristen everything, of course, though she's stoic about the entire thing. Kristen's a pragmatist about such things, which I suppose has to do with her earlier years in the Order of Whispers. I think with my heart too much; it's what makes me so passionate about the things I care about, and feeds my inner fires. Still, sweet speaks sense, and she helped me wrestle though some thoughts and worries. She's a good companion to have, and she'll make an even greater shaman. I thank the Spirits that they allowed our paths to cross when they did.

# 38th of Scion

Hoelbrak.  
  
Hmm. Wasn't smart today. Took the boy out to the edge of the Mourn, with the idea of spending a few hours on relative quiet, just the laddie and me, while I thought some things over. I got some tufts of good Dolyak hair, along with a good sale on a few rabbit pelts, so I started work on a doll too. It's supposed to be a surprise, for Kristen and the baby. Few hours passed well enough, but I closed my eyes for a moment, and must've fallen asleep. Next thing I wake up because of yelling. Boy had wandered off onto the Mourn, and had nearly been crushed underfoot by a couple of younger folks playing at kegs. Gave me a jolt of panic like I've not felt a long time before. Laddie fell on the ice, and has a good skinned knee for it, but really I should've been awake. Kristen was angry enough when I told her, which resulted in a... well, not a fight, but it wasn't very pleasant. I don't know what got into the lass, but she was coming at me as if I did it on purpose. It was a stupid accident, one that I'll be careful not to repeat, but Spirits... It's not like I deliberately placed the lad in harm's way. And of course, my temper flared, so now I'm sleeping over in Bear's lodge. At least until tomorrow, when I'll go and make amends. Ursel had a good enough chuckle hearing that I'd been temporarily banished from my own bed, but eh.  
I'm annoyed and angry with myself because of it, truthfully, and I feel even more idiotic for my pride and temper getting the better of me. Most of all, I'm relieved my boy's not hurt too badly. If something serious had happened, because I fell asleep... Spirits, I'm not sure if I could have lived with myself after that. Oh, and Raven help me when Hrist hears that I almost got the boy stomped on because I let my guard down. Bear, spear me of the righteous fury of mothers, and I promise I will learn, and do better when next I am tested.  
  
So, aye. Wife's upset, probably rightly so. Son's got a skinned knee, and I'm sat here with an untouched mug of ale, and a half-finished Dolyak dolly, wondering how I'm going to apologize.  
I preferred the frontline, to be honest.

# 39th of Scion

Hoelbrak.  
  
Well, I'm not going to live down nodding off anytime soon. Hrist and Hildr both showed up shortly after noon to collectively rake me over the coals for letting my guard down, and letting the lad plod around unattended. I thought Kristen was being harsh, but boy, the two lasses would not let off until I had apologized in every manner I could think off at the time. They weren't even openly confrontational, that'd be easier, they're just sitting there making disparaging remarks and sniping at me. You'd think they'd remember he's my son too.  
Truth be told, I didn't sleep too well. I've never felt guilty for falling asleep before, and my head just kept on grinding about what could've gone wrong. Norn children are made of stern enough stuff, but the lad's only a year old. In a few years he'll be old enough to roam around unattended, but... until then, I should be more careful. He could've hurt himself so easy, fallen off of something, or run afoul of one of the many animals that the shamans keep around the lodges. Spirits.  
  
Kristen was being snappy too, though she seems to have softened a little overnight. We had folks from the Chapter visit me at Bear Lodge, and Kristen joined us eventually. She couldn't resist the barbs, but I decided not to buck the bit too much. If her being a bit cranky for an evening is what I have to endure as penance, it's a small enough price to pay. Embersong visited, after a hunt with Saana. She brought over some gifts for me and the baby; a large snow bear's skin, as well as a bear paw for the little one. The skin's apparently for me telling her to stand down with Maeva. I suppose I'm pleased to hear she at least sees it as a good thing, and has taken my words on the matter to heart. Seleea was present too, with a new eyepiece to replace her lost eye. The Asura got horrendously drunk real fast, and KO'd herself pretty early. Leonard and Iluoana were also there, so overall it was a fairly pleasing evening. Kristen seemed to enjoy herself well enough. She likes making joys at my expense, much to the amusement of the troops. I don't mind, her jokes are all made with a wink and knowing smirk, because I know she loves me enough to feel comfortable to joke about even out intimate things. Wouldn't be married otherwise.  
Anyway, the company and the jokes mollified the lass a little, and I think working the knots out of her shoulders and legs before bed helped a lot too. I'm not too happy to have been put through some sort of 'punishment' by the women for what happened, but I suppose I can understand why they're upset. I love my boy just as much as they do.  
But, I suppose hanging onto that tiny nugget of irritation is petulant and pointless. I'll do what I always tell the troops; do better.  
  
Maybe I'll take Kristen and the boy out to Lion's Arch again, for a day. Something nice. Or the hot springs. I'll see.  
  
Oh, small sidenote. I had some ideas pop into my head while we were talking. One's that if Braham has Destiny's Edge to go north with him, maybe I should forge my own guild, for whenever we're called north. It's something I want to talk to Kristen about. With da saying he'll stay here to watch the children... well, there's nothing stopping both of us, when the time comes.  
An other thing is that I'm wealthy. Very wealthy, actually, by norn standards, considering I have a considerable sum of silvers ascribed to my name over at the Vigil. I was reminded of old Kolijn and the trade here though conversation. I should talk to Usha about making some investments for the future. I don't need coin now, but I suspect it will become handy in the future when we go north, and I will want to build the lodge. I intent to call on friends and allies to help me raise it by dint of reputation, but I will need coin to buy ale, food and perhaps even building materials. Since I don't need the coin now, I might as well go into trade with it.  
  
Anyway, all of those are merely words, and ideas. Right now, however, I'm going to commit some deeds with Kristen, before she falls asleep without me. I have a feeling that'll help with the 'making amends' thing too.

# 40th of Scion

Hoelbrak, still.  
  
Got post in today. At first, I thought the large keg I ordered at the monastery had arrived early, but I was pleasantly surprised to see it was a package from the Warmaster. It's a, uh... I think they call it a mobile? It's one of those things you hang over the crib, to ward off bad dreams, and keep the little one entertained. It has depictions of all the major and minor Spirits, which was a nice detail. Which, as it stands, reminds me that the little one is now due any day. With this extra stretch of leave, at least I can be reasonably sure I'll be here for that, which is a weight off of my chest. Three seasons is a long bloody time; hah, I can imagine Kristen's even wearier of the effort, she's been carrying the little one around all this time. I was merely off fighting dragons. It's a strange feeling, trying to get into your head you're only days away from holding another part of you in your own two hands. To think that in twenty years from now, an unborn son or daughter of mine will be scaling mountains, drinking ale, throwing kegs, and saving worlds along with their siblings. Freyja still amazes me everyday with what she's become.  
  
That reminds me, I wrote Freyj earlier, because I'm taking Kristen and Reuzen to Lion's Arch tomorrow. I'm hoping she can come down the Priory with Aska, so we can make it a family outing. Might drop by Lionhead's fighting ring too, see how things are going there. Hey, maybe we'll catch a proper fight while we're there, too.  
I've also decided, off of the back of yesterday's ruminations, that founding a guild like Braham has is a good idea. Kristen's agreed with me on the notion well enough; we're not all young folks with nothing to lose, so we have to look out for each other more. If anything, it'd be a hunting pack aiming to bring down the single greatest enemy our people has ever faced; Jormag. Besides, if the Vigil has taught me anything, it's that standing together in the face of such foes is not only prudent, but necessary. Alone, we'll fall. Together, we will make the mountains themselves tremble under our footfalls.  
  
I also spoke to Usha about making investments with my coin, and that seems to be a reasonably simple concept. She was surprised I'd taken an interest with financial matters at all, said I was much too honest for that sort of thing. Not sure if that's an insult or not, in truth, but I persisted. Seems the first thing I should do is consider what I think will make good coin for me. Usha's more than happy to manage the entire affair, since she has the contact with Kolijn and many of the traders as part of her brewery work. I can imagine her old Spook roots play into that as well, though I was polite enough not to mention such. Honestly, my first impulse considering everything that's been going on was weaponsmithing. With Braham going north, I'd think blades are in high demand. But then, if we ever go to reclaim the old homelands, it's not sword they'll want as much as it will be woodaxes, mining picks and lumber for lodges. So I think I might have Usha put some of those silver coins to use, and put them into tools and good timber for the future. If the worst comes to worst, and it's a wasted effort, I'll have the tools and the wood for my own use anyway. I just need to get some writ over at the Vigil post that allows Usha to collect the coin she needs for it. Seems straightforwards enough, so I'll do that tomorrow, before we pass the Asura gate.  
  
Also finished the Dolyak dolly. It looks a little derpy, which I think just makes it better. I'm keeping it hidden from Kristen until the baby's born. She wasn't so mad today.

# 41st of Scion

Hoelbrak.  
  
I am writing this, because writing is keeping me calm. It's all part of my meditation these days. A moment of deep reflection on the day, and what the future will bring. But, we'll get to that later.  
I am writing this, because it is keeping me calm. A bit like a mantra. Let's start with the day's account.  
  
Woke early enough, and had breakfast out in the lower lodge. I told Valharantha yesterday that I was taking Kristen away today, and she was gracious enough not to make an issue. Not that I would've allowed her, I'm only on leave once in a blue moon, it stands to reason I get to spend some time with my family. Even Snow Leopard can't lay claim on sweet every single day.  
Anyway, we went to get Reuzen from Hrist. Sjofn was there too, though thankfully they've seemed to simmered a down a bit since the days before. Hrist looked pensive, but she wasn't forthcoming with what was on her mind. I think maybe Raven gave her a dream she's trying to work through. No matter. I took the laddie on on my shoulders, and we passed through the Lion's Arch gate into the warmer winds of Lion's Arch. It's still a small shock to smell the sudden smell of brine, and the clear skies. It makes a change from the perennial snows that fall over Hoelbrak throughout the year.  
  
We spent a good part of the morning below the Deverol, opposite from Marriner. We've been there before. The water around there is shallow enough for us to wade around, and the laddie to splash around in without too much issue, and the overhanging rock saves us the worst of Scion's sun. Even so, I bought a bottle of oil, and made sure we were all properly tended too. Wouldn't do for the boy to get a skin-burn. He's not yet used to snow glare like Kristen. Not too worried for myself. I look like a seared steak, next to Kristen, and she's fairly well adapted for norn standards.  
Freyja and Aska joined us, along with Grace. It was nice to see everyone together. Aska's grown again. She's at that age. Soon she'll be taller than Grace is, and in a few short years, she'll be old enough to start forging the first elements of her own legend. She'll do her mother proud, I'm sure.  
I left the women and the children to talk, and swam all the way out to Phoenix Roost. There were a few ships in the bay, but no wind. Bad sailing weather. An airship passed overhead into the aerodrome too, but it was running under engines, rather than riding the airwaves. I spent a few long minutes floating on my back, watching it glide into it's docking berth.  
  
We passed over to Lionhead's ring around the after noon, and had a skelk and crab dish over there. She's set up pretty decently, and we were there before she was opening up for the day. Leif and Aska were off almost immediately, along with the boy. Not too much of an issue, Lionhead's perch has a good enough view on the beachfront which meant they were never out of sight. I could've watched the children play for hours.  
Lionhead only had a single brawl planned for the day, which meant we had most of the afternoon to ourselves. I took the time to explain my ideas for the guild to the folks, which was interesting. Freyja, Grace and Kristen all were in favour, and we decided to found it there and then. So, we all pledged that when the time comes, as the prophecy has foretold, we will all go north together. We pledged to slay Jormag, and reclaim the old Norrheart domains for our people and our children. So, we have become what I hope are the first of the Sworn Companions. Even Grace, though she is human, was adamant that where Freyj went, she would go too. I wasn't expecting any non-norn to understand the sentiment, but I wasn't going to stop her from making the commitment if she really wanted to do so. Lionhead wished us good luck, but abstained, for reasons I can understand. She's not mountain-born, and her leg would only mean she would fall behind. I will go and call upon my friends and allies soon after, and see how many of them will join me. We toasted richly to our pledges, and to the future. All of us have children, true-blooded or not, and we do it all for them.  
  
The evening ambushed us, and we watched a decent fighting act between a horned Charr and a Sylvari mesmer, which was deeply entertaining. Lionhead took off to manage the fight, and we were joined by a number of patrons, a few which seemed to be regulars. She's doing well for herself, and I think she pulls of the entire ex-soldier act to great success. Unfortunately, I have no idea how the fight ended, because Kristen suddenly folded in two. At first I thought she'd fallen off her chair, which made my heart skip a beat, but no. Our little baby's coming. This was... what, maybe a small hour ago? I yelled at Freyja to get the children, before I picked sweet up, and ran all the way over to the gate plaza. I almost ran straight over the gate operator in my haste to get through, before I carried the lass down the slope on the other side, and into Snow Leopard's Lodge. I'm not even sure what drove me there; I don't think I should've gone through the gate, but there was something primal in me that wanted to bring her here. Where she's protected by the Spirits. She's in labour now. Freyja arrived a few minutes ago, with Grace, Aska and Reuzen in tow. Hrist was so kind as to come and collect the boy, because I couldn't tear myself away from here. Kristen's upstairs now. I can hear her, now and again. It's a familiar sound, and I'd lie if I said I'm not afraid. I trust in the Spirits to keep them both save, sweet and the baby. I'm writing this, because it's the only thing I know that's keeping me calm. I am euphoric and terrified at the same time. Valharantha sent me downstairs, hah, because she said I'm making Kristen nervous with my fretting and pacing. She's right, though. This is helping. I'm writing this because it is keeping me calm.  
I see Usha approaching, with a grin from horn to horn, and a bottle of her best Wyrmsblood.  
It's going to be a very long night.  
  
I think it's going to be a girl.

# 42nd of Scion

Hoelbrak.  
  
I've been recalled.  
This... is making me tremendously angry.  
On this day, of all days. A day when I want to be happy. A day that does not belong to me. And that is only making me angrier.  
It is taking me. A conscious effort. To remain calm.  
The writing helps. I am writing this, because it helps me to remain calm.  
  
In the morning, shortly after dawn, after one of the longest nights ever, Kristen brought our baby into this world. A beautiful baby girl. Hejja Tzahrsdottir.  
Just hearing that sound. She's was crumpled and pink, like a little raisin, but wailing to let to world know she was alive. A promise. Kristen's resting. I imagine it must've been exhausting. She hasn't yet let go of little Hejja since they gave the lass to her. I'm not much better. I am awake because of sheer effort of will. I don't want this day to pass, because I know that I must leave tomorrow. I will squeeze every second out of every minute. Recalled. On this day of days. On this one day, out of three seasons. The one day that shouldn't belong to anyone by Kristen, Hejja and me. Oh, woe whatever has caused the mighty Vigil to recall their soldiers from well-earned leave. They will pay with their blood for the moments they are about to steal from me.  
  
Spirits. The 42nd of Scion, 1330 as the Krytans count their years. The birth of my second daughter, through my wife Kristen Dragonsbane, Hejja Tzahrsdottir. She came into this world with the dawn.  
In this moment, I love them both more than anything else in this entire world, and the Mists around it.  
And for them, as well as for my son Reuzen, and my daughter Freyja and her daughter, Aska, I will answer this call to arms. It is the promise I made to them: that I will fight, for them to be free.  
However much it pains me to leave everything I love behind, again and again.

# 43rd of Scion

Fort Marriner.  
  
I don't even know how to describe this anymore. First of all, the reason they recalled us is... It's not an Elder Dragon rising, but it might as well be. We're under specific orders not to divulge any information, including writing anything down, but... Spirits alive, it's not something anyone was inspecting. They recalled us, and they had a good reason, damn them. I wish they didn't. I wish that world was a quiet, silent place.  
  
I told Kristen this morning. She understood, but I could see the disappointment in her eyes. It is a soul-crushing feeling. I teetered on the edge of the gate, as I always do, wondering if perhaps this time I could really convince myself that staying home is good enough. That two Elder Dragons is good enough. But it isn't. It never is. And now, with this... new threat. There are a million questions, and no answers. I am worried that I won't come home this time. The place they're sending us... well, it's the furthest I've ever been. There will not be many places left for me to in Tyria, if I come back. I can't write about it. Not yet. We're departing soon, in the next few days. Then it won't matter what I write anymore.  
  
I hurt my hand earlier. I've been so angry all this time, it's been bubbling close to the surface. I wear my anger like a coat of flames. I thought, perhaps, letting some of it out would help. So I cracked a sheaf off a rock with my bare fist. The magic took the brunt of it, but the surge is making my fingers ache. As if the bones are on fire. It's throbbing, and I keep cracking the bones in my hand to make it go away, even briefly. It's not as bad as before, but it is making me irritable. I'm so angry I'm here. I'm angry at this enemy I can't even name. I'm angry I'm not holding my daughter. I'm angry that I see the faces of the soldiers around me, and resent them from existing. As if the Vigil disappearing would somehow make things better. I know it won't, but I don't have anything else to direct my anger at.  
I'm surprised there isn't more anger. If I was a human, I'd be angry right now.  
  
I don't want to be here.  
I don't want to go where we're going.

# 44th of Scion

Fort Marriner.  
  
It's slowly sinking in; this is all happening. It's not a dream, or some trick of the mind. In a few days, we're going to be flung to the furthest corner of the continent, in pursuit of... well... I can't write it down yet, but I'm not sure I even believe it. Most folks wouldn't. The new recruit who arrived almost didn't.  
And for all of that, the thing I struggle hardest with is knowing I have another, beautiful, daughter. Hejja. My mother's name. You know, I wish I had seen da before I left. I would've wanted to be the one that told him it was a girl. I wonder if I would've seen something of myself in him, at that moment. I hope he's there, now, with Kristen. Maybe he wasn't such a good father to me, but he can start again, and see if he'll be a better grandfather. I'd like that.  
I think of Kristen, in Hoelbrak, with our little girl in her arms. I hope she thinks of me, and doesn't resent my absence. She knows I do what I must for them. I just wonder if she finally understands why it is so hard for me to leave home now. I'm still angry, but... it's not as harsh anymore. It's slowly making place for a deep sense of resignation. Another tour. A long tour, probably, before I can go home. How much they both have changed? I am afraid I won't come back. I am even more afraid that when I do come back, my little girl will have grown up, and all she will see is the stranger that is her father.  
I shouldn't dwell on it. Some must fight. Some must fight.  
  
I spoke to Shatteredshield. He went and made good on his pledge to avenge the death of his friend. I feel slightly cheated he didn't think to tell me beforehand, but what done is done. He seems pleased. The way he tells it, I'm not sure if he did the right thing, but I have a feeling that at least he didn't do the wrong thing either. He badly crippled one, but let him live in shame and humiliation, rather than ending it cleanly. One's dead. The other recanted, and she yet lives, forgiven. A pity I wasn't a part of that tale, but then I suppose I was too busy in Hoelbrak.  
  
You know, it's funny. I was supposed to go on leave tomorrow. The baby would've been too early, and I'd have missed it. My ale keg will arrive soon, and they'll celebrate it all without me. Bah.  
I suppose I will lose myself in my work. There's still much that needs to be done, and as always, time is my greatest enemy.

# 45th of Scion

Fort Marriner.  
  
Well, I spent most of the day focused on my duties. Was able to draft and assemble our deployment ordnance package. Since I have virtually no idea what we're up against, I had to make some very important assumptions. I've decided that we're not likely to run into major sapping targets, with the note that setting of explosions in a chain of- well, the specific location we're going might not react well on a seismic level to the kind of force needed for major sapping work. Instead, I've opted to bring a field mortar with enough munitions for several deployments. I'm hoping we don't need the firepower, but who knows. I also had two of our storm boats dredged from the armoury, as well as a batch of flotation canisters. No point in drowning.  
Of course, drafting the list took only a small hour, but actually going to the main depot in the Aerodrome and getting the physical allocations done took most of the day. But, in the end, I have a heavy-duty strongbox large enough for an Asura to stand in packed to the brim with equipment. I can still lift, but it's primarily meant to be lugged around by Golem or a supply yak. Still, secured, locked and stamped with the relevant deployment notes. Now it's out of my hands and up to the folks at supply to make sure it's all handled and loaded.  
You know, it says something that we can be recalled and deployed to the place we're going in the space of... what, three days? Four, if you stretch it? Not many armies that can still do that. But we can.  
  
Evening was a bit calmer. The usual low-key chatter with the troops. We're getting new recruits in waves now. I assume they're bulking us out again before they throw us into the deep end. Doubt some of them will last very long, but we'll see. I hope the strain make them bow out before the enemies kills them. I'll try not to let that happen.  
  
I think of home all the time. I wonder how Kristen is, and if she's taking good care of our little girl. I wonder if Reuzen understand he has a half-sister, and what that will mean for the both of them. They'll grow up to be two sides of the same coin. I wonder where Freyja'll be. Most of all, I wonder when I'll be back home, and what tales I'll tell them. I wonder if I'll read back through my writings here, and laugh at something I don't know has happened yet.

# 46th of Scion

Fort Trinity.  
  
We deployed out over to Trinity, before we're getting an airlift all the way west. Since we're now no longer in Lion's Arch, operational risk is reduced a fair degree. Landing target's the actual Ring of Fire isles, if you can believe it. That's not the most surprising, though. We got a lot of intelligence in after the end of the last operation. The Shining Blade took the White Mantle apart, and uncovered some fairly important, and troubling pieces of information. A while back, the great bloodstone of legend in the Maguuma was detonated. This is likely what's been causing a lot of these magical anomalies and instabilities to appear out of nowhere. For a while, the running intelligence was that the resultant energy release was used by an actual Mursaat called Lazarus the Dire to manifest itself. This Mursaat then spurred the remnants of the White Mantle to uncover themselves, and attack the Reach. This is about when we deployed into Lake Doric. The entire attack seemed to have achieved little of note, especially now that "Confessor" Caudecus has been executed. However, this Lazarus was still reportedly at large. Except, it turned out, that this creature wasn't a Mursaat at all. It was merely masquerading as one, and using the White Mantle as pawns in some form of power play. We're still not sure why, but the creature's real identity is unsettling to say the least: Balthazar, the human god of war and fire. For whatever reason, War itself has returned to Tyria. Now, under regular circumstances I imagine this would be a cause for celebration for many humans. Except that his return, and his actions since are now in the process is causing the Elder Dragons to stir. We have reports of Jormag and Primordius becoming ever more active. Whatever that means, Balthazar must be checked before he awakens them both fully, or at least he must be convinced to stay his hand until we are prepared for the coming storm. We norn have neen readying for a strike against Jormag, but Primordius too? I'm not sure we can fight a war on two fronts.  
  
So, that's our objective. We're going to the Ring of Fire, chasing down a returned god. We don't seem to know what we're supposed to do once we find him, but I suspect he's not one to come easily. Of all the things to call me back from home, it had to be a god. A god! Spirits, I can only hope his intentions are peaceful in the end, regardless of how oxymoronic a peaceful god of war sounds. I hope that, at least, it'll make for a good tale. When Hejja's older, we can tell her that the day after she was born, her father left off to wage war against a god. Hah! Who knows, perhaps I'll slay him and take his place, like the legend of Nightfall, and the Elonian Kormir.  
On second thought, I think I'd make a poor war god. Best leave that to people who actually enjoy the waging of it. Or, perhaps, resenting war is exactly what would make one a good war god? A shaman's conundrum, that.  
  
Either case, we are here, in Fort Trinity. There's an airship docked and taking up supplies for our departure. It's an old friend, actually. The *Willhem's Vengeance*, the same vessel we worked on for so long in the Dustbowl. She's been fully overhauled, and recommissioned. It's... nice, I think. Vindication for long hours spent hammering bent plating back into form, or being elbow-deep in the engines, trying to find a fuel leak along with Seleea. It's good to see her fly again. She's no *Ramming Speed!*, but she'll do just as well.  
  
You know, being here really puts everything into perspective. Aye, I'm still angry at being recalled, but I've accepted the fact for what it is. There is a new threat looming overhead, and we're being flung to the far side of the world again. Considering everything, I do want to be here. When the world is made a little safer again, then I'll go back home, and I'll drink heartily to my little girl's health. Maeva made a small silver locket for her, too. She gave it to me when I announced the news to the other officers. It's a pretty little thing, for when she grows older.  
I found the Dolyak doll I was going to give to Hejja and Kristen, still stuffed in my pack. I simply forgot, when the time came, too swept away by everything that was happening. I sat down with it in my hands, and when I closed my eyes, I could almost imagine holding Hejja in my hands. Almost. Spirits, I hope we find Balthazar fast.  
  
Also took the time to speak to Inkblot and Wood-knead about joining the Companions when the time came. Saana didn't need any convincing, she simply said "yes" the second she understood what I was asking her. Emberong's a little more sceptical. She was raised away from Hoelbrak, and the tale of Asgeir and Jormag's Fang isn't as enmeshed in her blood as it is with most of us. She wants to wait it out, and see. She's free to doubt. Her lack of faith in our cause and the strength of our arms disappoints me more than I let on, but I can understand her concerns. Still, I won't be dissuaded. I will send letters to old friends and allies before we ship out, calling them to at least consider the cause. I'm not sure if many will see the use of what we've built, but then uniting any group of norn to a common purpose was never going to be easy. I just hope there's still time. With Destiny's Edge in the north with Braham, and the reports of Jormag awakening due to our rogue little god, the call to war could come soon. Very soon.  
I suspect that if we don't manage to stop Balthazar in whatever he is doing, the next time I'm home, Hoelbrak will be on a war footing.

# 47th of Scion

Fort Trinity.  
  
The last day before depart. I penned some letters during the day, to be sent back home whenever the postal block is lifted. I doubt we'll be getting mail out in the Fire Islands chains.  
I'm more than a little curious and apprehensive about seeing our area of operations. I don't expect it to be easy. The last time I even heard about those islands was in the human tales. You know, I considered sailing there, rather than to the mouth of the Elon. Lucky I didn't, there's a lot more open water to the west of Orr. If we'd been wrecked there, instead of the Steamspur Bay, I would have died. It was a fool's errand anyway. I fancied myself to be akin to Romke, or my father. Or at least, the exaggerated tales of my father. In reality, he's much too pragmatic to even attempt something as foolish as sailing a skipper across the Sea of Sorrows in the hopes of reaching the Crystal Desert. Spirits, I'm not even sure what I was planning to do afterwards. Return home with the findings, and hope to scramble an expedition together large enough to cross south through the Desolation?  
Spirits. Looking back, it really feels like thinking of someone else's life. Have I really changed that much?  
  
Anyway. I think my celebratory keg must have arrived in Hoelbrak by now. I hope Kristen's pleasantly surprised. Hah, she can even drink some of it, now Hejja's out and about in the world. Doesn't help that I'm thirsty. A nice flagon of good ale would go a long way, but I only have one ration ticket left, and I'd rather save it. Bah. Drinking this much water isn't good for a norn. Maybe it's the constant sobriety that's getting to me. I've only been drunk on leave twice! Twice!  
  
You know, I think I might just be nervous, and it's making me ramble. I can't wait to depart. That'll finally release all this tension. Let's see this dreaded Ring of Fire, where War is hiding from us.

# 48th of Scion

The Ring of Fire islands, near what's being called Ember Bay.  
  
We departed earlier today, airlifted on the *Willhem's Vengeance*, and off due west. It was a lengthy but mostly uneventful night, until we were on the final approach. Systems picked up something on the ground, so Blade was combat-dropped on an outcropping below a sizeable volcano. It becomes clear why we brought the storm boats though... there's barely even ground. From what we could see, these islands are just clusters of active volcanoes grouped together. The strangest thing is also that the volcanoes look man-made. They're fashioned into giant skulls, streams of magma dripping from their open jaws and eyes. That's not the only thing, the rock formations seem as if they're stacked up from giant stone slabs, like one would make a house with playing cards. Except the scale is... I wonder what primordial force shaped these mountains to resemble skulls. Maybe the Murstaat, to ward away curious visitors from coming too close?  
Anyway, we're not the first people here, it turns out. The signal we detected on approach turns out to be an Asura gate with a work team, on location here for whatever reason. Apparently the gate leads directly back to Rata Novus, which is strange. They're not giving us access to it, but the folks had all their paperwork in order. It's difficult to comprehend why an Asuran Krewe would be on location with one of the most expensive transportation systems in the world hooked up to Rata Novus of all places, but apparently they're on our side. They're here monitoring dragon corruption, apparently, linked to some specialist early warning research group in Rata Novus. They've been responsible for some of our intelligence reports, so they're on our side. Just, you know. Asura will be Asura.  
  
No sign of an rogue war gods, though. Scouts are out and about, so we're still waiting for the real reports to come in. Asides from the obvious natural hazard, the place seems relatively devoid of anything remotely hostile at first glance. that was before, of course, we spotted a large destroyer harpy moving up above us, nearer to the volcano's mouth. It was much too far for us to be concerned about an actual threat, but it's still troublesome. Maybe they bubble up from the heart of the world, and congregate around the volcanoes? If that's the case, these islands will be swarming with them.  
  
Also, the heat. The damned heat. It's not even the sun, it's just the constant, blistering heat. The streams of lava pour into the water, bubbling it into steam, and the stone itself is radiating an intense heat that is only just bearable. I have two cooling crystals wrapped in cloth tucked under my arms just to provide a little relief. That, and water. A lot of water. I feel sorry for the folks keeping the kegs filled. I'd dip down into the water below, but I don't think that's healthy.  
Spirits, I hope we don't stay here long. It's like being in a furnace.  
  
Just wait until I tell Kristen and da about this. An island of skull-volcanoes. You'd think we entered into the Realm of Torment or something. Still, if Balthazar is hiding out here, he picked a hell of a stage to play hide and seek.

# 49th of Scion

Ember Bay, Infernal Cape. Yes that's we're calling it now.  
  
So, reports came in from yesterday's scouting. One, the destroyer sightings were confirmed. And even if they weren't before, today's operations meant I saw them up close and personal. I'll get to to that in a bit. Second report noted that the shipwreck we saw was a cargo barge. Not just any either, but a barge manned by a carnival crew, back from the Maguuma jungle transporting exotic critters for their show. They wrecked here about a year ago, and somehow built a primitive society in the wreckage. They also seem to have gone almost completely loony, since they refuse any offer to get them out of here. They've been subsisting on an island outcropping that's riddled with basalt formations, but also has a fresh water source, and plant life. From the report, it also seems to be plagued with all manner of saurian life. I suspect some of the barge's cargo escaped, and prospered, rather than dying off. Either that, or these saurian critters are natives to these islands as much as they are to the Maguuma. I doubt that's the case, but then, there are giant skulls carved in the mountains here.  
  
We deployed to those carnival grounds well enough, following up on those scout reports. First, I took Blade out to lock blades with the destroyers. They were present in fairly large numbers along an ashen beach. We attempted to cull them, but they seem to dredge themselves up from the ground itself. They're not like any other destroyer I've ever seen either. They're green, for one, and they stink of rot. Up close, they seem infested with wild growths, not unlike vine tendrils. We managed to secure another specimen for Occult to take apart, but whatever's causing these to be so... altered, it's probably bad. In all the years we've been fighting, I don't think we've ever seen a dragon minion *evolve* like that, with the exception of the Mordrem. If our intelligence is on point, and it's Balthazar causing this, we need to stop him, and quick. That being said, there's no trace anywhere that even suggests his involvement. At this point, I'm growing rather more sceptical about his involvement at all. Wouldn't be the first time our intelligence was off the mark.  
  
Anyway, asides from a run in with the destroyers, we also saw the circus' special critter. They keep it in a cave north-west of their camp, and feed it what I suspect is a magical fruit of sorts. It's a vast behemoth, easily four times the size of a mature minotaur bull. It's got thick orange fur, and a weird triangular head, with oversized forearms. The caretaker called it a slothasaur. I've never seen anything quite like it. If this is what the carnival people were shipping back home, they were right about the notion that no-one in central Tyria's ever seen anything like it. We could probably arrange for them to be evacuated proper; I wonder if they'd agree to come if we take their slothasaur with them? It's hard to say.  
Either case, there seems to be plenty of surprises on these islands. They're not nearly as desolate as I thought they were, but they're lethal enough. Heat doesn't endear them to me either, but I have many stories to tell when I get back, at least.  
  
It's a pity I couldn't get a trophy or something. Or bring Kristen along, like Southsun. It's one of those Tarir stories. Folks won't call me a liar to my face, but they'll ask themselves the question if I speak truth or not, when I get home. Ah well, maybe we'll find something. They're big islands, and we've only uncovered a tiny little section so far.  
Not sure what else we're expecting to find.

# 50th of Scion

Infernal Cape.  
  
So, follow up from yesterday. While we were out fighting destroyers, and being amazed by the sloth-critter, Lance ran into some magical anomalies, once of which zapped Calder and briefly turned him into a demigod. They managed to cure that, at least, but not without causing a huge magical flare, and putting the camp on alert. That was yesterday.  
  
Today, we had something far stranger. It seems these islands hold dozens of secrets, and are far from the barren wasteland everyone thought they were. At the end of yesterday's operation, we spotted some strange rock formations further north, which we sent off to investigate today.  
Turns out it was a bloody Mursaat ruin, with the defenses still running active. We landed directly in the face of several jade constructs and these weird defensive obelisks that seemed to spit around incredibly potent magic. Spectral agony. It's the same searing pain and bone-deep ache we encountered when we fought the constructs fielded by the White Mantle. It put the Warmaster out of action, and forced me to take command.  
The place itself was impressive enough. A vast citadel built into the mountains, and dotted with onyx spires that reached for the sky like jagged teeth. The entire thing crowned a pool of lava, which flowed down from the volcano whose flank the entire fortress hugged. Inside was a monster of a jade construct, billowing fire at us when we got too close, but unable or unwilling to dredge itself out of its fiery realm. So, we moved around it, and fought our way to the top, along narrow pathways and ledges, only to find the entry to whatever the place was guarded sealed with a strange triangular symbol, embossed with an eye.  
We couldn't blow through it, not with what we were carrying with us at the time, so we could only take some datamagic readings, and even that required us to pull back, regroup and attack a second time.  
Spirits, one of the constructs flung me off of a ledge. It's only because I managed to slither down one of those onyx spikes that I didn't break several bones. Instead, if I have a bruise on my back, as if the after-throb of the spectral agony and the heat weren't enough to make life uncomfortable.  
Anyway, we got those scans and pulled out.  
  
Thinking of ancient legends, I have a strong feeling that this old fort might have been the Onyx Gate, the old Mursaat citadel that was said to be the last bastion between the heroes that came to fulfill the Flameseeker Prophecies, and the Door of Komalie. I wish Freyja was here for this. She'd have known the facts, rather than the mere stories and rumours I heard. Still, it was an impressive sight. I wonder now, if Balthazar disguised himself as the Mursaat Lazarus the Dire, would he shelter in the ruined fortresses of Mursaat too? I'm hoping we find out. So far, it's been our best lead regarding anything related to this fabled god of war. If he's chosen the Mursaat ruins to hole up in, he's chosen well. We won't be able to dislodge him easily.  
  
Spirits, I should've gotten something, a trophy, or a memento. Bah.  
Well, now we wait for the Warmaster to wake up, or the Tactician to make a command-level decision. Until then, Occult will be doing their best to ascertain if there's any reason for us to go back to the Mursaat citadel. If not, we'll continue searching. At the very least, maybe we've found something for the Priory to study. Besides, I can't wait to tell da and Kristen I set foot in the ruins of the Onyx Gate, heh. I saw some outcroppings of what I thought was petrified wood along the shores of the cape here. I might fashion my own memento.

# 51st of Scion

Infernal Cape.  
  
Warmaster's still out of it due to the spectral agony. Steady trickle of Occult reports, though, so at least we'll be able to tell her something when she wakes up. Calder seems fairly certain that the fortress from yesterday isn't hiding a rogue god, which I'm both relieved and disappointed by. I can still feel the pain in my limbs from the magic, so the prospect of not having to storm it again is nice. On the other hand, I can't help but feel some frustration at out continued lack of even the tiniest trace of this supposed god we're chasing. Secretly, I was hoping the solution would be as simple as cracking open the ancient Mursaat fortress, finding Balthazar, somehow convincing him to stop whatever he's even doing, and then getting back on the bloody airship and going home to enjoy the leave I was bloody well promised.  
Ugh. The heat's getting to me.  
  
Claridge and a recruit called Mai got the idea of making some sort of pool by conjuring a huge bowl made out of ice, and filling it with water. Not sure why they didn't just wade in the water as normal, or dug out a pit in the ground and filled that up, but at least it was very refreshing. A little overkill, though. I'm not so keen on people throwing around spells next to this volcano. It's bad enough to hear the local Asura constantly gibbering about seismic activity and eruption percentages. I have no doubt that if something really does go wrong, we can either evacuate though the Asura gate, or do a controlled evacuation using the storm boats and the airship. Still, it feels like I'm sleeping on top of a giant bomb.  
  
This entire place is... strange. I keep looking up at the giant skulls that loom over us, wondering why they're there. The islands have all just been a mess. A shipwrecked carnival with a magically mutated monster? A Mursaat fortress? And we've found all these things while chasing a rogue god. A god! Spirits. But, I can't deny what I saw. Of everything we've seen so far, those green-tinted destroyers are what worries me the most of all. Is this truly Balthazar's doing? What does that mean for Jormag? Are the Icebrood also changing? Spirits, if Braham calls everyone north tomorrow, I wouldn't even know how to get back to the mainland, let alone to the northern Shiverpeaks.  
I hope Kristen is taking good care of the children.

# 52nd of Scion

Infernal Cape.  
  
Still nothing. More reports from Occult, though a lot of it is, frankly, beyond me. Warmaster's still KO'd, which is problematic. At command-level, we've decided to recover a few days, during which we'll evaluate our options. The Mursaat fortress is still a potential point of interest, but we're undecided whether or not we want to commit to it. Disregarding the dangers involved, I also feel like this is a deployment for which we needed a Priory detachment. Don't get me wrong, Occult does an excellent job as far as field analysis goes, but this is something of a different magnitude entirely. I still wonder what lies through that sealed door. It is said there was a passage to the Foundry of Failed Creations on these islands, and this is where the titans once came from. Imagine opening that door, sealed for... hundreds of tears, perhaps, only to realise you've passed into the Realm of Torment itself. There's not many, if any, who can boast about travelling the Mists these days. Hah, I can imagine da Oddwalker would have a few things to say about that.  
  
Anyway, today was quiet. I spoke a bit with some of the troops. Had a rather lengthy chat with one of the necromancers, a lass called Devere, whom I also call 'corpselight' on account of her pale skin. Always interesting to see what hides below the surface. I gave her some of my blood for a little study they're doing with Occult. Not entirely sure if giving necromancers your blood is a good idea, but then I'm fairly sure the heat will kill me before any magic does. The only real relief comes from sitting in a corner down the side of the volcano, where the wind whistles in through the stones. The wind is actually better than the cooling crystals, especially if I pour some water over my head and back. In the weirdest form, if you forget about the active volcano, and giant stone skulls looming above us, this place is actually restful. There are constant banks of mist, condensation from where the lava pours into the water, drifting around, and the islands have their own music. It's the gentle breath of the mountains, and the beating heart of the world itself. In meditation, I imagine being the volcano. A mountain, steady and unflinching, chaining my molten fury deep inside. It brings calm and understanding.

# 53rd of Scion

Infernal Cape.  
  
Warmaster woke up earlier today, just in time for the scouts to return. She's pretty worn, which is expected from the study reports filed by our analysts. Seems the Mursaat's ferocious magic tears away at the very essence of the being. Corpselight penned a report that mentioned the spirit to be frayed, but slowly healing itself over rest. I think some of us here experienced something similar; the odd throb and pain lasted for days after the engagement, and I only got brushed a couple of times by the searing beams of power they directed towards us. I find the notion of them ripping my soul out of my body to be deeply disturbing; I can't say I envy Alleshia the experience. She's not ready to make any directives yet, but I'll furnish her with all the reports tomorrow. Even if she's bed-bound, she might as well keep herself appraised of the situation.  
Which brings me back to the scouts; they went out today to get some eyes on the area east of our position. You can see another rock formation if you look past the fog; I'm not sure what they've found yet, since I'm still waiting to get a final report, but they brought back a badly burnt body. It was almost fused and charred beyond recognition, except for the Vigil uniform and service tags it was wearing around the neck. There's not much legible to it; I'd almost think the soldier, whoever they were, fell into a magma pool. Only thing that stands out is "Ironpaw", which can mean any number of things. Now the really worrying part is that as far as we're aware, our Chapter are the only Pact forces active on this specific island chain. That begs the question where this one came from; and more so, if he was alone or not. I've sent off a letter to headquarters demanding immediate confirmation that no other units were retasked, and for them to reference "Ironpaw" against the service records. Maybe it's some poor bastard washed up, like those carnival people. I'll draft up a letter; I think the airship is due a supply run back to Trinity in the next few days, so we'll get our reply in a few days. I'll have the letter drafted and added to the small pile of paperwork we've got to send over back to command.  
  
Asides from that slight eye-brow raiser, the day was calm. Force and an Asura called Vaxun put some troops through a distraction, making 'dream team' fighting groups against illusion enemies. Diverting enough, though more a game than a tactical exercise, truth be told. I joined in, because why not. Reminds me of making teams for keg brawl. Spirits, I could do with a good keg of ale, nice and cold. The heat is making me crabby. I got annoyed at Inkblot and Wood-knead earlier for walking around in layers and layers of leather and fur, despite both sweating so much they resemble a fountain more so than a norn. Turned my humour sour enough, and probably meant I was more snappy than I usually am. Bah. At least it's nice and cool here, where the wind passes through.

# 54th of Scion

Infernal Cape.  
  
Long day. Warmaster's got her paperwork, and the scout reports brought back returns from the eastern deployments. We got more Asura out there, taking intelligence readings for their dragon magic; which of course means there's dragon minions out there. More destroyers.  
I ran into Occult discussing potentials ways to get bast the Mursaat fortress. I had to remind them that out ultimate target is finding Balthazar. We're not the Priory, we're a Vigil combat unit with a very important mission. And since Occult seems, by and large, certain that our rogue god is not hiding in the ruin. That means that currently, the roaming destroyers to our eastern flank are the most likely target. Klixxa remains adamant we can make gains on potentially very powerful magic, which I'll inform the Warmaster of. By advisory, however, is to alert the Priory of the ruin, and have them retask a research group to it, while we continue "hard scouting" the rest of the islands.  
  
Anyway, I'm hot, and tired. I wonder if we'll ever come here again. It's got the same strange beauty Orr did. Menacing, hard, challenging. Something to overcome. Maybe one day my children will come here to prove their worth, eh?

# 55th of Scion

Infernal Cape.  
  
Woke up, decided to sharpen my sword, and stepped on a pile of loose shale, before tumbling to the ground and wrenching my ankle the wrong way around. Not a major injury, but one of those that'll put me put of moving around for a few days. Annoying, because I missed the deployment to the eastern side of the Island. Apparently troops had a run in with several destroyers there, though the exact reports are still pending.  
I'm confined to hopping around with a crutch until the swelling goes down, which should be in a few days. Until then, I guess I'm stuck here, with the Warmaster and the camp staff for company.  
Hurray... ?

# 56th of Scion

Infernal Cape.  
  
So, the good news I can walk around pretty decently, now that the swelling has stpped. I had to sit out today's deployment, but I should be able to commit to tomorrow's operations, at least. Good, because apparently the destroyers are being rough on the folks. Won't let a loose rock make it so the linemen think I'm shirking. Wouldn't do.  
Bad news is that we got a return on the query about our 'lost soldier', Ironpaw. Turns out he's marked as a deserter, last seen in the company of our old friend, Vethrir Blackmoor. So, we've been given additional orders to follow up any trace of him, and bring hin in, preferably alive. Not sure how that makes me feel. I mean, the reports tell he's gone completely off his rockers, but to have gone rogue outright... I'll believe it when I'll see it. If he's here at all. Maybe this 'Ironpaw' was just another deserter, that ended up over here one way or another.  
  
Interestingly, reports from yesterday and today mention a Skritt encampment on the eastern side of the island; pretty sizeable one too, with an intact ship. I wonder if they sailed over here by accident? Skritt, of all things. Well, I suppose they're hardy enough to survive virtually anything, but... why Skritt? To make it worse, there's also Karka out on the far eastern shore. No hives as we know, but Southsun's taught me how fast these bastards can piss out a nest, and turn it into a hatchery. Thankfully they are singularly unimportant when it comes to our operational objectives, so we should be able to bypass them. Worst case, I suppose we can have the *Vengeance* strafe them with their broadsides, and level their nests from the air. We'll see. Our reports are more akin to explorer's listings at this point, than they are to military field reports. We're not really outfitted for this; not the first time I regret not having a full Priory team along with us. Ah well. I suppose we'll remain the hard, balled fist of the Pact until they integrate us into a combined force, like so many other Pact forces.  
  
No mail from home though. Pity, but understandable. I hope they're all well. I think of them often; every morning when I strap my sword on, and consider what the day will bring. I know that at the end, whatever may happen, I'll be a step closer to home.

# 57th of Scion

Infernal Cape.  
  
Sometimes I wonder if we did not fall down the Door of Komalie, directly into the Foundry of Failed Creation, bound to fight with daemons of the past until they devour us all.  
  
We went north today, through some narrow, winding path up a volcano, only to find a wide expanse of ash and fire. Then, a greater wurm twice the size of the elder wurm we killed some time back, reared out of the core of the mountain like some primordial beast. We fought it, and its kin. A giant golem was pummeling it with fists of light, while they were bursting up from the floor, hurling globs of fire everywhere. We were called over to follow up on some anomalous readings by these Asura. Why are they even out here? It's the Realm of Torment up there. A vision of a place where no people should ever go. And they sit there... running tests on things? Spirits, what a heroic tale it could have been, to bring a hunting party, and to slay that beast with your own hand?  
  
Of course, that's not the end of it. We climbered up the pass like a mountain yak, before being ran down the throat of the world. The last stretch was meant to take us home, but at the top it was just... fire. Vethrir Blackmoor. It seems all the reports, all the things others said that I wouldn't believe were true. He's gone. Lost his mind, in a firestorm that would try and engulf us all if it could. But it didn't. We destroyed his minions. Burst them apart, tore them to cinders and ashes, until he collapsed. Now he's on the ship, and we wait to see what happens next.  
I think of Vanholm, and I hope we can bury this here, and now. If we bring him back, they'll just see how far he's fallen before they end him. Spirits, I told him he'd get a fair trial, but that's the very last thing he needs or deserves. Chainheart has the right of it.  
  
My mind's jumbled. I think I'm dehydrated and overexhausted. Empty a canteen, and lay down until they come wake me, I think.  
Maybe I'll sleep for twenty years. Heh, I wonder how Hejja and Reuzen would look. I wonder if they'd both still be alive.

# 58th of Scion

Infernal Cape.  
  
Pulling out tomorrow. Prisoner, loads of injured, and lack of any real progress on our objective means we're done here.  
Good.  
  
People are getting on my nerves. I need to get out of this damned heat.

# 59th of Scion

Hoelbrak.  
  
*Vengeance* lifted us out of the murk of the fire islands, and carried us back to the transit point in Rata Sum. Not sure how I feel about leaving the place. Ember Bay, as it has been called, was a box of surprises, but it did feel like we we're pioneers, discovering a new world. Except, of course, everywhere we went, we seemed to be the last ones to arrive. We left the Asura and the Skritt to their devices, and sent out a supply package to the carnival people to help them hold out until proper evacuation measures can be taken. Not that we could get them to separate from their weird slothasaur critter if we wanted to, but still. Seems weird that folks would not want to get out of there, after spending more than a handful of days slowly turning into a living puddle.  
Airship wasn't too good. A lot of wounded, and what was once Ironside fuming in the hold. Not sure what's going to happen to him. I'm not sure I want to know, in the end. Oh, how the mighty have fallen. I hope that they make it quick in the end.  
  
Regardless, we arrived in Rata Sum, where the Chapter troops are billeted for a few days before we're getting new deployment orders. Never thought I'd say I was glad to be there. Moot point anyway, since the Warmaster pulled me aside and sent me on a "courier mission" to Hoelbrak. I'm to pick up some routine paperwork that could've just as easily been sent by mail, and report back with it... but only in two day's time. Considering the trip took me less than an hour...  
I think she feels a little guilty for recalling me. Well, I deeply appreciate the gesture.  
  
Two days are better than none. And spirits, walking in through those lodge doors, and feeling my heart beat in my throat... The surprised smile is the greatest welcome home. And my little girl! I am so proud, I want to hold her up to everyone I meet, and tell them she's my daughter. Just a tiny little lump of love and happiness. Smelly, hungry, bawling, happiness, but then she wouldn't be my daughter if she didn't know how to make a good mess of anything as soon as she was out of the womb. But, of course, after a long day of travel, there's nothing like falling into bed with Kristen after a few mugs of mead, and forgetting there's more than two people on this entire bloody world.  
So, that's exactly what I'm going to do, once I finish this last line.

# 60th of Scion

Hoelbrak.  
  
It's good to be home. Skaadi, Kristen and I took the Jotunling and little Hejja out to the Mourn. I can put the little lass in my helm, and carry her around like. Seemed like a good idea until the baby decided to use it as potty. Thankfully, the nappy prevented that from truly becoming a mess, and it was cleaned soon enough. I'll try not to think too much about it when I put it on my head. Skaadi joked it was penance for not being here to change the nappies on the other occasions. Can't fault the logic, now can you?  
Kristen's getting back to her old contours, too, though she's still carrying a bit of extra fat on the hips. Makes her look a little plumper than before, which I have absolutely no issue with. She's already thinking about leaving the lass with da and Skaadi while she goes into the mountains for some hunting and meditation. Taking care of the little one's the only reason she hasn't yet, which I understand well enough. I'd say to take the little lass with her, but that's mostly asking for calamity. Besides, Skaadi seems happy enough to take on the role of family matriarch every now and again. I think she's secretly infinitely pleased to have grandchildren to coo over.  
  
So aye, the day passed well enough, as it should. Seems the letters I sent out for the Companions haven't arrived yet. I assume that's because of the postage block, what with the entire thing I'm not supposed to be mentioning, and such. I spoke to Kristen about it, of course, though she was the first one to scold me for telling her, of course. You can get the woman out of the spooks, but you sometimes really can't get the spook out of the woman. Anyway, I suppose she's right, though I doubt many people in the mountains will care much about gods and such. Spoke more about Ironside, and how it disturbed me. I didn't realise how much that was weighing on me until I felt the weight lifting from my heart. Makes me wonder though, sometimes, if I'm speaking to Kristen the Shaman, or Kristen my wife. Maybe they're one and the same, these days, eh?  
  
Took a moment to pass by a moot out in the Foothills, though it was fairly tame. Some young folks, and older norn with brothers in the Vigil. Seems Kristen's not the only one who writes infrequently, since the man hadn't heard from his kin since '28. I'll put in a service status request when I pass by the Vigil post tomorrow morning, see if his two brothers are even still alive. Worst case, at least he'll know what became of them in the end.  
But aye, all in all, moot was tame. I returned home to find Skaadi already gone, and Hejja soundly asleep, the Warmaster's mobile hanging over the wicker crib. Kristen and I dug into the keg of ale I had brought up from the monastery, which arrived a while back now. She saved a good deal of it for exactly this moment, and we got merrily drunk. It's a bit of a haze from there, but Kristen's snoring away next to me, too fast asleep to notice me writing down the little words in the small hours before dawn. I've got a headache, but a mug of ice cold water took the worst of it off.  
I think I'll try and either sleep a little more, or just enjoy listening to the sounds of morning unfold.

# 61st of Scion

Hoelbrak.  
  
Got the paperwork for the Warmaster in order, which means I'll be making the return trip to Rata Sum tomorrow before noon. Should be right on time, just as planned. Two days are short, but they're better than nothing. May Alleshia be kept by those gods of hers, she's a good lass at heart. Makes you wonder where she'd have ended up without these dragons, eh?  
  
Anyway, slept in longer than I expected, mostly because I woke up hungover worse than I expected it to be. Kristen was fit as a fiddle, and called me a big man-baby for lying in. She tucked in the little lass with me before she set out to attend to the folks in the lodge. Good trade. Hejja doesn't snore as badly.  
Got out of the furs eventually, and carried the baby around while I attended do business. It's warm for the time of year, some of the snow was even melting. Not bad, though, just have to watch out for meltwater more than you do normally. It's a good thing we built everything out of wood here. Stonework would just split apart when the water refreezes later in the year. The folks in the Lionguard Havens along the roads outside Hoelbrak will have their work cut out for them.  
Hejja didn't complain either. She's a quiet little baby. Smaller than Freyja and the Jotungling were as babies, certainly, and much more restful. Freyja was a quiet child too. They say that means their minds are preoccupied with greater things, heh.  
Not sure what greater things my little girl's thinking of yet, though, aside from sleep and mommy's teat. Maybe she's in deep communion with the spirits, about some deep mystery only her infant mind can conceive. Wouldn't that be a thing?  
  
Tried passing by Usha's place, but she was not in. Managing accounts in Lion's Arch, took the cubs with her. A small pity, I was hoping to compare, and get some payback for the colossal hangover she swilled into me when Kristen was in labour. Ah well, next time, whenever that is.  
Decided I'd take the Jotunling and Hejja out to Bear's Lodge, and listen to Ursel speak to the petitioners. Kristen's doing much the same out at Leopard's Lodge, but I'm told it's distracting for me to sit in on her with the children, which I can understand well enough. The boy's happy enough to play where you put him anyway, and I kept Hejja bundled on my knee. Lad's a little awkward. He plods around and says a few words now and then, but he's not used to Hejja yet, and you can tell. I was told young children always react a little strange to a new baby being born. Something about them having to share attention. He doesn't need to worry; Kristen may not be his mother, but I love him just the same as I do my wife's daughter.  
That being said, I think Kristen and I should probably hold off a year or so before having another baby. Not that I mind, but I don't think I'd be able to leave again. That, and with Braham being in the north, and us waiting to fight Jormag, we'll wait for less tumultuous times. It does mean being a little more careful when it comes to making love, but nothing we can't work around with some care.  
After, though, once Jormag's dead, and I've put a lodge squarely on his dead corpse, that's a different matter entirely!

# 62nd of Scion

Draconis Mons.  
  
When I departed this morning, I did so with the notion I'd arrive in rime to be airlifted to the next ash-covered island in the damn island chain. Instead, we got ordered to board a submarine, before spending a few hours uncomfortably cramped together. And then we arrived... here. I don't know what 'here' exactly is. Best guess so far is an ancient, hollow mountain. We got carried in with the submarine, because there's no air access. Worse, the waters around us are a mess of sulphuric acids so volatile the waters itself is broiling. I wonder how they even found this place.  
The insides, though... I called it a hollow mountain, and I mean it in the literal sense. It's a huge, yawning cave, probably big enough to swallow the lodges of Hoelbrak whole with room to spare. The roof of it is so high, we can't see the top of it because there are clouds and mist banks accumulating around it. A vast pillar made of shimmering crystal or some other substance I can't identify stands in what seems the middle of it all, while large cliffs and sheaves of mushroom and algae-crusted rock and soil hang from the walls like vastly oversized tinder fungi clinging to the side of a tree. There's a microclimate inside there that strongly resembles the thick overgrowth and aggressive saurian life found in the Magus Falls. We saw similar things in the Osprey Pillars in Ember Bay.  
It is mind boggling, like a place out of myth or legend. And our intelligence claims our quarry to be here? I can't think of a more grandiose palace for a great god than a hollow mountain.  
  
We arrived down at the very foot of the mountain, along with several more Vigil detachments. We're going to deploy deeper into this marvel of nature. So far, it seems as if our goal lies far above us, at the 'roof' of the mountain. It's hard to express the scale of it all. There are trees here that are large enough for a main beam of the Great Lodge to be cut from their trunks in one piece, and yet they are dwarfed by the scale of the roaring cliffs. It is not dark either. Glowing mosses add to the light, but the greatest source of it is the great pillar in the center, which casts out a steady luminescence that renders everything as vividly and brightly as it would in unending daylight. It's hard to tell if night has fallen or not, and without the grumble of my stomach, I would find it hard to tell. It occurred to me that maybe I should have a watch made for me some day, like the humans carry around in their pockets. An astrolabe and a sundial are of exactly no use if you can't see the sun.  
We're currently camped some hundred meters above sea-level, at a Vigil staging post. The terrain's very rough, and the wildlife makes even cursory exploring dangerous. There are large jungle stalkers, and saurians here that could kill a grown man easily. The humidity and the constant drip-rain of condensation falling down from far above adds to the feeling that we're actually in the heart of the Maguuma, rather than out in the Ring of Fire.  
It doesn't help that we have multiple confirmed reports of vine tendrils sneaking up and abducting Asura, not unlike the Mordrem vines did. Mithra seems pretty adamant that it's not some piece of Mordremoth we overlooked, but I'm not so sure. There are the same vine-infected destroyers lurking further up, along stone shaves that run to the central pillar like bridges. Kraxxi once told me, a long time ago, that killing the dragons released a huge amount of magic into the aether. Much the same reason why our Ascalon deployments were plagued with portals, and why some of our soldiers encounter rogue magic. Spirits, I got flung halfway across Tyria by a magical instability. Something tells me that Primordius, or at least his minions, have been absorbing some of Mordremoth's magic. Why else are we seeing vine-covered destroyers? Why else do we have vine tendrils snatching away Asura when we let our guard down. So far, we got one confirmed report of an Asura soldier dying due to the vines, but thankfully not Ashen. Klixxa got close, and got snatched away shortly after we arrived, though Lance squad was able to find her again, curled up in a vine cluster not far from where we're camped now. She's lightly wounded, but will thankfully make a full recovery.  
I'm mostly worried about the implications of this happening at all. Is this all Balthazar's doing? We heard from intelligence that he was causing severe disruptions in magical energy; if he's causing the dragons to soak up the magic of their defeated brethren, he must be stopped.  
  
There's more. Apparently, shortly after landing, unidentified mercenaries attempted to disembark and attack the Vigil landing, with a submarine of their own. I don't know the details, but they were apparently very heavily armed, which is deeply worrying. Doubly so because we've seen no sign of any other presences in here so far. The name Aetherblades was mentioned, which is worrying. I missed the Scarlet wars due to being all the way in southern Tyria, but there are many veterans who muscled through those campaigns, and came out worse for wear. Right now, the biggest issue is a lack of intelligence. We're mostly flailing in the dark, working with extremely limited understanding of what we're facing, or even why we're facing it. Even if we manage to march up to the top of that mountain, I have no idea what they'll expect us to do. What if we arrive, and there is nothing there? What if we arrive, and we're asked to cross swords with a literal deity? Bear will grant me the strength to persevere any trial, but I doubt we'll all come out of it unblemished. Half of me is convinced we're in over our heads, while the other half tells me we will adapt and overcome, as we have always done.  
Regardless, it is... an experience, and it will make for an exceptional story already.  
  
I spent a good time dressing and cleaning a large jungle stalker that made the mistake of pouncing on us when we were searching for Klixxa. Not a very clean kill, but it's a beautiful creature, with a pelt pattern that resembles the skin I got for Kristen in... 1328? Has it been two years already? Anyway, it's some extra food for the pot, and the skin is certainly worth keeping. With everything going on, it was good to keep the mind occupied with something as familiar as skinning a kill.  
  
Vines, destroyers, gods, hollow mountains, mercenaries... The things I endure for my children.

# 63rd of Scion

Draconis Mons.  
  
Deployment into this tangle today. It reminds me of our deployment into the Tangled Depths. Some idiot scout mistook a spirit circle for a ruin, so we blundered straight into it, like some novice explorer trespassing on a sealed tomb. So, of course, we were accosted by a host of angry spirits that very nearly mauled us to death.  
Strange place, though. A nearly perfectly circular pool of water only a few inches deep, and surrounded by standing stones not unlike the old Jotun boulders. I wonder who erected them, or why? The nature spirits that attacked us were angry, and I suspect that they may be related to the vines and heavily aggressive wildlife we keep encountering. It's almost as if the mountain itself rebels against our presence, and seeks to drive us out. A chilling thought. Perhaps, if Balthazar is here, so is his god-kin, the one they know as Melandru? There are so many questions, and very little answers.  
  
Lance apparently found an old Asuran ruin, which is... equally odd. The vines we've seen only draw in Asura, and with destroyers here, I wonder if this is another Rata Novus? What if we continue upwards, and find yet another long-abandoned city, half-collapsed at the summit of a hollowed volcano? Maybe that's what those other Asura in Ember Bay were looking for, with their portal to Rata Novus. Rata Sum is, after all, much closer to us than any other place. I don't know. None of it really makes sense.  
  
At least I cooked up the tiger, and treated the folks to some lovely eating. Taste was alright, and I'm drying the pelt inside my tent. It's damn humid around here, but cooler than in Ember Bay. Small blessing, even though I'm still sweating profoundly. Looking up, trying to guess how much higher this all goes... Might be a while before I can go home again.

# 64th of Scion

Draconis Mons.  
  
Set out against the destroyers today. They were crowding around the central crystal, and since we're oathed to destroy them where we find them, we turned out the squad in order to repulse them. Went well at first, just a few scattered destroyers roaming around aimlessly. We dispatched them with little issue before proceeding deeper on. The crystal is impressive up close, and terrifying. It crackles with arcane energy, and it radiates an immense heat. We pulled up in squads alongside it, and I sent out some forward scouts. They returned, but one, Spiderman, was wounded. We were doing field triage when we got suddenly ambushed by a host of destroyers. They appeared to come from the crystal itself, as well as fissures around the rock shelf. They were aggressive, and hammered us hard. I managed to get a flare off, which called Lance to our location, or we'd have been crushed. As it stands, we managed to withstand the storm, but not before one of us took an injury too grave to recover from. Crusader Briam's arm was torn off, and the trauma was too severe. I'm sorry to say I didn't know much about him, besides that he was a solid fighter. It's always those folks I know least that die, and I always regret it. Every single time.  
It's all because we're forced to go into this nearly blind. We have no idea what we're facing. Spirits, Maeva thinks the crystal might be a giant cocoon, hiding Primordius himself. I don't know what to think myself. It's a titanic pillar, made out of a material that is very clearly magically charged. I don't know if the destroyers are attracted to it, or because they manifest from it. For all we know, it could be a gigantic, magma-filled tunnel that bores down into the heart of the world, and is home to endless amounts of destroyer hordes. Talking to Occult just makes things more difficult. To have any idea what the crystal is, they'd need to get close to it. Since we just lost a Crusader to a surprisingly aggressive destroyer ambush, I'm loath to commit troops to it again. Occult suggested we wait for scouting information to trickle back, and potentially consider our options based on whatever is further up-slope. I am getting more and more convinced that the answers to a great many mysteries about this place lie at the top of it all. It's still a way up. Like one of the tallest peaks in the mountains, only inverse.  
  
That's not the only thing. Apparently there's been a ruckus about some intelligence restriction placed on making journal notes pertaining to our objective. Something intended to prevent panic from spreading as to the new that a deity had returned, probably namely for humans. Now, turns out a bunch of people didn't follow that directive, including myself. There was a small meeting, and I pointed out how essentially pointless a writing ban was, since we're vastly more likely to have it leaked by word of mouth. Nevermind that the only foe here we've seen that might gain anything from reading private journals was that single unidentified crew and their submarine. Where they got it, who they were and why they were coming here remains a mystery, though reports on Balthazar himself mentioned that he turned some of the White Mantle and some mercenaries to his cause. Might be them? Hard to tell.  
Either case, the writing ban will be lifted, though those who transgressed will suffer the usual punitive action for disobeying an order. Myself included. They didn't check my journal, but I volunteered the information. Would be dishonourable to let others get punished for something I myself am guilty of, after all, and I can at least claim to still be a (mostly) honourable warrior. Not a paladin of virtue, perhaps, but good enough to be proud of the reputation.  
An unfortunate side effect of the ban was that one of our Asura, Vaxun, handed in a datapad filled with a huge amount of erotic materials, apparently obtained as a joke. And Maeva, being the ogre she occasionally is when faced with something like that, had the entire device wiped, including some personal information that the recruit valued. Not enough to have it backed-up in Rata Sum or a safebox, mind, but still. If he's lucky, the Asura in Rata Sum should be able to recover the wiped data for some coins, but that's only a maybe. Most of all, I'm surprised why he brought all of that with him anyway. He did the same weird thing Renn did, claiming he didn't trust anyone enough to leave it with them, which sounds like a deeply idiotic sentiment to me. But then, I don't think I really possess anything that I don't trust Kristen or Usha to keep for me, nevermind that I can't think of any reason why anyone would try and steal my trophies. Or Raven forbid, the investments Usha makes for me. Bah.  
  
In worse news, Renn's Snow Leopard, an aged cat called Eve, died of old age today. A bit overshadowed by the death of Crusader Briam, in all honesty, but Wood-knead probably feels the loss as keenly, if not more so. In all honest, I think it was a mistake to bring the animal here, rather than letting it live out its last days in the Foothills. But it's over now, I suppose. We'll have to keep an eye out on Embersong's mental state as a result.  
About that, we have a recruit called Kara Mai, who calls herself Siegeshield. She seems to have had a pretty nasty history with some criminal group, and is currently acting mentally unstable. The death of a Crusader Briam seems to have set off some very guilt-inducing thoughts in her, which is cause for some alarm. I'll have a talk with them when I have the chance, see if my assessment of the situation is correct. I'm worried she'll turn out to be too unstable to keep in the field.  
It's just been a tiring day for just about everyone.  
  
I'm sorry, Briam, for not knowing enough to tell a good tale, and do your memory the honour you probably deserve.  
  
89. Briam, succumbed to his wounds.

# 65th of Scion

Draconis Mons.  
  
Tiring day.  
First of all, we said our farewells to the fallen, and committed them to the pyres. May they join the other heroes in memory and the Hall of Spirits, in better and more glorious company than ours. None will feel shame when they stand alongside the heroes of old.  
  
On more mundane matters, we listed out the main transgressors for the writing ban. Turns out Seleea's golem has been constantly recording conversations; apparently so Sel can audit the communications, in case she makes a verbal agreement or something. From what I know of Asura culture, that's not that odd. Issue is that it constitutes a security loophole, even if it's a comparatively minor one. We're going to instruct her not to make any more recordings without prior consent, just to limit exposure. Personally, I find the notion of my every word being recorded somewhat interesting, though I'd be more flattered if it served a more memorial purpose.  
There's also a few folks, including myself, who will get seven days of punitive duties in Lion's Arch over next leave. I offered to step back, but apparently the other officers trust me enough to do my job, despite my personal stake in not wasting a leave. I'm honoured by their trust. That notwithstanding, I am colossally annoyed by having to sacrifice a leave period. I'll have to explain it to Kristen first of all, how I managed to fuck up a relatively simple order and can't come home because of it. Then I'll need to see if she's willing to move over to Lion's Arch for those few days, just so it's not all gone to waste. Bah. Though I suppose fair is fair, at the end of the day...  
  
Was also some camp commotion. Vaxun and Gunhaut causing a stir. Vaxun made a mesmer illusion of a Dolyak, and Gunhaut lost his marbles, thinking Ox had finally returned. He decided to rush off out of camp, and forced me to set out a search party to drag his dumb ass back over here. Spirits, he's got a strong back, but his head must be filled with gravel. Truly a son of an ox, and not in the flattering way.  
  
That asides, I spoke to Calder at length too, about a host of things. It was insightful, as it usually is. Sometimes, you forget how different folks are from one another. Not just individually, but as entire species. Norn and Charr, Charr and humans; a little introspection as to why we act like we act helps to foster understanding. I think there's mutual respect to be found through understanding. Besides, Calder's got a keen mind. An improvement over some of the more dim-witted conversation you occasionally run into. Not that I hold it against them, of course. This is the Vigil, not the Priory. That intelligence isn't a qualifier for recruitment is evidenced by several of our members.  
  
Blegh. Seven whole days, because of some silly orders being issued. Ah well, maybe I can turn it into something good. Have the children over with Leif, or in the Priory with Freyja while I work, and spend some hours with Kristen in the late afternoon and evening. Maybe even take a small boat out, and sail around Claw Island when the sun goes down, and then follow the lights of the Phoenix Roost back to the harbour.  
Doesn't sound so bad.

# 66th of Scion

Draconis Mons.  
  
Still waiting for our troop elements to move up. It's the same old story, hurry, hurry and then wait a few days while everyone else catches up to the advance. Can't blame them, the amount of messages we sent back, asking for clarification must be staggering. Spirits, sometimes I wonder if high command even knows why we're here. So far, it's been a case of calling the situation as we see it, which of course means imaginations run wild. I can imagine somewhere, there's a Priory scholar having a fit at the notion that it's Vigil soldiers, rather than Priory explorers running rampant around the area. I figure they'll have deployed study groups to Ember Bay by now.  
  
Everything in here is humid, and the constant ambient light makes it hard to sleep. Or to tell what day it is. Sometimes I wake up, and I haven't the foggiest idea of what time of day it is. It could be in the middle of the night, or after noon. Just a constant twilight, set to the soft sound of the condensation dripping down from the cave ceiling. It's like those cave warrens in the Maguuma again, certainly, just without any chak. That seems so long ago now, but it really isn't. The years have been filled with stories of war and battle. Spirits, I write these journals just to provide me with a degree of sanity about it all.  
  
While I was away in Hoelbrak, Vethrir was off-loaded to Trinity, and from what I can tell, remanded into the custody of his son, Trebius. Since the latter was adamant about killing his old man, I have a strong feeling that Vethrir is dead by now. I had put the matter from my head for some time now, since it reminds me painfully of the fall of Vanholm. Vethrir was... well, a friend, up until the end. I am saddened to have seen him fall so far from what we all aspire to be. To become so lost. I don't understand, and now I feel I never will. I hope that he died quickly, at least, and that perhaps some honour was redeemed.  
  
90. Vethrir Blackmoor, corrupted by fire.

# 67th of Scion

Draconis Mons.  
  
Scout reports came in, and... well, things seem to slowly snap into focus. The great central crystal spire goes up, and near the roof of the mountain there's a fissure that probably leads down into the very heart of the mountain. However, the access is controlled by a fortification, complete with cannons and emplacements. Calder, who went with the scouts, seems fairly certain it's Iron Legion technology, probably supplied by mercenary renegades or the sort. The appearance of a mercenary submarine at the landing suddenly makes a lot more sense, as does the idea that they're in Balthazar's army. More worrying is that the Warmaster also reported Inquest forces moving around. Odds are they're in league with the mercenaries, which is worrying. I missed the Aetherblades ravaging Tyria, but I've seen the damage they caused. Inquest working alongside mercenaries with high-grade Iron Legion equipment, fighting alongside a god of war? That might pose a problem. I'm suddenly pleased I brought the mortar, just to be able to provide some limited counter-battery fire. Either case, it makes it a priority target. If Balthazar is anywhere, he'll be up there. The next few days will prove to be exciting.  
Less amusing was that Alleshia apparently decided to fulfill her scouting role on her own, with little regard for the notion that she's our commanding officer, and it poses a tremendous operational risk for her to wander off on her own. I noted my concern to her, and was at least acknowledged. I hope she doesn't pull that sort of stunt again.  
  
Also took the time to speak to Mai, or Carbine as I call her, about her mental state. Seems she blames herself for the death of her husband. It's a peculiar story. She didn't love him, and apparently it was a hateful union. She ran away to people scantly better, and when he came after her to get her, they forced one of the two to kill the other. Why? Apparently to make a point. At least the fellow had the good grace to kill himself, as he should. Seems she has not yet processed the notion, and she blames herself for causing the situation in the first place. Preposterous notion, of course, evil people will always be evil. I can't understand humans, though. A marriage against one's will? A foreign concept, if ever I heard any. If the folks to be bonded are to be equal, how can one ever force the other to do anything? Either way, I think the talk was enlightening, though I also feel like the lass might have chosen the wrong line of work. Much as we try and do what is right and just, we essentially kill a few, so that many may live. A cruel and ugly truth I'm not entirely sure she will be able to deal with. With what we're up against, I can only hope she finds strength in heart and mind.  
  
Spoke with Calder again, specifically about Balthazar, and what we're facing. He formulated a scary notion, that when humanity hears Balthazar has returned, they will cling back to his old words, and wage war on their erstwhile allies. Even if Queen Jennah respects the peace of the Tyrian people, not all will. Another Krytan civil war would devastate their people. Nevermind the terrifying notion that Balthazar might actually succeed in harnessing the Krytans for war, before driving them like a spear into the guts of the mountains and Ascalon. It would be a bloody war, and I assume a short one, though I can't claim to say how much of an asset Balthazar will be to his people. There is small relief in knowing Balthazar is not beyond defeat, and that he does not seem to shun the other species. Why else built a fort armed with Charr guns at the neck of the volcano?  
Still. We both look up with a sense of trepidation. What we'll find up there might well cause ripples that will be felt in the far corners of the world.  
I hope not. We still have many Elder Dragons to slay before we can finally find peace. We can't have come this far to just slump back into war and darkness. That's not the gift I fight to give my family.

# 68th of Scion

Draconis Mons.  
  
So, contrary to what we expected, we got orders in to stand down and secure the wider perimeter around the upper tiers of the mountain. Apparently we're already somewhere halfway up, but the paths continue ahead and above of us. The reason we're not executing a direct strike at the target, as I expected, and that's because there's other forces operating throughout the area, including the fabled Commander. I guess we're just setting off the battlefield.  
I'm... relieved, on one hand, that we're not going to march straight on this fortification, and the war god that assuming is hiding within, while on the other hand I'm disappointed we're being relegated to the sidelines, when we did all the heavy lifting so far. Hardly glorious. Ah well, orders are orders. I suppose we'll have our hands full enough dealing with the surrounding area. The wildlife alone is lethal enough to challenge even the most heroic of hunters if they're not prepared.  
  
Asides from that, it's warm and humid, and the constant light is wearing me thin. I'm not sure how much longer we're expected to remain in the mountain, but I don't think it'll be much longer. We're just waiting, seeing whatever happens next. Folks were getting anxious about facing Balthazar. I wonder if we'll even notice anything at all.  
Would be a rather tame end to the story.

# 69th of Scion

Dracons Mons, further up the incline.  
  
We moved up a good distance, to a forward camp. We're supposed to keep these lower tiers secure, which is an interesting enough task. Most of it is wilderness, filled with stalking saurians and other large critters, many of whom are right at home in the Magus Falls. I'm starting to think them being here isn't a coincidence. Lance actually dispatched a large stonehead, and Renn butchered it cleanly. I had folks sent out to make a smokehouse, and get it smoked and ready for transport by morning. Or, well, whenever 'morning' is. We're only staying is this nook for a day, before we're supposed to advance further along. It's a neat enough campsite, nestled near a ridge, looking over into a forest dotted with vast palms and rock pillars supporting the ceiling. Giant glowing lichen dangle from the ceiling, adding their radiant light to the ambient glow cast by the crystal pillar. There's a lot of roaming wildlife, many of whom seem not to care too much for our presence, while the predators actively try to attack us when they can. It's an environment I can respect, at least.  
  
We were sent out today to take Occult to some grove, where the scouts reported seeing one of those spirits. Much the same as we encountered some days before. We found it alright, and it was... well, strange. A becalmed pool, taking water from a waterfall, and surrounded by serene animals, including some large predators. In the middle, there was a single spirit, resembling an oakheart, but only there as ghost. When we tried to communicate with it, it seized Forgewood, and spoke through her mouth, demanding why we were there. Once we tried to explain, it claimed that the dragon minions and other ancient magics had been here long before us. Not sure why it would say that, but it disquiets me. In the moment, though, I was more worried for Forgewood. The spirit asked we leave, and I offered to do so, if it would release Forgewood back to us. It seemed to like the bargain, because it said we seemed trustworthy, and then released Forgewood back to us. Oddly, she seemed no wears for wear, asides from running around with a huge grin plastered across her face. Strange. I know Forgewood has a much closer affinity to nature than many of us, but to commune with these spirits so freely? That's something else entirely. I've asked Occult to keep an eye on her, because I frankly have no idea what's going on. They're not like the Spirits of the Wild, but they are nature spirits. Guardian spirits, perhaps. Whatever the case, I hope we have established ourselves as not being enemies, and if not allies, then at least neutral parties. Perhaps this'll stop the vines from lashing out at the Asuran troops here, and down at the clearing, downslope.  
  
Having to process all of that, thankfully Ookstrid left me the great saurian's heart and liver to cut up and grill, which was a nice and filling morsel. The meat's very rich, and the heart was larger than my head. Embersong's going to have her hands full, smoking the critter. Probably give us enough forage to last half a season, as long as we don't have to throw any of it out. Coox should have a field day incorporating it into our daily fare.  
  
Also formally got my seven days of punitive. Blegh.  
I'll make it work, somehow. Convince Kristen to come over to Lion's Arch, spend some days in the sun. Maybe eve, go hunting with Freyja in Southsun or something while I'm working off my hours. It's my own bloody fault anyway, for not following tiny, simple orders. Kristen even told me so, hah. She's a good lass. Truly good. I hope she brings my little lass, and Reuzen too. Punishment or no punishment, I want to see my children over leave, even if ti's briefly.  
I'll have to write her, whenever we get back from.... whatever this operation even is.

# 70th of Scion

Draconis Mons, Blistering Abyss.  
  
Continuing our perimeter duties, we marched up what seems to be a small mountain to one of the higher tiers. We actually passed the cloud layer that accumulates inside of here, and came close enough to look up and see the ceiling. Or at least, part of it. The great crystal pillar flares at the top, and seems almost like a great tree, holding up the roof of the world. The distance makes their size deceptive. We must be hundreds of meters up into the air, if not more. You could navigate a warship the size of the old Glory of Tyria in here, and it would have the room it needed to fly from top to the sea level, far, far below us.  
The air is stuffier up there. Most of the clouds, and thus the humidity, was below us, and the air was just a dry, hot haze. All the warm air is trapped up here. The sea far below is boiling, and the vapours drift up, until the water in it cools down enough to form the condensation that drips down like a constant rain. Up here, though, it's just roasting air, filled with cinders and ash. I guess that there really must be a hole in that crystal pillar somewhere, billowing up fire.  
  
We were sent up to check up on some cavern, which turned out to be absolutely infested with devourers. Not small ones either, they were the size of mature dolyak, with stingers that could've punched through sheet iron if we let them get close enough. Morbidly aggressive though, most we saw just screeched at us in naked aggression before they were put to the sword. A lone explorer would've been hard pressed, but we went in on a full recon patrol, and managed to squash them without much effort. Lance apparently ran into a really big one, which gave them a minor spot of bother. Not enough to write home about though.  
More interestingly, we found some sort of tomb in the cavern. There was a large stone, carved in what apparently are Ascalonian runes, commemorating the genius of a certain Zinn. Mysteriously, despite the Ascalonian runes, this was apparently some sort of renowned Asura that got Klixxa all excited. I guess it makes sense, considering we found golems stalking around, and derelict Asuran ruins. Maybe this was all his work? The entire mountain. I wonder if there's a connection between the Asura-snatching vines that plague the lower landing, and the traces of older Asuran presences here. I'll bet those sneaky Inquest bastards the Warmaster reported on have something to do with it too.  
Some of the blanks are slowly being filled in, though there are still so many questions. Freyja would have loved being here, I think. Probably do a much better job of making sense of it all, too.  
On the way back down, a much easier walk, thankfully, we ran into another Destroyer host, which we immediately engaged in battle and destroyed. It was a ferocious enough skirmish, and there was a big destroyer troll left in the end. Without thinking, I swing my fist in, and cracked the critter across the sternum with my armoured gauntlet, which caused it to crumble apart in the end. The magical wards on the plate seem to have done a damn good job of keeping it all from getting damaged, and there's just some scuffing on the gauntlet that won't take long to smooth over.  
Only injured we got for our trouble was Crawley, who got singed pretty badly. She'll be back in the thick of things in a week or so, though.  
  
Now, back in camp, enjoying a bowl of smoked saurian, oats and apple mash from a tin. It's honestly one of the better meals I've had in a while. Coox isn't a bad fellow. I'm trying to get some sense of time by pacing my meals, in the hope that it'll help me sleep better in the constant light, but I'm not so sure. I think I'll need to buy one of those timepieces the Krytans make. Not sure how expensive that'll be, though. Might put a part of this season's pay to it, depending if we're back home before the season's out. That reminds me, I wonder how well Usha's doing with those investments.  
I'll see in time, I suppose.  
I'm getting a bit worried about the lack of news. I hope the folks back home are alright, and that Braham hasn't called everyone north yet without me knowing. Would be a fine start for the Companions to be late to the very battle they were founded to take part in, eh?  
  
Ah well. I hope the Commander up there knows what they're doing. If they cause this volcano to erupt, we're all dead. Best not to dwell on that.

# 71st of Scion

Draconis Mons, Ancient Hollow.  
  
Moved position, now on the north side of the uh... mid tier of the mountain. The area maps we're getting are fairly confusing, but it seems we've identified most of the hanging landmasses so far, and arranged them on three tiers. The lower tier is mostly water and the naval landing area we came in on, though some of the submarine crews navigated the area, and found several standing pillar that function much the same as islands throughout the area. Aptly, depending on what side of the great pillar they lie, the western and eastern boiling sea. Now we know the big central pillar is essentially hollow, it's been renamed to be the Titan's Throat; rather well deserved, I figure.  
  
Higher up, the tier we're currently on, things get a little be messier. There's clusters of rock and massive ledges all around the Throat at the center. We advanced up through the Savage Rise, which is the largest accumulation of overgrowth on the south-eastern side of the volcano. It's also where the narrow pathways that lead up and down to the other tiers are, meaning it's an important strategical location to hold. Unfortunately, it is also vast, and tangled, making it extremely hostile terrain for us to navigate. We spent almost the every day before now camped out in various spot across the Savage Rise. Today, we marched north along the north-eastern rim, across a narrow ledge that leads out to a multi-layered accumulation on the northern side, this one known as the Ancient Hollow. That's where we are right now; it's infested with some pretty nasty spiders, critters we've not seen among the fauna in the Savage Rise, along with the same nasty mushroom people we've seen in the Magus Falls, what must be more than a year ago now... The similarities between the Magus Falls and this hollow mountain aren't lost on any of us.  
This place is called the Ancient Hollow, on account of the presence of a large Asuran vault on top of our current position. There's a number of very old, but essentially defunct, golems littered around the area. The few that still function seem to only be uttering scattered sentences, or repeatedly chanting the name "Zinn". At least that confirms the correlation. Standing orders are not to touch any of the random Asuran junk lying around, considering a lot of might be unstable. I sort of wish Kraxxi was here for this; it's not unlike when we discovered Rata Novus, though much smaller in scale. I actually wonder if this was perhaps a colony of Rata Novus? That makes me expect an ancient gate somewhere.  
  
Of course, the upper tier, which is only accessible easily through a narrow incline from the Savage Rise, remains off limits to us. Most of it seems to be on the northern side of the mountain, but it's hard to tell. I'd dearly love to be able to see with my own eyes how all of it looks up there, because the few glimpses we keep seeing of the Titan's Throat, and the vast, colossal jungles, paint an impressive sight. Calder remarked we might as well be in one of Melandru's mystical domains, and we'd be right to believe it, too. It is all so surreal, and yet here we are, sword in hand, trekking through a hollow mountain that itself has mountain ridges and peaks. Hah, imagine if we'd sail to the edge of the world, and we'd discover that all of Tyria was just held on the inside of an even vaster, and more titanic mountain. The sense of scale here is... so beyond me, it's difficult to even express awe. It's like seeing the great arches of Arah for the first time, rising up from the ground like the vast, bleached ribs of a fallen, primordial, giant.  
  
Operations today went well, by and large, but I'm growing sick and tired of the lack of discipline showed by the troops. As a result, I've decided to crack down on even minor errors, and hopefully get them all back into shape. I bloody hope they realize that this isn't some game; if they don't shape up, they're of no use to me. I had both Claridge and Glimlaf saddled with extra duties, as well as that oaf Gunhaut for running off from the patrol again. Apparently he didn't realise command can be delegated, and blindly ignored his patrol commander when ordered to stand down. I've marked him down as punitive duties after leave, but if this carries on, he needs to be kicked back to something less sensitive, like a garrison unit. Lastly, Crawley went through some confusion with being injured, and not technically being cleared for duty when I gave her a patrol lead. The specific issue stems from the notion she didn't feel it necessary to inform me she wasn't cleared, something I had to find out by actually going about and asking. Apparently she was due a revaluation on her status shortly after we settled into camp. Even so, I can't let people go around without being properly cleared, so she's got some relatively light extra maintenance duties for a few days.  
I don't know if it's veterans growing complacent, or just recruits who occasionally forget what they're supposed to be doing that gets to me the most. My mood isn't helped by bad sleeping, though thankfully I found a reasonably shaded corner that I hope will help a little. I'm also considering draping one of the pelts across the outside of the tent, just to keep it dark inside.  
  
You know, in the grand scheme of things, regardless of what happens next, I'm glad I at least saw this place. I'd have loved to show Kristen all of this. She'll have to make do with my tales and descriptions, though. I doubt we'll ever find a way to sail over here, unless I get a surprise posting with a submarine crew. I'm pretty sure I'm too big to qualify, in all honestly, except maybe as ballast.

# 72nd of Scion

Draconis Mons, Ancient Hollow.  
  
No deployment today, but to say it was 'quiet' would be a gross mistake. We're still camped out here, with the occasional century-old derelict golem leering out of the bushes, and crab-sized spiders crawling around our tents. I slept pretty well, though, that's a plus. I just found spider webs covering most of the outside of my tent, and I'm pretty sure that cleaning any of it up is a futile question. The golems seem not to care. The one, Z.O.X. I think it is, just stands in the corner, muttering to itself in slap dash phrases. I'm not supposed to meddle with it, but observing it, it seems to be on some sort of caretaker instruction. No doubt Kraxxi would have enjoyed cracking them open.  
  
In other new, Crawley collapsed from exhaustion, apparently. She was around in camp, shouting, and I think she might be a little strung out because of the environment. For a second, I was worried it might have been fungal spores again, considering the amount of fungi and those weird little mushroom people around the campsite. Thankfully not the case, and she'll be back on her feet in a few days. Or so I'm told, at least.  
Something more disturbing is Maeva repeating their bizarre episode in Ascalon, where she ended up smacking Small across the rear. Except this time, she did it to Inkblot, after she decided to pour a canteen of cold water down Maeva's breeches. Spirits alone know why, but the Tactician headlocked the lass and proceeded to smack her across the rear, asking her to say 'uncle'. I intervened soon enough, but what in Torment must the other troops be thinking? Raven's feathers, she's not a popular officer to begin with, this just makes it so, so much worse. I alerted the Warmaster about promptly, as it's difficult for me to intercede when it concerns my direct superiors. In any case, I listed up Inkblot for her idiotic prank, and listed her for labour duties. At this rate, the entire Chapter will be spending leave on penal duties, me bloody included.  
Sometimes I wonder if some of our First Crusaders and officers purposefully try to make themselves disrespected. Try justifying that sort of behaviour to a recruit or a junior Crusader. What do you even tell them? With examples like *that* being put down, no wonder discipline goes downhill.  
  
That reminds me, I read through the reports on what happened to Forgewood a few days back. Occult can sometimes be a little obfuscating with their writing. From what I can tell, Forgewood's manifesting ever stronger forms of a new magical form that is very difficult to pin down. Thinking back at Iluoana's strange magical outbursts, and the Tactician's, as well as the portal anomalies we experienced in Ascalon... The magic of the world is changing. I found my battle-rage turning into raging, burning flames just the same. Kraxxi wrote me once to say that magic was spreading all throughout the world, and that this was what caused the Chak around Rata Novus to spiral so out of control. I wonder if it's all connected. Forgewood discovered her own, innate, magic while she was out in the Maguuma, tutored by Menderas. And now, when she spoke to that nature spirit, that inner potential was finally fully unlocked. Not unlike that time I saw too close to the ley-line in Lion's Arch.  
Maybe that's what brought Balthazar back too?  
  
I keep thinking of home. Or, well, rather, I keep wondering what the children are doing. If they're playing. Sleeping. If they're happy. Sometimes I just sit down, close my eyes, and pretend the condensation drips are melting snowflakes, hoping that when I open my eyes again, I'll be at the side of the Mourn. I imagine I can see my boy playing with his wooden soldiers in the snow, while Kristen's nearby, holding Hejja in her arms. She's still so little, you know. They both have so many years still to live, to become strong, and beautiful, and as heroic as all of us. I worry sometimes, about what I will and won't see. I imagine Kristen telling them both tales that they can be proud on. Maybe a day will dawn when the dragons all lay slain, the world is at peace, and my children are free to range and hunt the northern Shiverpeaks again, like all of our ancestors did. Will they look at the sun rising, and imagine me, hauling up that great orb of light out of the shadow for them?

*Stands this stone for Tzahr,*  
*south and west beyond resting,*  
*father's road traveled furthest,*  
*fair Bear made might and right.*  
*Allmora's call, he fought and fell,*  
*fire-hearted, dire-handed, iron eater,*  
*husbandsman and bonded honour,*  
*heart alone kept, his dragon's bane.*

# 73rd of Scion

Draconis Mons, Ancient Hollow.  
  
Now it *was* a quiet day.  
I spent some time yesterday composing verse. Proper verse, in the Skaldic form, like I used to explain to Trebius before he took Vethrir away. The old form is demanding, and I'm not nearly as good as the great storytellers in Hoelbrak, but I am pleased with the result regardless. That it took me what seemed like hours to come up with what some bards and Skaalds conjure up in mere seconds only instills more respect for their artistry.  
  
I'm going to conduct an interrogation of one of the derelict golems tomorrow, see if their eroded programming can yield up any secrets. I'm not a golemancer, but I remember enough from Kraxxi and Lyralii's lessons to navigate a century-old golem. At least they've already proven to speak the common tongue.  
What surprises me is that everything so far seems to be exceedingly quiet. Or, well, the normal swell and rumble of the jungle, and the roiling waves below us, but no fighting. No tremors. No cannonry echoing inside the hollows. Just the steady dripping of the condensation. I wonder if this is what it feels like to be trapped in time?  
  
Been making little wooden carvings from the palm wood here, trying to get ideas, and keeping the hand practiced. Small wooden soldiers and monsters for my boy's army, and little charms for good luck, as well as totems I burn as offering as soon as they're done. The blade's still as sharp as ever. No inspiration on what to carve the dragonbone in, though. They say sculptors sometimes lose their minds, staring at the untouched marble block, losing themselves in potentials they can never attain. For me, I don't want to waste so precious a trophy material on a mere fancy. That'd be a waste. It has to mean something. Something worthwhile.

# 74th of Scion

Draconis Mons, Ancient Hollow.  
  
So, I spent some time picking apart one of the more functional golems around this scrapyard, and I think I've actually unraveled parts of the mystery. As always, it is more mundane than the work of gods and Elder Dragons, but still. The golem kept an internal record that proved to be most illuminating. Oddly, it starts with the destruction of Rata Novus by the Chak, an event I was already made aware of by Kraxxi and her studies on the ruins. Apparently one of the survivors was this Zinn we found the tomb off in the higher tiers. He came here, to another hidden Asuran city, this one called Rata Arcanum, which I suspect is hidden somewhere in the mountain. Based on our extensive mapping and scouting of the lower tiers, I suspect it lies nearer to the top of the mountain. Perhaps even at the very top, ddrawing its energy from the Titan's Throat? Anyway, Zinn came here and used some device to re-biome the cavern, which I assume is the reason for these lush jungles and huge amounts of creatures prowling around. Interestingly, the cavern's nature spirits seemed to have rebelled against this violation of their domain, and they wiped out Rata Arcanum. The result is that only these golems remain, endlessly executing the last commands they were issues. From what I understand, they were tasking with nurturing the wildlife, which in this specific instance has given rise to a vast overpopulation of spiders. Strange as that tale might be, it does seem to fit our findings of the area so far, and it does well to explain the more puzzling elements. If it's all true, then this entire mountain is a monument to Zinn's genius; and his hubris.  
More immediate, the existence of Rata Arcanum points towards a more important point of interest for us. I wonder if Balthazar came here looking for the Asuran city? If the fort guarding the entry to the higher tiers has been erected by Balthazar's army, then perhaps it is not merely guarding the Titan's Throat, but also Rata Arcanum?  
Thinking back at the formidable automated defenses of Rata Novus, I don't envy anyone nosing about a derelict Rata. Spirits, I hope that the Commander and whichever poor sods they dragged up their on their special parameter mission knows what they're in for.  
When I have an opportunity, I should write Kraxxi. That is, of course, before they decide to classify the information again, for Raven only knows what reason. As if that'd help.  
  
Anyway, it's quiet for the remainder. The Asuran vault above us suddenly became a lot more interesting, but we're taking it slow and steady. Mostly because we're working on secondary and tertiary objectives. I do wonder how long the Warmaster is going to have us camp out in this spider-infested scrapyard. No doubt we'll redeploy to the Savage RIse once we're done here, however long that'll take. Meanwhile, I just hope this volcano doesn't decide to rumble, or we're all categorically fucked.  
  
Oh, that reminds me, Renn apparently decided I was worthy of carving, so she fashioned me into a wooden figure, replete with shield and sword. I'll keep it asides for Reuzen's wooden toy army. It's a bit out of scale with how large I normally carve his warriors, but maybe I can be some sort of giant. I miss the boy. I really do. And Hejja, of course, though she's still just a little baby. It's odd, everytime I come back from leave, they change so much. I forgot how fast children grew up.

# 75th of Scion

Draconis Mons, Ancient Hollow.  
  
Deployment orders unchanged, spent most of the day fiddling about. Not a lot to say, asides that the mountain is still hollow, and there's still condensation dripping down non-stop in thick, heavy drops. It's actually worth keeping the helmet on, the neck guard does wonders to stop the worst from just running down my back. Saying that, though, there are moments when I'm thankful for the rain. Keeps things cool.  
  
You know, I think Kristen would have liked to see this. I miss her, certainly. Maybe that's just me projecting then, eh?  
Reminds me of that time we went hunting out in Frostgorge, tracking drakes and critters in the day, sleeping under a single fur at night to keep out the cold. I wonder what she'd have to say about all of this, the hollow cavern, the rogue god supposedly perched at the top of the Titan's Throat. I wonder what lesson Leopard's wisdom has for this specifically. I honestly don't know what Bear would say. Maybe I should ask.  
Or, knowing, it'll be Hejja that knows the true wisdom of it all. I hope she sleeps well, with da out here, chasing gods and dragons for her.

# 76th of Scion

Draconis Mons, Ancient Hollow.  
  
Deployed to the Nu Vault above us, finally. Turned out to be a bit of a bust. Rather than a pathway into Rata Arcanum, as I was hoping we'd find, it was more like a derelict holding area. There was a huge sentry golem that welcomed us 'back', which was strange, and then told us we had full clearance to enter. Inside was just a toxic fungal infestation, a spider hive and only a single actual device of any value. It didn't look like anything I had seen before, but that's not unusual for an Asuran contraption. An entire species does nothing but invent gubbins, they have devices that look like anything. Despite my cautioning to take things easy, Vaxun decided to jump the gun and start messing around with it before I got the rest of the unit to a safe distance, which ticked me off no end. Thankfully, it seems Zinn and the Rata Arcanum people somehow decided not to put in place the heavy duty defenses Rata Novus was surrounded with. Considering they were almost wiped out by Chak, that strikes me as a startling unwillingness to learn from their mistakes, but I guess it means we didn't get shredded. The device itself seems to have been purpose built to capture one of those nature spirits. I assume this is part of the conflict between the Rata Arcanum Asura and the spirits that Z.O.X. spoke off.  
Once we pulled out, we actually spotted another of the creepy spirit critters starting at us from a ledge. Forgewood did her entire thing, and communicated with it. Seems the Spirits have names, and they're actually druids of sort. This spirit was called Rosewood, and for all intents and purposes it appeared they mostly just want us to piss off. Thankfully for these druids, I don't think any of us have any reason to stay here once we're done. It might be worth communicating that to Pact command, so they pass that on to the Asura and Priory teams that will undoubtedly will want to deploy here. Knowing what happened to Rata Novus, I feel the place will be swarming with Asura soon after. Spirits, the Warmaster insists she already spotted Inquest here. Now that I think of it, they might have forced access to that vault before we got here, which is why the guardian golem let us pass without issue. Hm.  
Either case, if it was up to me, I'd leave these druids in peace well enough.  
  
Starting to wonder if Balthazar is really up here after all. Despite our orders insisting to the contrary, this place seems to be devoid of any deity. Spirits, we barely see any Destroyers either, except along the rock spurs around the Titan's Throat. Occult apparently went to investigate the crustal structure, so we might get some more answers soon. Shouldn't be too long before we march back to the Savage Rise. Here's hoping we get rotated out of here soon enough, because I'm starting to serious miss seeing the sun. We've been here for a while now, and I'm starting to get used to it, which is scary. So, Commander, whatever game you're paying with gods and men up there, I'd appreciate it if you finished up.  
  
Gave the entire squadron, including myself, punitive duty tomorrow morning. There's been a rising number of smaller disciplinary infractions that are starting to grate on me; so I told them after operations that I would start holding the group responsible for individual mistakes. Of course, that's the exact moment Gunhaut decides to crack some half-arsed joke. So, my only solution was to stick to my word. And that's why I'll be putting them all through some manual labour come the morrow. Why do people always choose the worst moments to let their stupidity come to the fore? I understand some of them are recruits with little field experience, but they will need to smarten up. These small liberties they think they can keep taking will start costing lives when we're thrown into the thick of it. Elementary discipline is required, not optional. Even when I have to resort to bad practices to drill it into them all.  
At least I'll make an effort to be there on punitive duty with them; Blade's failings are mine too.

# 77th of Scion

Draconis Mons, Ancient Hollow.  
  
Started early today, with Blade out for extra duties. I decided I'd make it interesting, and have the sections race each other for some prestige and an extra ration ticket. Thankfully, though, some idiots from Lance decided to come by and gloat. Which lasted just as long as it took for me to draft them into the work duty. Not even Astrid escaped the maze, when the Warmaster decided to remember "Warmaster's Blade" is the full name of the squad. Asides from Sawyer pulling a muscle, everyone came out alright. The entire squad seemed to really pull along in the end, so I decided that the only real losers were Lance squad, and filed a note asking to issue the extra ration to all of Blade. Was good getting my hands dirty, even if it was a pretty pointless task in the end. I had our resident water-carrier, Ffynhonnell, prepare some buckets of war water to clean up after, which also ensures the entire squad's squeaky clean.  
  
Later, Cheery had the troops practice field triage, with mixed results. I heard a lot of raised voices, and somehow tempers were getting sparked. It does little to inspire me; triage and medical care is the exact moment when you should keep your cool. Thankfully, I was spared the details, since Cheery seemed to have it all in hand.  
Allowed me to speak with the Warmaster for a bit; seems we'll be moving back to Savage Rise soon enough, now we're done here. Ironically leaving behind three perfectly serviceable latrine trenches for the spiders to reclaim once we're gone. Ah well.  
Alleshia also told me the tale of the druids: Krytans who were so connected to the earth, they became spirits, scions of Melandru. If these spirit-druids are here, I wonder if she's here too. Perhaps Balthazar is trying to tap into her magic? Just another guess to add to the every growing list of questions we can't answer. What even motivates a god?  
Are they even real? Despite our reports, it seems no-one has actually seen them so far. Considering there are old tales that say you turn blind when you see them, perhaps that's a good thing. Well, as ever, we'll see what revelations the next few days bring.  
  
Had an ale from the rations with Ookdstrid later. I assume it was near to evening, but it is hard to say without sunlight. Spoke a few jokes and boasts, but mostly enjoyed the taste of the drink. I miss sunlight, and snow, and kegs of ale to drink until you can't stand anymore. Bah, and even if we get any leave, I'll be saddled with seven days of it in Lion's Arch. Astrid's agreed to help me arrange the moot anyway, though, so that's good. Hopefully spend the few hours I'll have after duties on important things, rather than trying to half-arse a moot.  
Can't wait to see Kristen again. Thankfully, they can take my days, but they can't take my evenings!

# 78th of Scion

Draconis Mons, upper Savage Rise.  
  
Eventful day. We've packed up, and moved the encampment back to the upper Savage Rise, near to the passage up to the upper tiers. March went without issue, but we were only just setting back in when something very strange happened. First, there was a deafening roar. Seemed like the Titan's Throat finally gave voice. What followed was a serious, minute-long earthquake that shook the mountain up pretty badly. Thankfully, we were near some trees, which anchored themselves into the rock decently enough. No-one got hurt from the falling debris directly, though, but it was a worrying experience. We're still not sure what exactly caused it. I got sent out with the squadron to check up on the camps down the lower tiers, and see if they suffered any damage. I saw some minor injuries, and the submarines too some minor hits, but our way out of here is still there. More worrying is that one of the Asura techs down at the landing spotted a massive magical spike right inside the Titan's Throat just as the quake happened.  
By the time Blade got back up to the camp, it turned out that the quake stirred a bunch of the wildlife up, and Lance allowed itself to get trampled a little. We got some serious injured, but I heard Ram managed to headbutt major saurian in the process of getting gored, so not all bad. He's still alive, though, thankfully.  
  
So, right now, everything a big question mark. No-one on the ground has any clue what just happened, and we're not in any position to find out. I honestly thought the volcano was erupting, and that we'd all die while the volcano shook itself apart. Right now, i'm just listening for minor tremors, worrying we'll all be buried, desperate trying to run down to the landing.  
It'll pass. If I think about it too much, I'll let it get to me. Best concentrate on trying to figure out what in Torment we're supposed to be doing there, eh? Who knows, maybe the Commander's to blame for the Titan's Throat hiccuping, and we can all go home.

# 79th of Scion

Draconis Mons, upper Savage Rise.  
  
No news. No new tremors either. I guess things will just remain as they are. It's starting to feel like we're trapped inside some eternal jungle. The lack of night and day is making it very difficult to tell time is passing at all. Falling asleep, I sometimes wake up, and I have no idea if I slept for two hours or twelve.  
It's starting to grate me. I'd like to get out of here, but we're just stuck waiting to be buried under the next seismic tremor passing through the Titan's Throat.  
Blegh.  
  
I'll stop writing, and try to get some sleep.

# 80th of Scion

Draconis Mons, upper Savage Rise.  
  
Nothing happens all day, and then we get a letter that turns the world upside down. Turns out that all those wild speculations might actually have been right for a change. We got a missive from command, less than an hour ago from when I'm writing this, stating we're to commit to the upper tiers. Whatever 'sensitive' operation was ongoing is now over, and were also responsible for the massive quake we all experienced. What's more, Balthazar was indeed *here*, but isn't anymore, for whatever reason. The letter doesn't go into much detail, except instructing us to now commit troops to the upper tiers, and essentially clean out the region of anything that isn't inclined to surrender to us.  
There's an even more curious addition at the end, noting that Balthazar may have done something to Jormag and Primordius, the latter of which is noted down as being buried directly below this mountain. Thankfully, our great fiery dragon friend seems to be dormant, and destroyer activity is sharply declining around the region. It's true that it has been quite quiet for a few days. And that's where the letter ends. Curious thing.  
I'm anxious to hear the next report. Jormag was mentioned only in passing, but it might be too much to hope that both them are quietly buried under some mountains. I'm also greatly worried about being in a hollow volcano that apparently lies above a Elder Dragon. If Promordius awakens, forget earthquakes or volcanic eruptions, we'll have something else entirely to worry about.  
Frankly, it's all a bit much. The scope of what that letter describes is so surreal, I probably wouldn't have believed it, if I didn't know for a fact such things were possible. We'll set to cleaning out the scum left behind in the Balthazar's wake, I suppose, and then see where we're sent. Guess we're not done in here yet.

81st of Scion  
Draconis Mons, upper tier. Called the Heathen's Hollow, which I find slightly ironic, considering.  
  
We're huddled inside a small cavern, below a nature ridge. On one side of the ridge, south, there is a rough rock accumulation before the ground dips away, and leads down into the Savage Rise, and the lower tiers of Draconis Mons. It's lousy with wandering elementals, all of which react with great hostility to our presence. On approach here, they earth elementals started lobbing rocks down at us, like an avalanche. We had to forgo conventional means, and use mesmer magic to get Blade squadron on top of the approach, so we could slay the elementals, and allow for passage up.  
The other side of the ridge, north of us, is mercenary territory. They have a sprawling camp, dotted with heavy duty gun turrets that overlook the entire area. We're covered, as long as we remain in the shadow cast by the near-constant orange glare of the Titan's Throat. The mercenaries are well entrenched, with steel fortifications. They made a hole in the Titan's Throat, and are harvest the magma that froths up from it, diverting it in a flow down to a basin where they keep a giant magam wurm. Scout reports said they fed it with bloodstone. I saw it, briefly, when I was bellying across the rock to get a clearer view at the camp. It's not the first lava wurm I've seen, though I wonder why they keep it as they do. Is it a pet? Or some sort of experiment?  
Either case, the mercenary fort is squarely in our way, and we'll be committing to attempting to seize it by force sooner or later. It's bound to be hectic, but we've already covered most of the ground. Spirits, we're literally sleeping under their guns. If they knew we were here, no doubt they'd try to shell the ridge until the cavern collapsed. I heard some people complain about the precarious situation, but then I think they'd have complained more if they were forced to sleep out in cannon's view. At least now, we can get some rest.  
Bad news is, the ceiling clearance is a lot lower than I'd have hoped. Since our only heavy weapon is a mortar, that's an issue. Unless I try and fire it a really flat arc, which will be tricky. Doubly so when they outgun me. I'm not so keen at attracting counter-battery fire before I've even ranged in halfway. And unless I want to try and skip mortar shells along the cavern roof, it means it's going to remain in its box. I suspect we'll gain more by closing the distance before they know we're here. I don't doubt we'll win in a combat crush. Doesn't really matter how well-armed mercenaries are they're not Vigil. If they think a little cannonry will scare us off, they're sorely mistaken.  
  
The good news, at least, is that once we're done punching through the upper tier here, we're ready to be rotated out, and shipped back home. Balthazar is no longer on this damn island, so neither should we. I'm fairly sure the rumour of Primordius sleeping below this mountains is more a myth than an actual fact. Or I hope it is, as I can see command constructing an excuse to keep us in this hollow even longer. I swear, at this rate, I'll end up like a dredge. I need to see some actual sunlight soon, or I'll go insane.  
All the more reason to get those mercenaries crushed cleanly and quickly, I suppose.  
  
Y'know, if I tell about this tour in Hoelbrak, no-one's going to believe me.

# 82nd of Scion

Draconis Mons, Heathen Hold.  
  
You know, I remember a time when I was used to noting down the wind direction. That isn't even that long ago when you consider it, but it feels a lot longer.  
  
We're still behind our ridge, making preparations for the attack on the fort. We have taken some measures, and I have a fair idea how to knock out the enemy cannons, but it'll still be a roll of the dice to see if we come through unscathed. We're only going to survive if we can deliver the right amount of overwhelming shock and awe, quick enough. I won't go into details for obvious reasons, but I hope luck is on our side.  
  
It's also just norn officers now. Warmaster was recalled for debriefing, probably because of how major the entire area of operations seems to have become in the scheme of things. I am pleased to hear that command at least trusts us enough to perform a high-intensity clean up operation without a ranking Warmaster at the rudder. Either that, or they're promoting Alleshia to an operational command, and throwing us a bone. I doubt it, but you never know. I honestly think I'd be too homesick to be an effective Warmaster. Starts to affect your decision making, after all. Anyway, we're set to finish up this deployment; no doubt it'll be some very intense last days. Probably the most intense days of the tour, bar a few Destroyer hives giving us some trouble. The goods news is that we're set to go home soon.  
  
I should rest. I want to be up early to make sure everything's set and ready to go.  
Sleeping in this cave... well, it's awkward. We're all packed together, like drunks in a mead hall. I dread the idea of waking up and having to take a piss, because I'd have to navigate across a tapestry of sleeping people to get to the exit, and there's a very real risk I crush someone to death by accident if I trip. Now that'd be a shitty way to die.

# 83rd of Scion

Dracons Mons, northern side of the Heathen Hold.  
  
Long day today. We committed to assaulting the hold itself earlier today, after much planning. I'm pleased to say my plan for the assault on the base worked as intended. I spent much of yesterday and the day before retooling munitions with some of the white phosphorus from the mortar munitions, with trace amounts of thermite, as well as packaging several smoke bales in safe-carry satchels. Then I had Crawley move up along the ledge above the mercenary camp with Calder as a spotter, and fire anti-materiel rounds into the munitions dumps of the cannon emplacements. The idiots kept their ordnance stacked next to the batteries, completely uncovered. Careless, I think.  
Either case, when the munitions started exploding, we laid down a smokescreen and stormed across the valley into the fortifications. The idea was that they'd be too bewildered by the sudden assault to mount much of a response, especially with sniper fire blowing up their defensive emplacements. And it worked, none of the main guns got a shot off before we were in between them. Then it went quickly. Honestly, we ripped them apart up close. They didn't mount an effective defense, and only managed a feeble counterattack. They pitched barrels of bloodstone into the lava basin though, and roused their pet wurm as a last ditch effort. That might've worked against other mercenaries, but I've honestly seen worse things. We put the enraged critter down, after which the mercenaries surrendered. Their officers all carried these odd houndskin mantle, which they tore from their shoulders as a sign of submission. A nice enough trophy to bring home, I think, eh?  
Anyway, we've taken a good two dozen captives, and rear echelon troops are moving up from the Savage Rise to follow up on our success. We've ordered our supplies forwards, and are now camped on a higher ledge overlooking the northern side of the camp. The view is beyond spectacular. The mercenaries built quite a fort here, and the lava flow from the Titan's Throat fills everything with a diffuse orange light. Like looking into the heart of a furnace. We're right below the roof here. The Throat flares open, great jagged crystals dozens of meter high reaching up, while great columns and arches of rock stand like pillars around us, supporting the very stone we walk on. No sign of any flore or fauna here, save some cave bats, and elementals with a volatile temperament.  
  
One of the prisoners we pulled from a mercenary cage, a former White Mantle, did the smart thing and started spilling the beans as soon as we got him. If what he's saying is true, there's a hidden White Mantle holding somewhere north of Brisban, where they've been keeping a piece of Lazarus the Dire. The real Lazarus, not the pretend-Mursaat that Balthazar masqueraded as. Not sure if he was just spewing nonesense in the hope he'd be released, or if he was serious. Either case, I signed a letter making sure he'll be fast tracked to a Shining Blade Exemplar and thoroughly debriefed. I don't doubt that the Shining Blade will follow up on the intelligence, and prove to be lenient if the man was of service. Probably save his life, if he's smart. The Shining Blade are pretty keen on making examples of all the White Mantle heretics after their attack on the Krytan Throne. Makes you wonder how much effort we go through to capture these White Mantle prisoners, only for the Shining Blade to hang them out of hand. At least the mercenaries here might be given some leniency. The state the prisoner camps were in though, I suspect the houndskin-wearing officers will be looking at the inside of a dark cell inside the Vigil Keep for a long time.  
  
We're not done yet anyway. There's one more path for us to march down, and then all our objectives will be accomplished, and we can go home. Soon. Very soon.

# 84th of Scion

Draconis Mons, Landing.  
  
Another long day. We found Rata Arcanum alright, a warren of narrow canyons overrun by Inquest. We took the long march there, and then started driving those long-ears out of there. Of course, they had an Asura gate leading back to Raven know where, and the skirmish that followed was just their rearguard action. They even threw a heavy duty battle golem at us to buy some more time. I can't say how many got away, but at least we sabotaged the gate, so they're not coming back the way they left.  
  
With that done, we marched all the way back down to the landing. Let the rear echelon and fresh rotation clean up the mess. We also recovered an unconscious Asura, whom Sel is claiming is their mother. I'm worrying why she would be in an Inquest base, but her state suggest she was a captive, rather than a member of the Krewe. Either case, she has not woken up, so I've left Sel and Mithra to watch over her.  
  
Tomorrow morning, we should have a submarine ready to carry us back to Kryta, and some well deserved rest. First thing I'll do when I arrive is write Kristen.

# 85th of Scion

Lion's Arch, Fort Marriner.  
  
Sunlight! Actual, real, sunlight on my skin! And a night sky! Spirits, I missed seeing stars.  
  
So yes, our submarine arrived at the landing in the early morning. I was already up and about; got woken up by some minor commotion about one of the rear echelon scouts having nicked a plowhead egg, and incubated it for the shits and giggles. The camp's supplymaster found out, and was going to release the critter back into the wild. I have a better idea, though, so I decided to take ownership of the hatchling, and have it temporarily put into holding pen for war animals. It survived the transit alright, and now it's in the stable. Good. Young critter like that's perfect.  
  
Anyway, yes, we spent a horrifyingly long time all stacked on top of each other in a large metal cigar, but it was worth it. It's like seeing grass for the first time after having spent half a year in Orr. I looked up, and I nearly blinded myself looking straight into the afternoon sun. Then it was just some formalities, a couple of promotions for the recruits that lasted the full deployment, and then seven days of soft leave! Not what they were hoping for, but still pretty good, I think. I sent out some letters, including to the sweetheart. Here's hoping Kristen won't begrudge spending leave in Lion's Arch again. It's not ideal, but then we'd be stupid to let any time we have for family be squandered. I'm a little bent out of shape about having to perform bloody work duties in the morning, but it's only from eight bells morning to eight bells afternoon. Means we have most of the late afternoon and evening for ourselves.  
There's a joke to be made about only needing five minutes.  
  
Anyway, the journey has been taxing, and I'm going to look deep down a few mugs of ale before I go to bed. Should give me a solid night's sleep before the morning. Here's hoping the military post works quickly.

# 86th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Long day. No news from anyone yet. Going to sleep early.  
Hanging under a warship for a day is exhausting.

# 87th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Still nothing. Spent a long day welding patches over airship damage, and discussing how to replace structural struts in the hull without crippling the vessel. Hoped to see my children in the evening, but nothing yet. Maybe tomorrow.  
Doesn't matter. I'll hit the pub, relish the ale, and sleep.  
I hate work duty.

# 88th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
It's actually the morning of the 89th now, I just... well, I was a bit busy to write an entry yesterday evening. Spent the day working on replacing a central beam along a deck, which meant we had to wedge in temporary supports to keep the hull from collapsing like a busted lung. Tiring work. We had to have four people wrench the screw mount in position before we cut the bent support out. Worse, we had to tether the entire ship, and cut out the balloon girders so we could crane in the support. Took us most of the day, and we're likely going to finish that up later. I need to wash up, and then get to the Aerodrome before the foreman writes me up as late.  
  
Anyway, the real news is that Kristen arrived yesterday evening, along with Reuzen and Hejja. They've shacked up at Lionhead's, giving Leif some time to play with the little ones a bit. It was damn good to see them all; it also means we the moot's on! I just wish I could spend the entire day with them, but ah well.  
Unfortunately, the little ones had to go to bed soon after they arrived, but that just meant Kristen and I had an evening to ourselves. Hence why I didn't bother making a note in my journal yesterday.

# 89th of Scion

Lion's Arch.  
  
Well, work news is simple. Spent the rest of the day, since what I wrote this morning, setting that support into place, and then punching rivets to keep it secured. It's almost as good as new now. After replacing the entire balloon array, we're down to laying down the wires and conduits for the magical systems. It's a step up from the old designs, replacing a bunch of the mechanical material with more advanced hardware. Pretty sure some of it was reverse engineered from the Aetherblades, and then improved upon by the Pact. They perform better in almost every way. The only issue is the increased complexity. I can figure out some of the basics, but you really need to have an Asuran College degree to fully understand all of those systems. Thankfully, at least, the interface is written in New Krytan, rather than Asuran. I'm picking up some things, though. They have holographic instrumentation, hah. I can remember when it was all just dials and whistles.  
  
Anyway, that was most of the day. I passed by the barracks in the afternoon, to check up on a few things. We got a deployment schedule in that's also extended our leave with two full days. Might get to spend a few days at home then, hm? More orders arriving when leave's over, probably back into the thick of things.  
Also bumped into Irma Meadows, of all people, who was skulking around Lion's Arch. Without her boots, as usual. It's always good to see old pack members. I also invited her to the moot, which is now due to happen in three days. With the extra leave days, we can get outrageously drunk, and not worry about the repercussions too much.  
  
Was in time to enjoy some evening brawls at Lionhead's place, with Reuzen on my knee. Not a bad bout, I'll give them that. There was this Sylvari wielding a pair of daggers that moved like a dancer. Stole the show, and with good reason. Lionhead's not afraid to let them bleed in the ring a little. Not sure if the boy enjoyed it or not, but I'm happy to have him and Hejja here. They've both been growing quite well. Hejja's hair's started to grow, so she looks less like a pink lump. Looks like she'll take to her mother in looks, though, which is good! Freyja took after me, and she can look like an angry ox when she goes cross. Best Hejja has Kristen's lines in the face, I think.  
We put them both to bed at dusk, and then I took Kristen out swimming. I showed her the hollow behind the waterfall east of Marriner, and then we made love there. It was... something different. Spiritual, almost, with the rushing water and the near-darkness, drowning out everything else. Kristen and I've always enjoyed our sex before, but this was different. Fundamental... No, more like primal. As if our spirits melded together, and we briefly, truly, become one.

# 90th of Scion

Lion's Arch, Fort Marriner.  
  
Another long day in the Aerodrome. They're making good bloody use of the extra workforce by committing to a lot of major refit work. Still, it's good to see the progression. We're cleaning up a lot more weathering and general structural damage than actual battle damage. Since the Magus Falls, it seems our warships aren't getting a lot of return fire. Still, the amount of dented keels does tell me the new holographic instrumentation isn't a substitute for a good helmsman yet.  
  
Still, things improved markedly when the day was over. Seems news about the moot travels fast, so Hrist and Hildr showed up. Half of Hoelbrak'll be here before the season's out at this rate, hah! Not that I mind. Freyja showed up with Aska too, which has turned our little corner of Lion's Arch into a madhouse. Aska's doing well, energetic as any girl in her age. She plays hunting games with Leif and Reuzen, though I think she's a little too rowdy for the little lads sometimes. Give it a few years, though, and they'll be causing all sorts of mischief. Hejja's thankfully spared the general chaos by keeping in the crib, or in with Kristen. It's.... uh, exhausting, in a good way. Like getting trampled by a very happy Dolyak.  
  
Thankfully, the children wear themselves out before long, and they were all neatly knocked out a bit after dusk. The mugs of warm milk with honey and a measure of rum is doing wonders in keeping them sound asleep, which gave me an opportunity to talk about what we learned from the deployment so far. Everyone present save Lionhead was a Companion, and we were only missing Inkblot, which meant we also spoke about Jormag and Braham up north. News is that Destiny's Edge is out there, trying to pin down the dragon, but that's relatively old news. I told them about the command notice we got, saying Primordius might have gone dormant, and we had a long discussion about what that could mean for Jormag, and what we could be expected to do. It's all very... confusing. I'm starting to feel that we're delaying too much. Spirits, I remember when Braham cracked the Fang, and we were all worried Kristen would still be heavy with child when the day to go north comes, but now Hejja's born, and the Vigil seems adamant about chasing off after Balthazar, while Braham still has not called us north. It's getting to the point where I'm wondering if Braham is being overly cautious. I just hope to the Spirits that whatever Balthazar did, it didn't stir Jormag awake fully. If that's the case, then Braham and Destiny's Edge might already be dead. It's a gloomy thought. Whatever happens though, we're all ready to draw our swords, and direct our gazes north should it be needed. We're a fearsome enough collection of warriors, and we'll make a dent where-ever we commit.  
  
Anyway, enough doomsaying. I need to go to bed early, since I'm up in the early morning tomorrow again.  
  
Oh, before I forget! I wrote to the Hwacha Kraal when we returned from Draconis Mons, asking them to send a beastmaster here to collect that Arrowhead hatchling I impounded. A large fellow by the name of Varga showed up, and I could take a break from my regular work to sign him over the critter. His eyes lit up, and he gracious accepted the warbeast as a gift. I've always carried along the debt I owed Burunk and Unger for what they did for me, on those cursed steps in Orr, but now I think I've finally managed to repay a small measure of that. A saurian hatchling is something small, compared to saving a life, but I know Ogres do value their animal husbandry more so than anyone else. Varga noted that he was pleased to know that I remembered their ways, and gave back to the tribe. Well, I hope he's up to the task. The hatchling was already the size of a small drake, no doubt it'll grow to become a fearsome creature sooner rather than later.

# 1st of Colossus

Lion's Arch.  
  
Another long day of work. I'll be glad when it's over. Not that I don't enjoy doing something I'm reasonably skilled at, but the real wear comes from the impatience for the day to be over. I count the hours, wondering every five minutes if the hour has passed yet. When they sound the bell for the shift, it's always with palpable relief that I drop what I'm doing, and walk out that door.  
  
Anyway, afternoon was pleasant, as always. Crowded, like the Great Lodge after a great hunt, but that's something good I suppose. Freyja and Aska had been about town, apparently ran into Inkblot and Embersong before. Freyja thinks they're a bit odd, but I'm pretty sure she thinks that of everyone. Grace was playing with the kids, some sort of hide and seek game that knocked them out pretty early. And I do mean "them", as in her and the children. Hejja was a bit restless, kept waking up and crying in the early evening, until I put the jade wind orb da gave me a while ago into the crib. I think the soft whisper of the trapped wind calmed her right down again. Little girl's not used to Lion's Arch, I think. Smells different, sounds different, feels different. It's okay though, after the moot tomorrow, we can go back to Hoelbrak, and she'll be peachy, wrapped in a hare's coat.  
  
I'm very tired now, though. Kristen's going to work some knots out of my shoulders and back before bed, so I'm looking forwards to that. I deserve to be pampered now and again too, I think, carrying the weight of half the world on my shoulders... Spirits, I pity those poor sods who don't have anyone to occasionally rub their feet, or surprise them with a delicious meal out of the blue. Just as long as I give back what I receive of course. It's easy to start taking... all of this, around me, for granted, when it really isn't. It's years of hard work, dedication and love poured into life. When I was young I always though the hardest part about building a homestead would be the lodge. Turns out the hardest part is having something worthy to build a lodge for.  
  
One day.

# 2nd of Colossus

Lion's Arch.  
  
Last day of work duty, so I'm not even going to mention it. That way, it's behind me nice and squarely.  
  
The moot was after, and I think it went very well. We had kegs of drink rolled out, along with some foodstuffs. Half the Chapter showed up in the end, and it turned into a regular mess. Astrid lost a drinking bet against Caeranis, and conceded to having her hair cut as penance. Freyja used her greatsword for it, and nearly beheaded her in the process. So, now Astrid's got the most crooked haircut you've ever seen. Freyj seemed adamant on getting utterly sloshed, and I think she dragged Inkblot along with her during the binge. No doubt we'll see how bad the hangover is in the morning. I'm not that drunk, but I stayed quite long after, so Kristen was asleep by the time I came back home. Mind's to wake her up, but I won't. It's actually kind of quiet in here.  
Nauja came all the way from Hoelbrak, with the regards from the steading. She also accepted my offer to join the Companions. It seems the little guild is growing slowly but steadily. With all the uncertainty, it's nice to be laying down a foundation. Hopefully, when the storm eventually breaks, we'll weather it.  
  
Spirits, and tomorrow we can head back to Hoelbrak. Two days to sleep off a hangover, before we're sent back into the thick of things.

# 3rd of Colossus

Hoelbrak.  
  
Tired. Long journey here, spent most of the day walking about, saying goodbye to Grace, Freyja and Aska, and then to Nauja. Then went playing in the snow with Reuzen along the Mourn, didn't fall asleep, and finally emptying a few steins of ale with da over a long story.  
Tired and drunk. Good to be home. Sleep long, tomorrow, I think, and then find cheese-covered Dolyak meatballs and eat as much as I can stomach. Yes. I like this plan.

# 4th of Colossus

Hoelbrak.  
  
Good day today. Slept in so long, Kristen was already out of bed, and in a Leopardskin by the time I woke up. She had Hejja on her arm, and was recounting the old tales of wisdom to a gathered crowd of children and petitioners, the lines well practiced and delivered. Being a mother has brought her that gravitas and grace of an Elder, even though she is still many years away from being anywhere close to considered old. I wonder if others see me with the same colours and hue. Certainly, we're respected warriors, the both of us, our reputation well-earned.  
  
Slipped out in the afternoon, and went stalking for my favourite meatball vendor, whom I left a silver richer, before I went to pick up my little lad from Hrist. Ran into Aghi there at Raven Lodge, where the lad is learning to become a shaman now. Good man. He wrote me a letter before, but apparently it passed me to Lion's Arch. Doesn't matter, better to be there in the flesh, I think. While the little Jotunling chased after the Ravens, we caught up. He heard word of the Companions, and offered to take the pledges too. Our ranks swell! Soon it won't be a company, but a veritable host of warriors. Still no news from the far north, however, not even in Hoelbrak. The Fang still stands cracked, and the warriors boast of casting Jormag down from the sky, and brewing ale from his blood, but their axes remain unblooded while Braham Eirsson does not call us forth.  
I did get a letter from the Warmaster, telling us to arrive early in Lion's Arch tomorrow. Our briefing will be... something, apparently. I wonder if the day has come, then, finally? We'll see.  
  
It's now a little past dusk; I have the boy back with his mother, Hrist, and I'm about to go have an ale with Usha, who only arrived back here from the Black Citadel an hour ago. I'll try not to drink too much, on account of an early morning, but I fear for my sobriety when it comes to Snowbanished. I suppose we'll see. It'll be a day of catching up with old friends, eh? Takes the mind of the resent I keep feeling at having to be up and away again come the morrow. Spirits, I wonder if we'll ever get a full season's leave. What would I even do with all that time?

# 5th of Colossus

Lion's Arch.  
  
So, we got the briefing.  
Uh.  
Well, yeah. Okay, we're going to deploy away from Tyria, and into the Crystal Desert. Apparently that's where Balthazar went, and there's been a sudden influx of refugees from a place called "Amnoon". Apparently Palawa Joko diverting the river Elon ensured that there is now a free city built along the mouth of the Elon. Since Balthazar is still a danger, we're being sent after him. We haven't told the troops yet, but they'll hear soon enough. Right now, I'm wrapping my head around the notion that I need to compose an ordnance package for a location I haven't even seen before. I might just prepare a full expedition package, and talk to the Priory people about what they usually bring. Maybe dig out the lists we used for the Silverwastes.  
  
Spirits, thinking about it, how close did we come to discovering Amnoon? We sailed so close. If that city really exists, we can't have been more than a few days sailing away from finding a trace of them. Imagine that. Inches away from being a true pioneer, and discovering the way into a long-lost part of the world again. Well, I'll see what I missed out on soon enough. Can't wrap my head around it yet.  
  
Also, Jormag went asleep. Apparently, the Commander had a face-off with Balthazar, during which Primordius and Jormag were put asleep. How this happened, I don't know. I'm not exactly sure why this is a bad thing either, but the intelligence seems pretty adamant about Balthazar not being on our side. Apparently, he's persecuting his goals with such reckless abandon that command thinks there's a real threat to Tyria itself. A rampaging god does sound like a pretty bad deal. I'm not sure what that means for the norn, the Companions and Braham Eirsson's great hunt, but if Jormag is dormant... Well, then our priorities have shifted. As much as I am tempted to return home, and wait to hear what will happen now, my duty to the Vigil is more immediate. I'm sure da or Kristen will send me a letter when there's new. I imagine it will take a while for the news to disseminate, and things to fall back into place.  
I admit I am disappointed, and not a little confused.  
  
Onto more personal matters, apparently Bjorn and Maeva finally decided to become an item. Maeva apparently was hesitant about it, following some principles about adhering to her duties. I wasn't entirely sure what the conflict was, but I can respect that well enough. Still, that sort of tension has to run its course, or it'll become a problem later. Anyway, they'll have a lovely desert trip to figure out how unpleasant being extremely sweaty in a small tent can be.  
I'm going to miss Kristen when we're away. Might be a long deployment.

# 6th of Colossus

Lion's Arch.  
  
Preparation work was poor today. Despite my best efforts, there is virtually nothing I could find about any place called the Amnoon, asides that it's supposedly a in the Crystal Desert. Cartography records either don't exist, or are copies of copies of copies, made more than two centuries ago. Some of them still have their edges marked with "here be dragons", and a poorly drawn little critter. Ironic. Anyway, I'll set off towards the Priory on a fact-finding mission tomorrow, and have one of their scholars dig up anything they know. Freyja might be able to help me dig up something, she has a nose for old ruins and such. If not, I'll just have to assemble the materiel package for the engineers by the seat of my pants. At least I'm fairly certain we won't need the storm boats, or diving gear, in the desert.  
  
Warmaster and Maeva went out for a walk, left me as "Tactician for a day" as a lark. I gave a round of drinks in the tavern as a high note, bolster morale a little, which I think went well. Mostly norn. Both Renn and a new transfer, and old brick of a warrior called Ranek, have decided to join the Companions, which means the majority of the Chapter norn are now also my guild members. I couldn't have asked for finer warriors to have by my side, truth be told, but I feel that with Jormag going asleep, all of our efforts might have been premature. A disappointment, certainly. I just hope it was merely a delay, one we can exploit to prepare better, and to ensure we will all stand united when the time is ripe. We cannot live with Jormag hanging over our heads, like a sword waiting to fall, for much longer. Jormag may be asleep for now, but we'll be ready to put him down for good the moment he blinks open an eye once more.  
  
Anyway, aye, the evening was pleasant enough, though I am starting to think that some of our lasses really need to find a man to settle them down once in a while. Hearing them, you'd think I was bedding every woman I meet as a matter of principle, and half of Hoelbrak is populated with my offspring. Frankly, asides from the jeering and a passing appreciation for the female form, I have little interest in any of them beyond friendship. Now, that is not to say I couldn't, if I had such a desire, but I am rather content with my Kristen. Unless she suddenly decides she'd like to have another woman in the bed alongside us two, I suspect that it will remain that way.  
  
Which reminds me, I should write Kristen tomorrow, when I have time. We're about to be gone for a good while, and I should let her know we have confirmation that Jormag is dormant. It'll be hard being away for so long again.

# 7th of Colossus

Lion's Arch.  
  
Preparing. I went to the Priory early this morning, through the pass in the east, on a fact-finding mission. Sadly, the girls weren't there today. When I asked about them, I was told they were away on some errand or other of which I din't ask the details. Ah well. I suppose I did see them at the moot before, so... Anyway, the Priory did have a lot of material hidden away on the Crystal Desert. So much, in fact, it would take many days to sift through it for anything usual. Thankfully, I was spared that labour by the sheer dint that I couldn't read any of them. The Priory's translated the most important works to New Krytan. Much easier, but also much reduced in quantity. I found some interesting works describing land surveys made by colonists under the Primeval Kings, and a more recent retelling of a ritual known as the Ascension, at a place called Augury Rock. It's said to bring you in communion with the gods, and unlock hidden reserves of power. Maybe this is what Balthazar is after? The Priory scribes seem to think that the area was frequented by the Forgotten, the same snake-people that allied with Glint, and helped her build Tarir. Makes me wonder what ever happened to that dragon egg Freyja told me about. Anyway, the texts are all ancient, and describe places that are utterly barren and lifeless. Considering the amount of refugees finding their way here, I find it hard to believe the place is still utterly inhospitable. I've secured permission from the Warmaster to head out and hand out some rations to those folks, and perhaps see if any of them are willing to tell us something about where they came from. Maybe it'll help me prepare better for whatever we're about to fly into. At least it isn't another Elder Dragon.  
Though saying that, Kralkatorrik is said to have flown south into the Crystal Desert. I imagine if he was in play, though, we'd be seeing a military mobilization on a much grander scale. We'll see what happens.  
  
Onto the more personal notes, seems everyone is doing well. We're getting a number of recruits in to account for the last batch of drop-outs. I never bother naming people in here anymore, but there's still the constant flux of people coming and going, with a few steady veterans holding the entire thing together. I'm going to whip up a proper meal for the troops on the 9th, along with Gunhaut. His antics in Draconis Mons seem to have him perturbed, which I suppose is partially my problem for using him as a scapegoat to harden Blade's discipline. So, I'll help him reestablish some goodwill. He's a good lad, just... well, he's a very stereotypical norn, and not always in the good way. He'll buck the bit a little, if not deliberately. Anyway, the way to any soldier's heart should lay through their stomach, so I'll do my penance and help the lad cook up a proper feast. Hopefully the others will see it as the sign of goodwill it is.  
  
Asides from that, I spoke to the Skylarks about their memories of Elona before they became Zephyrites, though they mostly drew a blank slate. They were pretty young back then. They did tell me of Hydra, which I think are large triple-headed beasts of legend. Apparently they're real enough. I'm looking forwards to seeing if they make good hunting. Also wrote to Kristen, in a miserly letter that once again remind me how much I hate writing to her. It never feels good enough. Thankfully, I know she knows me, and that she understands. If not, I could sit in front of a blank page for a thousand years, and I would never be able to conjure up words fluent enough to encompass that what we both share, and know. I doubt I'll see her again soon, which makes me broody and nostalgic. We haven't even left yet, and I'm already homesick.  
Well, I hope da will bring you back great tales, Hejja. Take good care of your mother and brother for me, hm?

# 8th of Colossus

Lion's Arch.  
  
Started early today, had a cart loaded with field ration packs from the general store, and then wheeled it out to the Commodore's Quarters, and handed it out to refugees. The Lionguard have been doing a decent enough job of keeping them somewhat comfortable, which isn't surprising. They're slowly adding refugee management to their core skillset. Anyway, there were plenty of people who were willing to talk about what happened to them once they were properly fed, and convinced we were there to help them. The stories we got back from there are a tangled mess of contradictions and what I assume are exaggerations, but some of it has to be true. By and large, a large amount of the people are not only from the settlements around Amnoon Oasis, but actually Elonians from much further south. Many have been exiled from Elona by Palawa Joko, who does still hold sway in the region. Apparently his armies hound the refugees, and they are regularly faced with massacres, starvation, extortion, and a whole list of other crimes and atrocities. No surprise many are fleeing here now. Another very real threat is the looming presence of the Brand and Kralkatorrik's minions. Many of the accounts are confusing, however. One of them described a being which I assume was a Shatterer of sorts. Whatever the case, it seems that the Vigil can do a lot of good down south. I'm just a little worried about facing down an entire kingdom of undead beasts. Oddly, few mentioned anything about Balthazar, though a handful said they had seen creatures of forged metal and fire lay waste to villages. Whether or not that's true, or just trauma distorting reality is hard to tell. Either case, I am not certain we can ever be prepared for whatever we're about to fly into. We'll have to adapt and overcome.  
  
Onto more mundane news, we had medical checks pass through nearer to the evening. Just making sure we're all functioning and ready to go. Tomorrow'll be more exciting. Gunhaut and I will be making food, and Inkblot managed to convince the Warmaster to hold a remembrance for the warriors that fell alongside her on her venture north. A small moot is a good high note to end on before we ship out.

# 9th of Colossus

Lion's Arch.  
  
Kit checks today, which was the same dull affair it usually is. Gunhaut and I whipped out a proper meal afterwards, though, and that was worth it. Made saffron rice and oats, steamed some greens and then simmered them in garlic, and then we had steak and yak-bacon pie along with honey-marinated chicken. Inkblot's remembrance was the perfect occasion to cart it out. Felt like old times, plus an extra mug of ale. Here's hoping Gunhaut's part will have done a good job of redeeming some of his.... less-ideal qualities.  
  
It was a nice break before everything's set drop. Tomorrow, I'll need to finalize the ordnance package, and make sure we're all good to ship out. And then... it's onto new lands, and different foes. Palawa Joko and Balthazar, eh?

# 10th of Colossus

Lion's Arch.  
  
There are these days that I look back on the the years of hard work, tenacious fighting and simply refusing to accept that there are things that cannot be overcome by sheer willpower, and realize we've barely even started climbing the towering peak in whose shadow we have been born, grew up, and will likely die. There is so much that needs to be done. So many battles to be fought, so many evils to be vanquished. But there is no 'end goal'. We work towards something we can never attain. Tyria will never be free of evil. We may limit it, challenge it where it rises, and defeat it before it overwhelms and destroys us, but we will never know a time where warriors like the Vigil's will not be required. You know, in Elona, they founded something like we are, thousands of years ago. The Sunspears. They were sworn to protect the people from evil, a duty they adhered to proudly for untold centuries. And they were celebrated, paragons of virtue that might have stood shoulder to shoulder with the norn's mightiest heroes, and not fall in their shadow.  
I don't doubt that, if they had existed still, they would be our staunchest allies, and we could learn much from them.  
  
I like to think that, one day, I will slay the Elder Dragons, and I would be done with warring and fighting, so I could retire to live a life on the glories and laurels of battle that I have well-earned, and see my own children grow up to build a legend as grand and unspoiled as the heroes of old. Tales of Dwarven-forged steel, giants and Raven's guile. But the truth is, reflecting on the Sunspears and their thousand-year vigil over the Elonian people, I doubt that day will ever come. One day, we might destroy the Elder Dragons, but I don't doubt there will be another evil to be fought as soon as the last evil is put to the sword. I suspect I will see my own children grow up under the same shadows of doom and despair that we've all known, and to become soldiers that fight the same wars as I have been fighting, and their children in turn, until a thousand years later, some foreign warrior looks back at the Vigil's proud history, and idly muses on the struggle between good and evil.  
I fear I might spent the rest of my life, however long that is, longing for an end to a war that is eternal. The hallowed day that I hang my scabbard over my shield, and set it down by the side of the hearth, content that there is no evil left to fight, will never come. I will stand in front of the roads leading away from home a thousand times, and I will always have reason to convince myself to march away. The Sunspears were not merely warriors of moment, they were sentinels. When the foe was vanquished, battle won, and disaster averted, they simply resumed their watch, ready for when the next battle was to be joined.  
It makes me angry to think that they were shattered, and weary knowing we will soon face the same evil that destroyed them. I used to joke that one day, when the Elder Dragons were dead, maybe we'd go south to liberate Elona from Palawa Joko. Seems we might be starting early.

# 11th of Colossus

Lion's Arch.  
  
Well, this is it. Our last day in central Tyria before we're flown out away from home. Tomorrow, we board the airship and we'll in flight for an entire day, before arriving in this fabled Amnoon city. I have the ordnance manifest passed along, and loaded up, along with our supplies. Of course, that means that today is the day when people start asking me if they go on errands or if they can have an extra drink. Carbine asked if she could go out to get a cake for Iluoana's birthday, which is of course not something I can authorize the day before departure. If anything happens now, it'd delay the deployment enormously.  
Instead, I made a pretty basic apple cake using the canteen supplies, and we held a small party for her. It was nothing special, but Iluoana's shyness about it made it endearing. I don't know why I put so much effort into it.  
Actually, that's a lie. I did it because it felt like the sort of thing I should be doing for my children. It bothers me that I miss their birthdays, and that I can be there to bake beautiful cakes for them. I wish I could promise that I'd be there for Hejja's first year, but I doubt that's a promise I can keep. Reuzen will be two near the half of the season, and you can bet if we're shipping to Elona, I won't be there for it. This vexes me terribly. I just feel this hunched cloak of disappointment hang over my shoulders. I wish I could be there. I hope, at least, that Kristen, Da, Usha and Hrist will do their very best to make it memorable nonetheless. Kristen can tell me all about it when I finally return, and I'll make it up to him. We'll go to the Foothills, to Bear's shrine, so he can play in the shallow waters until he falls asleep between the bear cubs.  
  
I've realized that, for all the excitement and the prospect of seeing new a far-fetched corner of the world... I don't want to leave.

# 12th of Colossus

In flight, somewhere west of the Steamspurs. Weather mild, stiff breeze south-east, tailwind. Makes the engines happy.  
  
Well, we're up and away. I've stowed down on the gunnery deck, right next to one of the cannon mounts. The others are packed in like tinned fish on the main deck, sleeping in tight rows with their kit stowed next to them. I don't think many of them will sleep soundly, but that hardly matters.  
I'm still coming to terms that we're flying south so far. I'd think it would feel more... cathartic to finally complete the doomed journey I started so many years ago. All I feel is some vague sense of regret. I remember the names well enough. The Li Jo, Anna, Akxxi, Muller and Arbaea. Just the same mix of Lion's Arch adventurers that were willing to sign up to an ill-fated journey for a modest sum of coin. I don't even remember that much, I only knew them less than a season. They're like that recruit that dies too soon for you to know them. It feels like a failure to remember them, an insult to the notion that my hubris ended up killing them. When we arrive, if I have the chance, I will commemorate their sacrifice. Perhaps maybe we can lay those ghosts to rest.  
  
About that, I spoke to the Warmaster during the flight earlier, shared some of my insights from a few days ago and  
my worries about never finding time to be home. I normally only share that sort of thing with Kristen, but it helped, I think. She told me that, in due time, she would understand if I took an extended leave to spend some time with my family. And not a few days, up to a season. It is a... tempting offer. Perhaps to build the lodge, and watch my children grow up a little, before I return to fight whatever comes next.  
But that's still far away. Tomorrow, we'll see this city of Amnoon. I am not sure what to expect yet.

# 13th of Colossus

Amnoon Oasis, Crystal Desert.  
  
Okay, where to start.  
We arrived early today. The city is... beautiful. It's several large pyramids, built from azure stones, and decorated richly with sand-worn sigils. Banners and streamers of cloth hang from rafters, down between lush plants, and fountains of crystal clear water. It smells of exotic spices, and the pungent and rich smell of the black coffee, mingling with the fresher hint of mint tea. The opulence is both evident, and deceiving. People in richly embroidered robes, wearing jeweled chains and painted faces sit in silk tents. To the north, half the city lies sunken under the sand. A recent sandstorm, terrible and epic in proportion, and then further brought low by the troubles that seem to plague these people. Outside the walls, the tents are like an army encampment, hundreds of people, fleeing away from something.  
  
It started as we arrived. We were in the process of unloading our cargo when we heard the screams, and saw the first flicker of fire. Of course, being foreigners in a strange city, we hesitated to intervene. In the end, it wasn't needed. There was an attack on a casino, perpetuated by what the locals call Awakened. They're the undead minions of Palawa Joko, though they are apparently more sapient than Risen. More so, some of the people here, notably Elonians from further south, view the Awakened as being blessed by Palawa Joko, their god-king. I even saw an Awakened merchant in the streets, peddling wares. Seeing the creatures filled me first with revulsion, but then with pity. I felt a strong need to destroy it, and release its tortured spirit from its prison, but that is apparently not the way things are normally done here.  
You see, Amnoon is an free city. They tolerate the Awakened inside these walls, because it would not do to give offense to Palawa Joko. Though his kingdom lies far to the south, the influence he exercises here is palpable. The local peacekeepers, a gallant group of soldiers called the Cavaliers, seem competent enough at maintaining the peace, but they're hard pressed. Palawa Joko exercises his will here, and they struggle to remain free from his grip. I suppose tolerating these festering corpses to walk the streets, and turning a blind eye on attacks on their people is a small price to pay in the face of being invaded. It smacks of compromise and weakness, but I suppose I have not lived in the shadow of Palawa Joko's evil for as long as they have.  
  
Despite all that, it seems that the most immediate threat is not Palawa Joko at all, but something the locals are calling "forged". Our intelligence of Balthazar coming to Elona was not wrong, and it seems he has found himself use of an army. For a purpose we cannot divine, he seems to be attacking the outskirts of Amnoon, putting even more pressure on the Cavaliers. Thankfully, the city already had a royal Krytan envoy who was more than happy to vouch for the Vigil's good intent, and the Cavaliers have welcomed our assistance. No doubt we will be turning our attention towards those forged soon enough. If Balthazar wants a fight, he picked it with the wrong people.  
  
Everything is overwhelming, and confusing. Palawa Joko, the Forged, the Awakened, these Cavaliers... I expected an outpost, maybe a small trade port. Not this. We'll be needing time to orient ourselves, and think about what actions we commit to, acting in the greater good. Our ultimate objective is still the same, stop what Balthazar is doing, but... everything along the way suddenly became a lot more complex. I don't even think the Warmaster knows what we're planning to do beyond our immediate short-term objectives. Right now, we must get the Chapter mobile, and ready to move, while we provide as much assistance to these people as we can. Whether or not we do that by our standards of those of the local council and the Cavaliers, remains to be seen.  
  
There are still many other things, of course. We're camped outside the southern gate, below a large water pipe that runs down to what I assume is a fresh water pumping station. It would be a crude construction by modern Tyrian standards, but it is still more advanced than many continental cities in the north. I assume it provides them with the clean water flowing through their fountains, and keeping everyone's thirst slaked. The area around us is surprisingly lush, filled with high-reaching palms and broad-leafed plants. I can see the green fields of irrigation farms extend to the east, beyond which the land becomes craggier and sandier, surrendering fully to the dryness of the Crystal Desert.  
  
Further to the west, ships lay in the harbour. A magnificent construction lies in the water, draped with white silk sails, and crowned with a carved lily of radiant light. It is the Lily of the Ebon, some sort of luxury resting place. Luxury seems to stand shoulder to shoulder with poverty here, the sumptuous opulence stubbornly refusing to make way for the more immediate need for survival. The contrast is appalling, but it seems to simply be a way of life here. Desert nomands and refugees drink tea from the same cups as nobles and dignitaries.  
The bay itself is beautiful, lit by braziers held aloft on two lazurite gates that seem to encompass the setting sun. The local boats are small, fishing skiffs or more ponderous pleasure barges not designed to go far from the shore. More stately Tyrian vessels are at anchor nearby, the first traders and Priory explorers already arriving. The city is filled with adventurers and explorers come to discover the new world.  
  
I wish Kristen was here to share all of this with me. Though who knows, maybe I will take her here sometime, in the distant future. Perhaps the locals might have gotten used to the sight of norn by then, or fashioned norn-sized cups.

# 14th of Colossus

The Free City of Amnoon, Crystal Oasis. That's how it's known.  
  
First night here was... good, actually. It becomes cold, and after the blasting, furnace heat of the day, it is quite welcome. I didn't think I'd have an night of being rolled up in my bear skin, but I did, and I slept quite soundly too. Unusual, but welcome. Also didn't dream. Just a constant, grey haze of deep rest.  
  
Duties were a little more mixed. Blade was supposed to provide some direct aid to the Cavaliers, as we promised, but the supply caravan we were supposed to help escort never showed up, neither did their Cavalier escort. We were simply informed that they had been retasked. So, instead, I decided to put some feelers out along the southern road. There's an entire tribe of people living near a smaller oasis east of here, Kusini Crossing. They call themselves the Shaahiran, and apparently they're some sort of desert nomads? They were very distrustful when we arrived. I need to get used to the notion that people here don't know who or what the Vigil are. To them, we're just another band of heavily armed strangers. Anyway, we tried our best to convince them of our good intents, but I suspect they're wary of us simply because we're soldiers. War tends to follow where we go, after all.  
  
Anyway, those poor people aside, the area was lousy with Forged. They operate from a camp hidden out in a ruined village, and threaten travelers and refugees alike. We got up close, trying to get an eye on them, and I must say that Balthazar has indeed 'forged' an army of some ability. They're very durable, living flame clad in steel, and they fight with great innate tactical acumen. They had sharpshooter lay down suppressing fire, and floating-steel clad mages throwing balls of flame from their hand, and generally make them out to be dangerous opponents. Falchion section and I were conducting some recon on the camp when one of the patrols cut us off. I called on Bear's own power, and charged right down their center, while the rest of the section waited in ambush. Managed to turn them all into scrapheap alright, so at least we know we can beat them. I ripped a few of them apart with my claws. It felt right, at least. We're fighting the enemy. I don't know why Balthazar has decided to unleash his army on these innocent people, but we won't stand for it. Maybe Balthazar can retire as the god of bitter defeat once we tread his army into the dust.  
  
Anyway, gutso aside, it felt good to help people, and do some good. It means we're still on the right track, even though we're not sure what our overall objectives are just yet. We'll have to send back details to high command in Tyria, and see what they think.  
  
Spent some time before dusk wandering the city itself. Saw a couple of baubles and trinkets in the market. I'm tempted to buy some souvenirs for Kristen and the children. The local urchins seem to greatly enjoy playing with large and beautifully painted kites, fashioned into the form of local animals. I think I'll get one for Aska, and have it sent home with the postage whenever it leaves. It feels weird to be so far away from home.  
Still. I got here.

# 15th of Colossus

The Free City of Amnoon.  
  
More field operations. We communicated with the Cavaliers, and they noted that the Forged patrols were straying into the fields on the eastern side of the city. Considering the encampment we found, we deployed in full strength, and that was needed, too. The march itself wasn't anything big, but we came under heavy attack as soon as we marched into the direction of the camp. We held our position and repelled repeated assaults until our supplies started to run low, and we pulled back. We put a serious dent in them regardless, but we'll need to strike against that camp if we want to make the region even close to safe.  
  
Today's fighting was ferocious. The fire took, and blazed, and I could hear Bear roar within me even as I hacked at those metal constructs. They just kept coming, and coming, and we just kept destroying them. I worry we might have ruined the fields we were trying to save by fighting in them, but I'm not a farmer.  
  
After that, we went into the city, and I tried some more of their coffee drink. I think I might have had too much, because I feel ill. I was oddly energetic just before, but now I feel hungover and tired. I got some small things for in the postage tomorrow. A kite for Aska, and I actually bought a small statue of Palawa Joko as a souvenir. Fun little things, I think. About as best as Elonian toys go.  
  
Ugh. I need to lie down.

# 16th of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Ill. Off duty for today, while I'm trying to stop myself from staining my breeches.  
Warmaster snuffed out the encampment earlier today, pity I missed the operation. Still, don't think I would've helped much. I'll be better tomorrow.  
  
I am very happy they have running water here. Having to repeatedly sit over boiling hot latrines while I'm sweating like a pig is one of the single worst things I've ever experienced. I feel like I need to scrub myself clean after every time.

# 17th of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Feeling better today. Thankfully, the pressure on the outskirts has lessened, so asides from my single day of missing out on the action, everything has remained somewhat calm. Klixxa has finished her report on the Forged, and Calder seems to be having an unreasonable amount of fun taking apart the one Awakened corpse Occult dragged in. The Forged and Awakened both make strange and dangerous opponents; still, they will yield to Vigil still if and when our paths cross. I sense that it is not wholly to the liking of the locals and their Cavaliers, however. I think I understand their trepidation well enough, they have a different frame of reference. I know a world free of tyranny, a Tyria that united in the face of evil, and came out triumphantly. For the people of Amnoon and the trickle of Elonians, that Tyria is a distant place, and Palawa Joko's realm looms much closer. They move in a different world entirely. Spirits, we Tyrians see it for the veiled evil it is, but they don't. I wonder if they think us judgmental?  
At the best of times, I would venture to call this place beleaguered by evil. Perhaps not as openly or boldly as in open warfare, but it is said that all that is needed for evil to prevail, is that good men do nothing. What would we have done if we had arrived in Amnoon only to find the city firmly in the claws of the lich-king?  
  
And then we have the Forged, of course. The rogue god Balthazar has made himself an army that adds another burden to these troubled lands. I can only guess after the why of it, but it has become increasingly clear that opposing this god is, in fact, the correct course of action. If this god goes around slaughtering innocents, and torching villages like common raiders, he doesn't deserve to be given any respect. What kind of warrior proves his strength by fighting a foe who is too weak to fight back? There is no nobility nor honour in mere butchery. I once held a grudging respect for a being like Balthazar, perhaps even an inkling of admiration at the human tales. Now, I only have contempt and scorn.  
I have no doubt his Forged will fare a lot worse against an opponent whom they can't just shoot in the back. We'll measure Bear's might up against Balthazar's fury, and I'll give them a proper smiting.  
  
See? One day of inaction, and I become bellicose. Regardless, I sent out some letters and some post parcels. I took a moment of the day to go the bazaar out the eastern gate, and got a magnificently painted Elonian mug, though apparently it's supposed to be a vase. I don't mind much, it looks like a very bug mug, or a pitcher. I got some other trinkets, a rather delicate pewter coffee pot, and woven rug. I had it all neatly wrapped up in a little bundle to be sent home with the outbound postage. Cost me a fair bit of coin, too, I won't lie. Still, I couldn't resist. Kristen will be happy, I think. I miss her and the children terribly, and it makes me envious to see other folks have their loved ones with them on deployment. I'm looking forwards to seeing my little Hejja again whenever this is all over. And the Jotungling! He'll be a handful in a few seasons. Hrist'll have to start asking Helga to run after him once he starts properly running about. Spirits, I wonder what totem the boy will take to. His father's a Bear, Kristen's a Snow Leopard, Aska's Wolf and Hrist is Raven! I'll be proud of him regardless, though I think Bear will speak to him strongest.  
  
I also took a small moment to finally, fully, finish the journey I started. I communed with Bear first, and then thought back to those days of travel, and the shipwreck. I do actually feel a small sense of contentment at finally having finished the journey. Like a pilgrim finally reaching his destination. I wonder sometimes how lucky I was to survive what others didn't, to have washed up at all, rather than be dragged down to the depths of the ocean. I have always felt a measure of guilt for all of it, but I think that, finally being here, it's okay to start forgiving myself. I've completed the journey, and I honour the memories of those who failed; I hope their souls rest easy in the Mists.

# 18th of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Enjoying another day of rest. There's a lot of planning and orientating going on, so action's down a notch. I suppose there's no point to set off into a random direction on a wild line of march until we know what we're doing. Until then, we'll keep hitting Forged troops when they show their faces, and try and support the local Cavaliers as much as we can.  
  
The camp's still in relative calm, and the city gates are open. It's tempting to wander around and get lost inside its sprawl, and drink in the atmosphere. They're very good at pretending everything's fine. I actually took some time to go to the northernmost edge of the town, to look at the slumped and collapsing pyramids there. They've actually been buried by a sandstorm fairly recently, which is surprising consider the amount of damage they suffered. I wrote to Kristen about them, and how the desert storms managed to reclaim half this city on a whim. It does break the illusion a little, and exposes the city as being more vulnerable than you imagine. I understand that they're on their guard, and pretend to act like everything is alright. It's a more comfortable way to live than being constantly terrified of your entire world collapsing. If Amnoon was destroyed, I doubt there's be anywhere these people could go.  
  
Anyway, I'm tired. We're resuming drill tomorrow, keep the folks busy, and then start working towards campaign goals.

# 19th of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Fletcher gave one of her first drills as a First Crusader, and started with a history lesson and a field theory recap. Some of the responses were pretty spotty, truth be told, which only means that it was direly needed. I'll be running some engineering exercises soon enough myself, if time allows. We've sent scouts out to get some eyes further along the east, maybe help us determine where we're going next. Command's still unsure, but our Tyrian resupply arrived, so I know those letters and packages I had prepared are ready to being sent out, along with our dispatches to the command team. The question is, how much further are we committing? If we decided to back out, we could be on the airship and back to Tyria within a few days. I doubt Soulkeeper will tell us to pull back, but it's always a possibility.  
  
In the meanwhile, we're sweating, and slowly settling into life out here. The troops are enjoying the local amenities as best they can, and it's hard to blame them. It's a pleasant city to be around. The large open pyramids appeal to me, in that they remind me of lodges. They have no dividing walls, and they are filled with life. I wonder if I could build a similar structure out of wood, with the center working as a giant fire-pit. Maybe dig half of it in as well, fashion the bottom out of stone, and then build sturdy, thick walls that needn't even be that high. Overlay that with heavy crossbeams and sloping roof with big central chimney for the smoke of the fire... Kristen tending the flames, with a warm bed in one corner, and the walls decorated with trophies that would strike even Knut Whitebear with awe. My children playing nearby. It's a nice little idea.  
  
Oh, that reminds me, those Shaahiran people we met some days ago rode into Amnoon, looking for supplies. From the sounds of it, travel back to Amnoon is a little safer now, if not safe enough to live of the land as they did before. At least I am pleased I could have been of some limited service to them.  
The Sunspears might have been driven to the edge of extinction, but we're ready to shoulder our share of the burden.

# 20th of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Still quiet. Went swimming out in the bay, and found a few divine places. Carbine went with me, which was decent fun. I just repeatedly wished she was Kristen, though. They were just those little things that I had wished I had shared with her, rather than anyone else. Hm. We'll come back here, one day. Swim in the harbour. Watch the sun set. Drink bitter coffee and drag smoke from snake-necked hookahs. Hunt out in the dunes, and bring back beautiful trophies to hang over the hearth.  
  
You know, this place moves me to melancholy.  
  
Scout reports came back, seems there's another Forged camp on the northern side of the city, nestled along a dune-sea. It's also exceedingly heavily armed with artillery emplacements, which makes me wonder if it's a firebase. Either case, our convention when it comes to Forged is to destroy them if and when encountered, so it's in the cards for operation. It'll actually be good to see some action, I think. Diverts the mind. My bouts of melancholy and the oppressive heat are making me slow and lazy. I just sit in the shade all day, like a lazing yak.

# 21st of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Set out today to put in some routine repair work on the Water Authority that didn't pan out as expected. We were just heading down there to patch some leaks, and make sure the facility would continue running, when one of our inspection teams was attacked by what the Cavaliers call "Hamaseen". They're apparently the local criminal ring. From what I can tell, they tried to sabotage the facility, before running foul of our folks. We had to put a few of them down when they tried to go through us. Thankfully, only Gunhaut's injured, and no deaths on our side. It surprises me, really, but at the same time, it really doesn't. The Water Authority is a large water pump. It draws brackish water from the Elon Bay, sucking it up with mechanical pumps powered by large red wind-vanes built on top of the pyramids housing the pumps. Then, it's all filtered, and cleaned, and potable, fresh water is pumped through a T-section. One half flowing into the city, and out in the fountains and waterworks that keep it alive, while the other half is dumped out the outflow, and into the irrigation ditches that sprawl out to the east of the city. In other words, the Water Authority is keeping this entire town alive. Without it, the people would die of thirst, and the crops would wither inside a season. And they haven't even built their wall around it. Spirits, if Palawa Joko decides to attack this city, all he has to do is seize that facility, and wait. Torment, if the Chapter was an invading army, we could seize and hold that facility right now, and start laying siege. They'd last as long as the water reservoirs, and then two days before they'd all be dying or fleeing. It's depressing, really, how painfully vulnerable they are. I don't know why these Hamaseen have decided to shoot themselves in the foot, but I worry about what would've happened if we hadn't stopped them from attacking that facility. Why would they even do that? Wouldn't they be shooting themselves in the foot? I don't understand what politics are in play here, but Bear help me if they've come to using starvation as a weapon.  
  
Less immediately problematic, but still of interest is a rock outcropping right off the western shore that is housing a serious Scarab infestation. I suspect they keep finding their way down from it to the southern approach, and they attack wildlife and Water Authority workers with impunity. Without a doubt, it's the reason for a huge amount of the pest problems around the area. Now, the issue is, there are fishermen living on the lower reaches of this outcropping, which means we can't just drop a few incendiary grenades on top of it, and be done with it. Which, unfortunately, that we'd need to expend significant resources on rooting out the infestation. Considering the other dangers posed by the Forged and these Hamaseen lunatics, I suspect that might be a while.  
  
I did have a pleasant enough conversation with the Cavalier folks, including about hunting Hydra. They're apparently formidable beasts, which only makes them more enticing to fight. The Cavaliers seem worried and overly careful about chasing down the critter, even fearful, but I'm not sure how much of that is the usual human reticence, and how much of that is actual hunting wisdom. I'll have to see if I can't make the room to chase one down. I'd love to bring Kristen back the heads.

# 22nd of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Patrol duties today, out in the sunken part of the city. Spirits, but the desert has all but reclaimed it. The large pyramids simply lay slumped in the sand dunes, propped up by hastily constructed scaffolding that prevents it all from sinking even further down. It's devoid of anything more elaborate than a stray pillar, and the sand-blasted tiles and bricks of the walls. You can tell from the way they're lurching and tipping that the sandstorm shifted something in the foundations, causing it all to just slump over like warrior at the last legs of a feast. There's very little actual structural damage, they're all just... well. Fallen over, and then covered with literal meters of sand. Now, it's infested with sand eels and thick-bodies sand sharks that lurch around and burrow in the sand. They're large too, easily twice my mass, and very aggressive. Still, they all like to lurch at you. If you strike them hard enough across the nose, and deflect them sideways, they're easily killed. Just bash them with the rim of the shield, and then work the sword in behind the jaw and eyes, straight though where I assume their brain is. You stab them a few times, and they'll stop moving. It's a bit like hunting minotaurs by making them charge into a blade, really. The sand eels are less sporting. Calder described them as "sand wurms", which pretty much is an insult to wurms. They're easily slain, just don't let them leap for your face.  
Asides from that, we managed to find an entrance to one of the major pyramids, and it was beautiful on the inside. Light filtered in from on high, and a pool of water had made its way inside, being turned into a mirror. You could see it dance all across the inside surface. It was fairly empty, with only two large brass statues of snakes looking over their fallen home. I think the locals stripped anything of value out long before we or the sand sharks got here. At least they're not stupid.  
  
Sinned a little, by having a pitcher of Elonian wine and a hearty steak in the city, with some of the troops. I have to give it to them, no Krytan tavern or Ascalonian alehouse can even come close to measuring up to how the people of Amnoon relax and enjoy themselves. It almost comes closer to the norn, except that instead of being clustered around fires and drinking tables, they're clustered around elaborately wrought teapots and hookahs, sat on thick cushions and woven tapestries. I like it immensely. It is, somehow, more alien and exotic than the Asura, despite that there are no floating constructs of light and magic around. Maybe that's simply because that's what we expect of Asura. These people here, they're human, but an ocean of culture and understanding separates them from the Krytans, Ascalonians and exiles we find at home. And I thought there were big differences between Lion's Archer norn and Shiverpeak norn. Spirits, we're only separated by a mountain, these people live what might as well be half the world away.  
We can only wonder what will ever happen if we reach Cantha...  
  
Lance is took the time to secure a pack Dolyack from a local ranch. Unremarkable enough, in itself, but telling. Seems command has decided we're here to stay, and venturing out further in due time. Off to fight the war god, I assume.

# 23rd of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Purchased a brace of raptors today from a very special merchant called Hassan. They're a fine bunch of riding animals, that's for certain. I've taken a specific liking to the largest of the bunch, a heavy-set male with gilded scales and several prominent scars, called Tuhaibei. It's also the only one that seems able to carry me around at all, which means we're pretty much destined to get along. We have the benefit of them all being well trained, however, and they lend themselves to being ridden easily enough. It'll take some practice and effort to get the hang of it, and be able to pull them into combat, but it's certainly possible. I've resolved to make some time to train my riding, and ensure I've got the hang of it before too long. I have a feeling Fighting Tuhaibei and I will be able to make the best out of it.  
  
As for actual duties, I had an equipment review with some of the engineers and the sappers. Introduce those Legion scaling ladders and assault bridges we got in. They'll prove useful before long, I have a feeling. I've got a work exercise planned for the engineers come the morrow, too. Seems most of them are up to speed. A few questions were asked about desert fortifications, so I'll run them through some basics. I hope we don't have to dig around in sand dunes, though. There's virtually nothing to work with should it come down to that, asides from digging foxholes, and lying down in them.  
I ended the engineering review today by setting up a hookah, and sharing it around. Though of course, only Seleea and Shatteredshield know how to smoke. That bore Octavian just keeps yapping about munitions and other duty-related none-sense everytime we're trying to take the edge off, and one of the newer sappers seems to have a severe obsession with 'big guns'. I can only hope that's literal, and not metaphorical. Why am I the only sane person in the engineering corps? The ideal engineer is a collected, thoughtful, expert with a solid grasp of structural mechanics and ballistics. I get a bunch of suicidal madmen who just *happen to like blowing things up*.  
  
Talking about insanity, apparently one of our recruits ended up in medical, when they informed him that employing his lungs as a smokehouse was a bad idea. So, now the man's suffering what I can only describe the worst kind of withdrawal symptoms, which have made him utterly unfit for duty. How this even made it past the medical fitness checks, I have no clue, but unless his situation improves markedly, I'll have him sent home.  
  
Wish I was home. Riding along Tuhaibei today, I wanted nothing else but to have my son along with me. It reminded me of that one time we went sailing by Lion's Arch, and he just sat at the prow, giggling out across the water. I think he'd have enjoyed sitting with me in the saddle, too. Maybe Daufi will let the boy sit on him, hm? I imagine that'll be a sight to see. I don't imagine we'll bring the raptors back to Tyria, though, which is a pity. It'd be nice to bring so fine a creature home. Who knows, if we ever fly home, maybe I'll buy it over from the Chapter. Anyway, getting ahead of myself. I'm going to make sure I can actually ride the critter into war first, without falling from my saddle and impaling myself on my own sword by accident.

# 24th of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Good day. Started off early, put the engineers through an exercise in the morning. Nothing exceptional, just had them construct a gabion fortification with a small tunnel as entryway. Also went over to proper tree-felling technique. All basic, solid engineering skills that even the most novice sapper must master. Whether or not any of it will stick is a different matter, but we'll see.  
  
The rest of the day went by relatively quiet. Carbine came by in the afternoon, said she really needed a swim. Apparently she got a message back, saying she's inherited a huge stash of munitions and weapons from a Separatist arms dealer, and that they're waiting for her to come and collect it all. Except she doesn't want anything to do with it. I told he she'd probably be best off donating it to the Vigil. I have no doubts we can either put the equipment to good use, or sell it off to responsible buyers in order to fund the constant war effort. We went out swimming in the harbour again, which seemed to help her perk up a little. Swam over to floating barge, which is apparently some sort of drinking-vessel. That was pleasant enough, except that we were apparently the only folks that swam across, while there was a rowboat ferrying people up and down. It was pleasant enough, talking to some locals. I spoke with Alevyne too, about sailing here. It's still a confronting story to tell, truth be told. I keep feeling this stab of guilt, despite having laid those memories to rest. At least the lass enjoyed the story.  
I left, got my armour back on, and returned later, only to find Carbine throwing up over the side. Not sure what happened, but she asked to go back, so I let her go. More folks from the Chapter arrived, so I stayed, make sure everything went in order. There was a local woman, apparently a desert guide, who was able to tell us a few things. Apparently the supply run we were supposed to escort to the Cavaliers several days ago was retasked, and tried to make the run again. Unfortunately, we were dealing with the attack at the Water Authority at the same time, which means that none of us were on escort. A pity, because Forged attacked and destroyed the convoy, meaning those priests and refugees up in the Kormir temple are still missing vital supplies. I'm not sure what can be done, but it's worth consideration in the near future.  
  
The floating boat-bar is an interesting idea. It's a pity that it wouldn't work up north. Maybe in Lion's Arch, but I suspect the tides would be more problematic in a bay like that. I might come back sometime, hopefully when I'm allowed to have a drink. A lot of these seem worth a try, at least.

# 25th of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Quiet day. Went out riding with the Warmaster this morning, which was a very pleasurably experience. I try to spend as much time in the saddle as I can, and I have to say I'm getting the hang of it. I managed to gallop a distance in full-armour, which just makes the most tremendous sound. It's like Hoelbrak's greatest weaponrack tipped down a stairway, just the heavy thud of Tuhaibei's claws, and the percussive clanking as I'm being jostled in the saddle. One thing I can say is that I'll need to look into getting something to wear in the saddle, because I'm getting slight irritation on the inside of my thighs. The saddle chafes. Even so, I think Tuhaibei and I are getting to each other's presence. I take to the grooming now, too, with Bjarni's occasional help. Apparently there's a real concern for tear on their claws, especially when riding over hard surfaces like stone paving and such. So, you stand behind the raptor, and hoist up the claw between your knees, before you use a brush and a whetstone to make sure they're well maintained. Also helps to check if they stepped into something. You never consider that, but with those spiked Choya creatures around, I suspect a raptor stepping on a spine isn't uncommon. Thankfully, Tuhaibei and I seem to only pick up some mud and alluvial soil.  
Either case, duties today were permissive, so I went riding in the afternoon and after dusk, too. The city is beautiful in the setting sun, and their farmlands are strangely enchanting. I don't know why, but the water here seems to be especially enchanting. Like mirrors, buried in between the fields of life. Norn never were a people to work the soil much, but I understand the inherent nobility in working the land. There's something poetic about these people tilling green, living crops from a land that for all intents and purposes should be dead and dry. They have come such a long way to accomplish something so simple. I can imagine every harvest they pull from the ground here is a victory for them. Surrounding the fields lie farms and ranches, and those are surprisingly similar to what you find in Kryta and the foothills. Dolyak and chicken, mainly, though there is a large bowl-like pen in which a well-respected farmer keeps sand-sharks! Their meat is apparently quite edible, and they are less likely to be preyed upon by the desert's less amicable critters.  
  
Thinking about norn, and our propensity to hunt, I passed by the Cavaliers again, and spoke with their Lieutenant. They've had a listing for a wandering Hydra up for some time now, but they haven't allocated the manpower to it. I took the liberty of saying we'd pick up the task. Seems like an opportunity. I've wanted to see one of these Hydra for my own eyes, and now I can bring a detachment of troops to actively hunt one down, for the good of the people too. I'll have a hunting party drawn up in a few days, and then we'll set to tracking it down. I hope it'll be an impressive critter. I'd love to take a good trophy back home.  
Ah, if only Kristen could be here. Between the two of us, no terror of the desert would be safe!

# 26th of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Riding lessons today, with some of the locals and the Cavaliers. I helped teach some folks the very basics I was learned myself, and it turned out to be overall pretty decent. Several folks fell out of their saddle, as was to be expected, but by and large everyone should now know at least the very basics of how to act around a raptor. Tuhaibei did well enough, though I think he's had a long day. Everyone seems to be great excited by our new talon'd friends, and I doubt we'll have a shortage of volunteers for the exercise rides in the morning. I think I might try galloping for longer periods at a time, and even attempt to navigate small jumps. You know, I've never grown particularly close to any animals before, unlike Kristen's almost natural bond with some of her hunting animals, but I think I'm starting to understand what she means when she says they share a connection of some sort. I can only imagine how Kristen'd look on one of these desert raptors. No doubt it'd suit her, and challenge her to start learning how to shoot from raptorback. It's rare to find something challenging in a craft we thought ourselves to have mastered.  
  
I've also set to carving the piece of dragon bone. Decided to shape it into a handle for a blade. I might return to the weaponsmith in the city, and have something forged to order. Thinking of making it a gift for the Jotunling. He's a little young to have his own blade yet, but Hrist can keep it form him until he's old enough to learn how to use it. I miss my boy scarcely less than I miss my little Hejja. I can only imagine how she's grown. I picture a happy child, warm and secure in her mother's arms, a world away from the scorching desert days, and shifting sands of the Crystal Desert. Spirits, sometimes I wonder how much I actually resemble my da. We both walk plenty of odd places, after all.  
  
Evening was decent. Rodent somehow managed to set up a romantic encounter with some manner of spice merchant, something I had to curtail. The man can be excused, he seemed like a pleasant enough sort, but I am deeply annoyed with the Crusader for doing such. If it was an isolated incident I might have looked past it, but this is the umpteenth time that I've gotten wind of the Crusader displaying an overly sanguine attitude towards the menfolk walking around. And this is what bothers me. If this becomes an issue, which I have a feeling it will, I'll be having a serious talk about the *decorum*. I imagine it will be a singularly unpleasant conversation.  
  
Oh, also, we ran into some Charr who asked us if we were Elonian. We then proceeded to take the piss with him for a bit, including a mock-battle between Neya and Iluoana, fought out in rock-paper-scissors. In general, the mood was high, and folks were laughing more so than frowning, which I think is good. It's nice to see morale being this high, in the face of such a dangerous enemy. The truth is, we're still figuring out what way we're even supposed to advance, which means we're sitting next to Amnoon for the duration, sending out scouts. Those found some sort of tower guarded by Djinn, too, hidden behind a series of mountains. Intriguing as it sounds, it doesn't look to be an objective for us, so I doubt we'll commit any troops to it. Right now, there's still some Forged holed out in the north-east, as well as the continued stress on the Temple of Kormir further to the east. Whether or not we commit forces to either is still up in the air.  
Where is Balthazar, and what is he doing?

# 27th of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Quiet day. Took the troops out for a walk, went back to the boat-bar thing. Barge beer hall. However you want to call it. wasn't half bad. More riding in the morning too, which went about as well as expected. Apparently Sinclair's not getting the hang of it, though I gave some pointers. We'll see if he manages.  
  
Not in a big writing mood. Too warm. I'll do some more carving, while I think of what Kristen's doing right now, and then get some sleep.

# 28th of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Hydra hunt. Killed the critter. Bit me in the stomach. Not me, but Bear. wound came back. Big thing, that. Still. Brought back the heads, but I'm in medical. Really hurts, too. I keep wanting to scratch at it. It'll become a nasty scar, that's for sure. Good! Need to get the trophies treated, before the rot sets in. Wonder, will it be better to keep the skulls, or to have the heads stuffed?  
Hm. Ask Bob.  
Wonder if the wound's bad enough to send me home. Not sure if I'd want that or not.

# 30th of Colossus

Free city of Amnoon.  
  
Wound hurts. Still in medical. Keep busy with reading, though I have to lie on my back, and keep the book up above my head. Never thought such a small thing could make my arms so tired. Less enjoyable: writing. Can't rest the book on a solid surface, so... Mostly use my own hand, but it's annoying. Didn't write anything yesterday, mostly been lying around anyway. Troops are getting survival training, while we're also going to do some sort of Mad King's Day celebration. The idea's to gather in some coins, so we can ship in extra supplies. Nice enough, I guess.  
I'm going to take my painkiller and try and get some sleep now, though. Problem is I keep trying to roll over on my side, and I keep waking myself up.  
At least Astrid was able to clean the Hydra heads.

# 31st of Colossus

Urgh.

# 32nd of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Still injured. Pain in my belly still there. Not going to write much, too annoying.  
Everything quiet. We're going to have a Mad King's party, too. Not sure if I can attend. We'll see.

# 33rd of Colossus

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
Can sit up a little these days. Still, I have a giant, itching scab over my lower belly, and it's hard not to keep picking at the bandages. It's worst when they change the bandages. The itching only really seems to stop about thirty minutes before they replace them with an entirely new set of itchy cloth for me to deal with. I can't even scratch it. The best I can do is lightly rub the bandage, which doesn't really help. You'd think the disinfectant is made of ants or something.  
  
So, Mad King's day thing tomorrow. I'll have to see if I can't convince medical to let me out of my mandated imprisonment, so I can have a look. I'm pretty sure I can walk about a little without too much issue, as long as no-one prods me in the belly. It's weird having a valley in your gut. It'll turn out to be a scar and a half, that's for certain. Better than trophies, is what they say! Wonder what Kristen'll think of it.  
  
Miss home. Feels stupid to be idle and wounded in the baking desert, when I could be idle and hungover at home! Both would have similar results anyway.  
  
Eh. At least I got a scar and a Hydra skull for it!

# 34th of Colossus

Amnoon.  
  
Mad King's day. Was fun, but I underestimated the toll of walking around with the constant niggling pain.  
We'll be deploying deeper inland soon enough. Won't be of much use yet, still on light duty for a good while.  
I'm tired.

# 35th of Colossus

Northern Waystation.  
  
We finally left Amnoon. It seems we're committed to rooting out the Forged now, so we've moved up the caravan road, so we can strike against them more easily. I had to be put on a cart, and carried along the road, since I can't march or sit in a saddle yet. Not the most pleasant ride. The good news, I'll be on light duty from here on out, so I should at least be able to walk around a little.  
The Waystation is decently equipped, and it's even got semi-comfortable beds, and a hall out in the shade. It's nice and restful, though not no-where as colourful as Amnoon.  
  
Oh, and Carbine received a letter saying that some Grimaldi lady was dead. If I recall correctly, that's the one that essentially held her imprisoned for a long time. She seemed fairly distraught by the notion, and collapsed into the medical bed across from me not long after. Not sure why, I'd think hearing someone like that finally died would be cause for some amount of celebration, rather than an emotional collapse.  
  
Hm. Hope Ookstrid and the other two manage fine. I'll have a look at the reports and the planning tomorrow, might as well start with a walk to where-ever command's set up shop^.

# 36th of Colossus

Northern Waystation.  
  
Operations underway against the Forged. Apparently everything went well, and they even brought back some Forged equipment for Occult to look over. Good to see progress is being made. I feel a bit useless on the sideline, but I should be back on active duty in a few more days. We're heading further north in due time, tracking down numerous Forged in a region further north, close to the Tyria. Still further south than anyone has come for almost three hundred years, mind, but *closer*.  
  
I've been lazy. This heat is making me slow and sluggish. I hope things will be better north. Apparently there's even snow in the foothills and the mountains leading up to the old Deldrimor Front. Spirits, I would kill for a little bit of snowfall.

# 37th of Colossus

Northern Waystation.  
  
Another day of sitting by the wayside while the Chapter engages the Forged. It gives me a false sense of calm and quiet, given I'm left to have the illusion that everything is at peace. I stare out over the sand dunes into the distance, prop myself up in a shadowy nook to read some of the books Alevyne has lent me, or watch the raptors stir and stalk in their pens. Reality is, of course, different. We're driving headfirst into roaming groups of Forged, and battles are being fought with a regularity which is making me wondering how long we can measure up to Balthazar's strange armies. For all intents and purposes, the Forged seem endless. We merely push back positions, and interdict their access, but it doesn't seem we actually diminish their operating capacity.  
  
Anyway, I'll be back in the field in a few days time, if the damned wound would stop itching. I've set to wearing my cuirass just so I can't get to the bandages, but I'm not sure if that was a good or a bad idea. At least it seems to have scabbed over well enough.  
Also, Alevyne spoke to me about her crisis of faith. Not sure if I helped, I have a feeling I don't understand human religion enough to say something wise. I suggested she speak to Alleshia. Not a lot of other humans who are open enough to discuss Balthazar's treason, or rather heresy, openly and rationally. That, and with the temple of Kormir nearby, it might provide a little bot of solace to share.

# 38th of Colossus

Northern Waystation.  
  
So, seems that my prediction from yesterday was correct, about the temple. Alleshia's taken Alevyne over there for a few days to consider the meaning of things. To find Truth, so to speak, in multiple ways. Meanwhile, we'll hold up in the Waystation, monitor for any increased activity around the area, ensure the Forged aren't encroaching any worse.  
I wish there was a shaman, or a decent Skaald out here, you know.  
  
Anyway, another day in the desert.

# 39th of Colossus

Northern Waystation.  
  
All quiet. Just some talking with the other folks, waiting for the scouts to head out. Spoke with Renn and Saana for a bit, that was nice. Bad for being homesick, though, as I now really just learn to see my children again. Saana also needs to sit down and think about her duties as a Beastmistress, since she seems unsure about what was actually expected of her.  
  
Everything's sort of got a surreal aspect, being locked in this island, in a sea of sand. No wonder the Warmaster and Alevyne left for the temple. Probably did it to preserve their sanity. Once I'm fine to ride, I might saddle up Tuhaibei and go and visit them.

# 40th of Colossus

Northern Waystation.  
  
Spirits, but I feel like a yak put in a pen that's too small. If it wasn't for Alevyne's little books or my self-imposed little carving project, I'd have been bored to death by now. If resorted to sand-staring at this juncture, simply looking at the shimmering heat distortion that forms on the horizon, trying to figure out what I can make out. Sometimes, it looks like there are whole cities just on the horizon, brimming with life, but I know it's just heat haze. Sometimes they even look like the light foothills, or distant mountaintops. Those, of course, are visible more clearly to the north of us.  
  
Sitting here, baking like clay in an oven, I gain ever more respect for the people that seem to have wrangled this place into submission, and made it their home. The desert is every bit as lethal and dangerous as the snow-capped mountains are. They are two extremes, equally worthy, but because I wasn't born and raised here, the desert still daunts me. I think that, if we are not careful, we run a very real risk of dying here, simply because we weren't prepared to deal with the terrain. If not for these Waystations mapping out the vital watering holes and linking together the lush oasis around which the loclas live and thrive, we would have never been able to respond to the Forged. That specific insight makes me realize that the desert wilderness around us is every bit as much our enemy as the Forged and Branded are. What worries me is that I suspect the Forged know this too. If they are smart, and I would wager the God of War understands strategy and tactics, they will try and cut us off as soon as we are in a precarious position, and then simply let the desert do the rest. Spirits, isn't that exactly what Palawa Joko did to Vabbi when he changed the flow of the great Elon river? Looking around, I have to say that I can see some grim elegance in the idea that even before Palawa Joko and the Forged arrived, this his always been a place where life and death have locked horns. There's some mild comfort in knowing that the people of Amnoon seem to have eked out a living here, precarious as it is. No wonder they have kept faith.  
  
Miss my family. I don't want to write about it, because it brings my mood down, but I miss them. Kristen, my boy, my girls, Aska's mischief, everything. I entertain myself with thoughts of how it would be to have them all here. We'd have built the world largest sand castle, no doubt.

# 41st of Colossus

Northern Waystation.  
  
Warmaster returned from her temple trip, along with some fairly worrying news from the scouts that's prompted us into action. It seems that a settlement guarding the passage north into the highlands has come under sudden siege by Forged troops. We'll be packing up and making an effort to relieve the siege as soon as we can. At least it gives us a target. There's only some rough roads between us and them, though we'll be skipping close to the brand on the way there. There is a large, open canyon we have to traverse, leading up to the Temple of Kormir. I haven't seen it yet, but I hear it's impressive. My wound's mostly stopped itching now, so I'll try to get Bob to sign off on me being cleared for duty come the morrow, and then saddle up a raptor and have a look for myself. It'd be a shame to miss a landmark like that, I think.  
  
The day itself has been the usual. Caravans and refugee groups occasionally pass by, though they seem to travel in clusters down from the temple. They're not getting attacked as often now, which I assume either has to do with us killing the Forged in the area, or their troops concentrating on destroying Makali. Regardless, it implies we've pushed them back a little. Victory measured in inches, I suppose.

# 42nd of Colossus

Makali.  
  
Back in the saddle, literally and figuratively. I went out riding early in the morning, went up to the Temple with a caravan. It's an impressive building, set in the cleft of the mountainside, looming over a deep canyon. It lies ahead as you come along the pass, a pearl hidden in the shadow of the soaring canyons walls around it. I almost felt like I was journeying to one of the wayshrines in the mountains to make an offering to the Spirits. There is a small village first, before a large bridge spans the canyon. The temple itself is surprisingly open. They built is so that it looks a lot larger and solid from a distance, but it is really just a collection of painted and decorated arches supporting an ornamental dome. The wind passes through it softly, like an open lodge, and even though it is filled with people, it hardly feels crowded. It is unfortunate that it seems to be as much of a hospital these days as it is a place of worship. Still, for silent gods, they built beautiful houses. They're monument builders, these descendants of the Elonians.  
  
I rode back before noon, and then prepared for the march to Makali. The outpost suffered a Forged attack, apparently including Balthazar himself. Details are fuzzy, but the Branded Shatterer we picked up about from the refugees seemed to not have been Branded nor a Shatterer. Rather, it was a being known here as Vlast, a defender of the people. It fought Balthazar, and you can still see the razor sharp crystal splines littering the salt flats outside. Not entirely sure what happened next, but word is Vlast managed to repulse the attack. We're here now, and we're still considering the town to be under siege. First order of the day was shoring up defenses, which will take some time. I'll set to draft the working detachments.  
  
The heat is, somehow, worse, and I can't see any snow at all.  
I feel cheated.

# 43rd of Colossus

Makali.  
  
So, we're under siege again, by a different enemy.  
Thankfully, we set our work detachments in the morning, and were able to make some needed repairs to the ramparts and fortifications, a mere few hours before the enemy was at our gates again. Surprisingly, not Forged, but a force of Awakened led by some dead thing that kept on yammering about Sunspears. I suspect that's just an excuse, and they're here to swoop in after the Forged battered down the defenses. Pity we got there then.  
They tried to storm the gates a few times in short succession, but the only real threat were some sort of blade-festooned beast of war that used terrifying magic to try and batter it's way through the defense lines. Once those were dead, though, the Awakened grunts are barely more challenging than Risen, and they died easily on our shields.  
  
And now we wait for them to try again. I suggested to the Warmaster that we sally forth, and destroy them before they could settle in and drag this out. But, we haven't. We'll see how it all turns out.

# 44th of Colossus

Makali.  
  
So, turns out there actually was a Sunspear hiding in here. Figures she came here to help fight off the Forged, but the Mordant Crescent caught her trail. It does explain why this dead fellow kept on demanding that the outpost give them up. We just so happened to be present, able, and more importantly, willing to intercede, albeit unknowingly. The Sunspear was smart enough though, and agreed to make her own way out, to spare the outpost and draw them all away. We fashioned that into a plan, of sorts. When they came at us again today, we beat them back, and then used the lull directly afterwards to venture out. We proceeded out towards a strange cave formation due west, and then made our stand there. The Awakened swarmed in, and we slaughtered them, including their so-called Hierarch. I don't care much for the local politics, but it felt good to finally put those undead monsters to rest. They put up a fight and a half, and we've suffered a few wounded in the progress, but I have a feeling we're free of both Awakened and Forged for the time being.  
  
Things are quieter out here now, though still baking hot. It's somewhat worse out here than it was further south. Makali is surrounded by hard scrabble desert land that is mostly flat, and baking with heat. I've been sweating like a yak almost the entire time, which makes me sluggish and slow. It makes me envy the cave in which that Sunspear decided to disappear. It has water, and is shaded almost entirely due to the peculiar way erosion wore away at the rocks surrounding it.  
Oddly, meeting a Sunspear was an oddly muted affair. I didn't get to speak with them at all, and they kept out of sight. I suspect they've changed over the last hundred years, from proud beacons of hope to resistance fighters that are used to going to ground more than they are used to displaying their colours in public. Makes you wonder if the Vigil will ever fall so far away from their own ideal.  
  
Not sure what's up next. Warmaster took a minor injury to her arm during the fighting, but I feel we'll be having a strategic meeting sooner rather than later. I suspect we'll be dealing with the substantial cancer of Branded territory due to our east. The prospect of having to wear a gas mask in this heat is... worrying.

# 45th of Colossus

Makali.  
  
Keeping busy. No more attacks from either Forged or Awakened, so it does seem we're in the clear. We're still being cautious, mind, shouldn't be lured into a false sense of security. Still, so far, neither of our enemies seem to be the subtle kind. But then again, folks used to say that about the High Legions, right before the Ash Legion tore them limb from limb.  
  
I've been passing the time, working on the finishing the blade hilt. The dragonbone is obnoxiously hard. If it wasn't for the darksteel carving blade I got from Vatorn, it'd have been near-impossible to get it to shape. Even now, I have to press down hard, and taking a few splinters off leaves my arms aching. Have to be careful too. Putting that much force behind the blade's usually dangerous. Don't want to slip, and wedge it into my own arm. I can only imagine being stuck in medical again, because of something as banal as an unfortunate carving accident.  
Either case, it's going well. I keep worrying away at it, and the rough shape's starting to show. I'll have to find a press or a drill to bore out the handle for the tang. I have an idea for the blade, but it'll have to wait until we're back in the civilized world. Makali is pretty much as far as the frontier stretches, out here.

# 46th of Colossus

Makali.  
  
It's just entirely too warm, now. I didn't even think that was possible.  
Thankfully, lying flat on my back in the shade, with my feet in a bucket of water is entirely within the realm of possibility. Outside, even the sand is so scorching hot that stepping on it with your bare feet will cause burns. It's like living inside an oven, being slow-cooked. Spirits, but it's atrocious.  
  
I can't wait to get out of this place. The prospect of having to wear my armour out there is daunting, though. Ugh. I want to find a snow-capped mountain, and just live there until rain season comes.  
Oh, yeah, there is no rain season. It's just this baking hard-pan, stretching out around us. Spirits, here's hoping we fall back to Amnoon. At least it's not as bone-dry arid out there.

# 47th of Colossus

I am going insane.  
Insane.  
Insane.  
Insane.  
Insane.  
Insane.  
Insane.  
  
Please let me go home.

# 48th of Colossus

Makali.  
  
Yesterday was taxing. Just Gunhaut's density, and folks being abnormally obtuse wearing me thin. Literally sent me crawling up a wall, before I turned into a bear, and jumped off of a pillar. It was just a little too much in the end, and I cracked. Alevyne had to get me into medical to calm down. Not a good show. Stupid. That sort of things is unacceptable behaviour, and I know it. If one of my soldiers had done something similar I would've been livid. I'll report to the Warmaster for censure, and get that straightened out.  
  
Today was better. I spoke to Carbine for a while, which helped me balance my humours a bit.  
Later, the scouts deployed, which caused a ruckus. Astrid and I saw Iluoana and Thalius argue about something, before Cinderkeeper started stomping around angrily. Turns out some of the scouts decided to kill some sentries in an Awakened encampment due north, endangering a group of Cavaliers camped nearby, in addition to needlessly putting that camp on guard against attack. Cinderkeeper's going to deal with the immediate details, but it's a worrying development. Sloppy. Everyone's getting sloppy.

# 49th of Colossus

Makali.  
  
Fuck Palawa Joko.  
I've decided to make that into a point of doctrine now. We deployed against that Awakened base, out over north of here. They were on alert, thanks to the scouting gaffe from yesterday. Apparently it was Embersong and Betzler's idea to trade small gains in intelligence for the partial element of surprise. Considering Embersong's supposed to be some sort of hunter, she should know spooking your prey spoils the kill. I can only imagine they both suffered heatstroke for that sort of lapse in judgement.  
Either case, we decided to exploit their expectations of an attack. Blade move into position down a covered wadi with a mortar, and dropped several shells into their midst, making sure their attention was firmly fixed on us. Lance swooped around in a flanking movement, around a large rock formation, and attacking them in the rear and the flanks. They delivered enough of a shock attack for us to storm our own section of the encampment. Once we were in among them, it was a melee, though one we seemed to get the better off. I don't think these Awakened are used to fighting professional soldiers out here. Certainly not Vigil. They dredged up some war-beasts that managed to hold us off for a while. Long enough, because the Mordant Crescent commander managed to form a portal and flee before he could be put down. It was over almost immediately after that. No Awakened left alive.  
  
I'm not sure what that means for us yet, but I'm fairly sure we're considering the Awakened to be our enemies from here on out. They seem intent on attacking us, and attacking the local people with impunity. No wonder they hunt down the Sunspears, they're the only ones who dare stand in opposition against them. Well, my oath swore me to protect the innocent, and da once said my grandfather told him: "He who preys on the weak should assure himself the weak do not have strong friends." I'm happy to bare my blade for these people. They are good, honest, hardy. Human, perhaps, not all warriors, but they are part of Tyria now, and I doubt we'd have it be said we broke our oaths because we were afraid of some undead tyrant.  
  
I think I'll go riding out tomorrow. Check back down our supply links to Amnoon, and ensure we're well-stocked and able to keep going. Spirits, if our supplies are interrupted out here, things could get lean very fast.  
  
I had a dream about Kristen. It was odd. I was thirsty, and was lying on my back. She came over with a cup, filled with melting snow. I woke up before the water touched my lips, and I've never been so thirsty in all my life. I doubt it means anything, just... strange. Hunting out in these desert flats would be... challenging. I think this is one of the few places where humans can survive and brave the wilds, while norn could not. Not yet, anyway.  
Who knows, maybe now that the ways are open, some of my people will find their way here, eventually. Imagine if Hejja grew up here, instead of in the mountains, so far north of here. I can only imagine what she'd look like. She must be a beautiful girl by now.  
We'll go home, some day.

# 50th of Colossus

Makali.  
  
Went out riding in the morning, out of the flats, and south, to the Temple of Kormir. It was surprisingly refreshing. Somehow cooler, too, because the wind howls through the canyons, and sets the pennants and banners to strain at their poles in a desire to rip free, and fly away from this place. It's the same winds that swoop over Amnoon, and blow out to sea. It bears aloft the coloured and beautiful kites, drawn about on flaxen string by the expert hands of children who can sail their paper ships with more dexterity than any Lion's Arch sailor could ever hope to achieve. I hope Aska got hers in the mail, and flies it high in the mountain winds. They're more capricious than the desert's air, certainly, but she's a norn, and she'll overcome any challenge we can put before her.  
  
Riding back was pleasant enough, too. Tuhaibei's a reliable warbeast, and there's something comforting from sitting in the saddle. No surprise that Cavaliers form close bonds with their animals. I was accompanied by some of the others, just for safety's sake, but I think they all enjoyed their airing. Only Alevyne looked pensive. She's been a bit brooding lately. She wears melancholy poorly, but I suspect saying that is hypocritical of me.  
  
The deployment was more arduous. We marched into the Brand, past some abandoned Forged encampment near the edge. I'm not sure what they were doing here, but from the debris and pieces of discarded wargear we found, it looked like they were making weapons. We found an oversized cannon without a loading breach, and carts filled with loose-hewn Branded crystals. Like ore. For all intents and purposes it looked like they were trying to power a gun with Branded debris; a prospect I'm thoroughly not enjoying.  
We left Occult to piece together what they could, before we pushed in deeper east, into the heart of the Branded territory. What we found there was worryingly... Incomplete? Unidentified. A vast, downward spiral, carved in the edge of a caldera large enough to fit an airship. It was as if something cataclysmic had happened there, but none of us could put our finger as to what exactly. All we found was a strange, snake-like being that had been corrupted by the Brand, and tried to fight us when we reached the bottom of the crater. It looked almost like a Krait, but different, though I can't say how much of it was the Brand. It fled, in the end, before we could slay it, but not before it put several of us down with injuries. I ordered a fall-back, and we were able to get back to Makali, mostly in one piece.  
  
I don't know what to think of that Branded place, or the strange creature we found. Some suggested that they were a Forgotten, but surely such a thing is preposterous. They haven't been seen nor heard of for untold years, and we suddenly happen to find one in the Brand, on a fluke? The only thing that even moves me to give it a sliver of credence, is the notion that there was something *inexplicable* down there. A sense of magic, of lingering presence, like a totem that has seen the light of a Spirit, but much more raw, and much more dangerous.  
I don't know, perhaps it was just the heat and the claustrophobia from wearing the gas hood. Visibility was bad, because my faceplate kept misting up. No small wonder, it was soaked with sweat by the time we were back in Makali. I swear I'm shedding my skin here. I think back of the dream I had about Kristen, offering me a drink of meltwater. I just picture it in my head, the snow in her hands, and it makes all the pains and discomforts lessen.  
  
The Warmaster also took her time to speak to me about my nervous break. She was... encouraging, though I almost wished she'd been more reproaching. I don't like myself slipping up like that, and I despise the notion I got away light simply because I can be forgiven these kind of things. Perhaps that is my punishment, in some strange, convoluted way? I'll do better. That's what I tell my soldiers, after all. Do better.  
  
On a brighter note, we might be moving north soon, into the foothills and the mountains of the southern Deldirmor Front. Spirits, da will be envious.

# 51st of Colossus

Makali.  
  
Deployed out, towards Godfall Tower. Apparently the stories of the dragon Vlast are true; there's a seriously strange marking on the ground up on that mesa, and Klixxa told me the place was lousy with extremely potent magical energy. So, Balthazar did really snatch a dragon, one fighting to defend the people of Makali, from the sky, and killed it? Seems a bit far-fetched, but I suppose it's not the strangest thing I've ever encountered. What's strange is that according to local legend, this Vlast was said to be Glint's scion. A relatively recent story, since this is not something I can remember ever hearing or reading about. There was a tale about a dragon called Gleam once, but that's an old Dwarven story. Maybe they're the same? There's no way to know if it's true, but one the Skylarks seemed credit the idea enough to actually ask permission to hold a ceremony for Vlast's memory.  
Makes you wonder about that egg in Tarir...  
  
No combat, asides from a Forged Siege Devourer haunting the tower. We destroyed it, and then ripped it apart for trophies. I have a large segmented limb, the top of which is bladed. It's perfect for the purpose I have in mind.  
It gave us a little bit of trouble, but nothing fatal. Gunhaut got injured, and refused to listen to Mirka, or me for that matter, when we told him to lie down. I've just about had enough of his antics, truth be told. I'll draft a proper note of dismissal for the other officers when I have an opportunity. Much as he fights well, he's simply not reliable enough in the field. Ironic, since he's a follower of Ox, and not in a good way. He's a good lad. Just not cut out to be a soldier.  
  
The damn heat's still not lessening. Maybe my temper's literally cooking off out here. Hard to say. I'm tired, and today's given me a lot to process. Wish meltwater-Kristen was here. Spirits, when I get home, I'll have to tell her about that dream. I think drinking water from her hands might be something surprisingly tender between us. Symbolic, perhaps. Maybe the dream has meaning of some kind? Pity there's no shaman around to ask. I suspect they could help with Gunhaut as well. All the norn are a bit wayward here, except maybe Embersong. Figures.

# 52nd of Colossus

Makali.  
  
Thought it would be a quiet day, but that turned out to be an illusion. Gunhaut, damn his hide, decided to be an oaf again, and stand in the yard, fully packed and armoured, sweating like a pig. Carbine tried to get him to cool down, but that idiot naturally refused to budge. Some people can make stubbornness into a virtue. Gunhaut isn't one of them. Carbine eventually decided to just douse him in snow with magic, and freeze his boots, so he had to take them off. Not exactly a smart thing to do, but the intent was harmless enough. Gunhaut, of course, draws his sword, and threatens her. We had him put under guard, while we figured out the details of what happened. We're letting Carbine off with a relatively mild correction. Gunhaut... well, it's a moot point, because he just up and left, instead of reporting to medical. Rather than consider him a deserter, as we probably should, we'll just note him down as a dishonourable discharge, and let him go. I was going to press the Warmaster for a regular discharge, but he made a proper fool of himself, so... he'll have to live with it. A pity. Ox and Yak are supposed to be reliable animals. I don't think the Spirits look kindly on that sort of thing either.  
  
The rest was just... I don't know. I took Tuhaibei out riding late, just to clear my head a bit. That helped. Just sprint down the dusty road, and feel the sheer power of movement. It's hard not to relish the feeling of being two coiled springs of muscle, hammering across the sand. It's hard not to want to run into something, and trample it into dirt.  
  
Oh, I got a letter from Nauja. Some news from home, though it seems it was about as I expected. It's nice to know I'm not forgotten, though.

# 53rd of Colossus

Makali.  
  
Sometimes, there's a whispering in the sand here, a hiss of escaping heat, that is so foreign to anything you've ever heard before. The air dances, and though you think you can see the horizon, everything at the bleak edge of your vision is an illusion. The nomads tell me that those who spent too long in painted halls sometimes swear they could see cities and bountiful oasis' where there are none. But then they also tell me of lost cities and hidden treasures obscured by wily Djinn, and ancient magic. The idea to saddle up a raptor and to ride off in search of something long lost to time appeals to me. I think Freyja would not have hesitated to venture off into the sands.  
And I think that's also exactly why they're so dangerous.  
  
Makali is quiet, for once. As always, any place that is returned to tranquility is sure to see us leaving it sooner rather than later. At least, I hope that we can leave this place better than we found it. Are we liberators? I doubt it. I suspect we have bought them a few days of respite. The Forged are still out there somewhere, with Balthazar leading his crusade of madness. And even without their relentless violence, Palawa Joko and his Awakened filth pollute the land with their evil.  
Are we really the only ones who will take a stand?

# 54th of Colossus

Makali.  
  
Another day under the blazing sun, in the land of gods and mysteries.  
Quiet again, which means it's just the same old rote. Wash in the morning, and then equipment maintenance in the shade when the sun starts coming up. It's holistic, though sometimes I feel my life is just a sequence of routines. It's moments like that when I sit down to read, or try and chip away another few splinters of dragonbone from the carving hilt.  
  
There's always moments when you realize how ephemeral everything around us is. We'll leave Makali soon, and its people and the vistas you see from the walls will fade away from memory. We walk around here, laughing, jesting, living, but who will remember any of this? You realize you think back in terms of 'where we have been', and 'who was with us then', as if those places exist only as tiny slices of reality. This Makali, the one where we have fought off the Forged, the one where the heat drove us crazy, only exists in the moment. As soon as we leave, that place will never be able to be found again, except in memory. Those who are here with me now, will remember it, but everyone else will never take part in this. They will never be able to say "I was at Makali, after Vlast fell".  
You can see it in the eyes of the new recruits. They weren't there when Zhaitan fell, so they will never know Orr like we did. They didn't see the fleet's remnants, or Modremoth's fall, so they will never know what Magus Falls means for us.  
I wonder what we will say about these long desert days in the future. Will they be fond memories, the steps before triumph and glory? Or is there something yet to happen that will taste bitter on our tongue when we speaks its name?  
  
Maybe one day it'll be different. After I die, I wonder if people will ask "Where you there, when Tzahr was in the Desert?"

# 55th of Colossus

Makali.  
  
So, we're going out in search of some Priory folks that passed by, before Vlast fell. We've not seen nor heard any trace of them, which means we're off to go searching. To cover more ground, we're splitting the Chapter by squad. The Warmaster and I will take Blade north, to an Ogre Kraal that's nestled in the foothills. Meanwhile, the Tactician and Astrid will be heading west. Apparently to a Choya village.  
I suppose we were never going to stay in Makali forever. Ogres, though. Scouting reports aren't exactly verbose, but they seem to be friendly. I wonder if they're related to the Ascalonian Ogres. They're on the wrong side of the Deldrimor Front, but then the dragons always caused mass migrations. I wonder what sort of animals they've brought to heel out here. Imagine the chieftain with a pet Hydra! Hah, now that's something to think about. Perhaps I'll tell them of all the great beasts I've seen and fought.  
  
That's tomorrow, though. Today, we're mostly packing up. Oh, and one of the Rayders decided to tick me off, for no apparent good reason. Sinclair decided to change up Alexina Rayder's training regimen, which is within his authority, and have Iluoana train her, rather than her brother, Marcus Rayder. This apparently caused him to throw a fit, yelling about how he should be a good brother, and how that came second to being a good soldier, and other none-sense. I don't even know why he was yelling at me to begin with, I couldn't give less of a shit who trained Alexina, as long as she comes out the other side being able to stand her ground. Be that as it may, I'll trust Sinclair to make a judgement call on training. It's literally his job, after all. Anyway, the idiot decided to challenge my authority outright, so I've made his sister responsible for all of his slip ups. If he wants to be a good brother before being a good soldier, I'll damn well force him to be a good soldier in order to be a good brother.  
  
Either case, they're about to spend some time apart, since they're both in different squads. Probably for the best, too, might give them some time to get some perspective.  
I'll just be glad to be out of the sun, and into something that at least resembles hillands. Who knows, maybe it'll look a little like the Wayfarer's forests.

# 56th of Colossus

Lommuld Kraal.  
  
So, we moved north across the salt flats, and into the foothills on the south of the Deldrimor Font. The Kraal here is large, and beautifully built. It's very rocky, with a lot of sheer cliffs and steep drops into ravines, and the Ogres have built up and out around it. To the east, the Brand stretches out as far as the eye can see. It has already claimed large stretches of the Ogre's territory, and if not for the constant threat of the Brand and the monsters lurking within, these people might have lived peaceful and idyllic lives. The center of the Kraal lies between two brooks, one flowing down a deep canyon that separates it from the Brand, and the other a fast-flowing stream that comes down from the mountains to the west. The Ogres have built their animal pens and huts around a great umbrella acacia that shades them from the sun. It is a beautiful, and serene, place. If their animal pens were not filled with sand eels, and strange rock-encrusted deer, you could almost close your eyes and imagine yourself being in Ascalon.  
  
The Ogres live in some harmony with desert nomads, and Cavaliers. We could see signs of more advanced construction around, and there's supposedly a human village further into the hills that has good relations with the Lommuld Ogres. There was also a man here, who spoke to the Warmaster and myself, albeit briefly, about our efforts against the Awakened. He mentioned some name with the word 'shadows' in it, but I let the Warmaster settle the details. If he can help us find the Priory, then I'll be content.  
I suppose it is good that our deeds have started to precede us. The Warmaster told me that she suspects command might actually order us in to commit a strike against Palawa Joko. For all the bellicose sabre-rattling, I worry about the odds of us against an entire kingdom of undead horrors.  
  
All in all, it's been a quiet day, as we settle into the Kraal for the time being. The Warmaster and I have a wager riding on whatever's lured our Priory friends away. She thinks it'll be a ruined city, whereas I wager it's something to do with djinn. I just hope they weren't stupid enough to wander into the Brand.  
Warmaster also told me she had a vision of sorts, which is why she ended up heading off to the Temple of Kormir when we were still at the Waystation. A priest told he she was blessed. Most curious, considering the human gods aren't usually prone to answering prayers, or granting visions. It's odd, humans are so pious, but they have so little experience or understanding on how to treat with the actual spirits they worship. I told her that if she had a vision, and the priest saw something in it, she should follow it, and embrace the gifts she is being offered. That is the way the Spirits of the Wild teach their followers, after all. So, for now, she has become Alleshia the Truth Seeker. An apt name. I hope her goddess is real. We could use her aid in bringing her errant kinsman to heel.  
  
Asides from that, Vatorn gave me a piece of calcite for the dagger's hilt. He was digging up the minerals in Makali, and was kind enough to offer me one. I'll need to grind it down to size, eventually, but I think they will fit quite nicely. He seemed pleased enough to be out of Makali. Truth be told, I think everyone is. Most of the squad was out by the river for most of the day, ignoring direct orders not to venture directly into the river, as can be expected of them. I corrected them, but I'm not going to cause much more of a fuss than needed. I wouldn't have minded a splash myself, when it comes down to it, but I have to set an example. So, no cheeky river-dipping for Knight Tzahr.  
  
Meanwhile, Lance is way off over in the west. Not sure how their encounter with those Choya is going, but I hope it's as serene as this side of Lommuld Kraal. Spirits, if the Brand wasn't already gnawing away at it, I'd almost feel bad for disturbing this place.

# 57th of Colossus

Lommuld Kraal.  
  
We found something unbelievable today. We ventured into the Brand, due east, to see if there were any traces of our Priory folks left out there, and to assist the Ogres with heading into some ruins. Except they weren't exactly ruins. At first, the Ogres asked us to help us as the "ghost queen" for aid, which... well, it made us pause. Ghosts are exactly uncommon, but we simply didn't expect them to be out here. Sure enough, the Ogres lead us into a colonnade and were promptly met by spirits brandishing scimitars. We fought our way through them, into a cavernous chamber that is, somehow, kept safe from the Brand's corrupting influence. Piles of treasures are heaped high along the walls, piles of gold and silver, as well as huge gemstones larger than my fist. It was filled with spirits, though only a few opposed us as we invaded their domain. They cursed at us, calling us grave-robbers, though we took nothing.  
We ventured deeper, and then it became clear we were being tested. More ghostly champions assailed us, but we defeated them with relative ease, before a powerful spirit appeared before us, and declared itself as being Queen Nadijeh. She would treat with the Ogres, now that they had proven themselves worthy, and help them defend their territory from the Brand.  
We were left awe-struck and confused with what had just happened, before we ventured to ask some of the ghostly attendants who their queen was, to which they prompted us that it was she who had once united all of Elona. It was then about that we understood we were standing in the ancient Tomb of the Primeval Kings, the fabled resting place of the ancient Elonan monarchs. It is said that great heroes would come here to prove their worth before the human gods, and be welcomed into the Hall of Heroes! Klixxa confirmed our suspicions when she told us that there was a portal to the Mists, hidden at the back of the chamber. I tried to open it, but failed. I could feel the magic coursing through the air, and I felt like I was about to step through to the other side, but... the portal wouldn't open.  
The ghosts seemed to resent our presence in their tomb, and eventually we had to leave mostly empty-handed. Still... the experience of having stood so close to something so momentous...  
I wonder why the portal wouldn't open. Is it because the power of the human gods has waned since the days the Hall of Heroes was open to mortals? Because I am no Ascended, like those heroes of the Flameseeker Prophecies? Or are my deeds simply not enough for the exalted company I would seek to join? I doubt we'll ever return there now, and it feels like I have missed an opportunity of sorts. Maybe I just expected too much, once I knew where we were.  
  
That's not the strangest thing that's happened today either. Athelstan, who was a Quartermaster with the Ashen for a long while, suddenly appeared out of no-where. He told us a jumbled tale of having been transferred away a while ago to work on those strange magical portals that kept appearing all over Ascalon. One has, so he claims, thrown him all the way over here, and he's been surviving in the desert for over two seasons now. After having caught wind of Tyrians being in the Crystal Desert, he sought us out, and has finally ended up back here, in Lommuld Kraal. He's a hit... scattered. I think his brain might have boiled with staying out in the desert for so long. He'll get some rest, we'll see if he becomes more coherent.  
  
So, asides from... all of that, no signs of our Priory friends. Funny, because I suspect the Tomb of the Primeval Kings might be one of the single most significant finds out here for them. But, they're not there, which means they've either went deeper into the Brand than the Tomb, or they headed west.  
  
Spirits, I wish Kristen was here for all of this. It feels like ages ago since I last saw them.  
But, you know, the Warmaster said she might have been able to wrangle us something for Wintersday, so... maybe. Small hopes.

# 58th of Colossus

Lommuld Kraal.  
  
We went out into the Brand today, due east. The Ogres used to have more of their Kraal out there, surrounding the ruins of the Tomb. The area is littered in the scraps and remnants of those structures, corroded with the cancerous influences of the Brand. It twists and tears at everything it touches, turning it asides to some twisted purpose. We put down the Branded Ogres we encountered. It was a bitter mercy to dole out. Spirits, the Brand in Ascalon is bad enough, but out here, it is of an entirely different magnitude. I didn't even know something as vile as the Brand could somehow turn out even worse, but it did. I can't imagine what it must feel like to see your home corrupted by such evil. Is this how Asgeir and our ancestors felt when they saw Jormag lay waste to our northern homes? What do you even do, in the face of such a nigh-unconquerable evil? The Ogres of Lommuld Kraal are not the first to see their homes ripped away beneath their very feet by the evil of the Elder Dragons, but I hope that they will be among some of the last.  
  
And of course, still no sign of our missing Priory people. I suspect we'd found some trail of them out in the Brand, but then it does feel like searching for a needle in a haystack.  
Between the Brand and the Tomb, it feels like we're teetered on the edge of something here. To the east lies death, loss, and faded grandeur. It makes me realize how far away from everyone and everything we are. We've been driven to the edge of the world, in an attempt to fight everyone's war. Is it futile? Is this why the Sunspears eventually broke, and fell to Palawa Joko? Spirits, sometimes I wonder why I'm here, and in the same instant I know I have all the honourable justifications, and noble excuses in the world. I don't doubt that what we do here is worthy, but sometimes I selfishly wonder if everyone even deserves to be saved. Why do I risk my life for people who I have never met? Jormag is north, not south in the desert, and the human god seems to be a human problem.  
Bah. I know such thoughts are unworthy of me. I just worry that beyond the next hill, we'll just find another evil to fight. How will I ever know it is time to stop fighting, and go back home?

# 59th of Colossus

Lommuld Kraal.  
  
Headache.  
I think I'll just stay in and lie down for a bit. Listen to the rustling leaves of the tree, and sounds of the Ogres tending to their creatures. Maybe it'll be better tomorrow.

# 60th of Colossus

Lommuld Kraal.  
  
Headache persists. Spent a lot of time inside. I heard some shouting outside, but I'll let the First Crusaders handle it. We don't have much orders, asides from keeping an eye out for any trace of our Priory friends. Thankfully, that means I can keep cool, and not worry too much about anything. Asides from the Brand's looming presence to the east, this place is almost tranquil.  
  
Anyway, I'm not going to spend too much time penning things down. It hurts to concentrate.

# 61st of Colossus

Lommuld Kraal.  
  
Feeling slightly better, which of course means things get slightly worse in the world around me. Rest is for other people, after all.  
  
So, first of all, apparently this entire Alexina-being-trained-by-Iluoana nonesense is still playing out. Following the entire debacle with Marcus Rayder forgetting his place, I am not well-disposed towards this continued lack of respect for the chain of command, and the consistent inability to follow reasonably simple orders. I was a First Crusader long enough to understand that *hurt feelings* are not a condition which allows a soldier to ignore instructions given to them. I, nor the Vigil, has any use for a soldier who is unable to follow orders because they so happen to dislike them. Iluoana may be fresh and still uncertain in her boots as a First Crusader, but Spirits alive, if the Rayders think they are in any way permitted to continually undermine her authority, they better have a better bloody reason than "I don't like her". I may leave more allowance than the Tactician, but if they think I will brook insubordination in my squadron, they will be sorely, sorely mistaken.  
  
In other news, we've gotten a trace of our lost Priory people, but it's not much. Apparently a recon patrol we set out found the body of a dead Asura due south-west of us. Not in the direction of the Brand, then. There was a small encampment, but no further traces of the rest of the expedition. What was this one, then? Someone who wandered off? A survivor of something bigger? It's hard to say. Carbine examined the body, and found that the throat was slit, which is likely the cause of death before the local wildlife mauled the carcass. Not much to go on, since we know there's supposedly bandits out further, nearer to Lance's position. I wonder if they've found anything of value.  
We'll be holding some funerary rights, put the body to rest. We thankfully found enough to identify the body, one Explorer Kelak, and we'll be able to inform a next of kin. After that, I suspect we'll head west ourselves.  
  
Heache's still there, at the back of my head. I think it's the heat, and just some general stress from being out here. Listening to the tree calms me down, though. I wish we had them like this in the mountains. Perhaps a snow cherry, scattering pink blossoms onto the white snow. A better alternative than painting it with blood. Hah, is that what peace looks like? Mountains flowers in snow, instead of the blood of our heroes.  
That reminds me of the wreath of snow cherry blossoms Kristen wears in her hair sometimes, when she has the patience and time to work the branches. I like seeing her work things, like fletching arrows. It makes me feel at home when she does.

# 62nd of Colossus

Lommuld Kraal.  
  
We burned the Asura today, and returned them to the Eternal Alchemy. No memories to share, no stories to retell, just the silence that is somehow louder than the crackle of the pyre. No remembrance should be silent. I hope that we find the rest of the Priory group, and perhaps they will be able to tell us a tale about Explorer Kelak, and the deeds that are now only consigned to memory.  
  
We'll be departing soon. I don't know what to think about leaving this place. The Brand looms as it did since before we arrived. The simplicity of the lives the Ogres live here belies their strength and endurance. They are unshakable like deeply rooted trees, though sometimes I wonder if they are too stubborn. Pragmatism would say to abandon their home to the Brand, and look for greener pastures elsewhere. On the other hand, I can admire their will to stay and fight for what they have built. They train their animals for battle, forge crude but effective weapons, and build wooden walls and palisades... for what? To stave off the inevitable? Or does their defiance have a meaning beyond the sheer unwillingness to give in?  
I wish there was something we could do for them.  
  
This place. We are so close to the Brand, the mystery of the Primeval Tombs and the Mists, and yet... I could lay here and listen to the winds forever, thinking about home, and losing myself in melancholy.  
Spirits, no pyre in Hoelbrak has ever burned in silence. We celebrate life too much to mourn death.  
I suppose the Ogres here defy death and ruin in their own way, and that is why they have my respect. They are like us, in that they would rather meet their ends with swords drawn. Their last words will be thunder and fire.  
  
  
91. Kelak, burned in silence.

# 63rd of Colossus

Highjump Ranch.  
  
We left the Kraal behind, and moved out due west deeper into the mountains. The hills become more rugged, and the terrain is more jagged. It's not a gentle slope, but rather a steep and sharp rise upwards. The mountain peaks are surprisingly close-by, yet they soar above us. It promises long and dangerous climbs, and narrow passes filled with deep snows.  
The local villagers here raise large hares which they call springers. We've seen them before, but they seem most common throughout this entire area. They are easily the size of bull-minotaurs, and have tails thicker than some trees. When ridden expertly, they can leap up to great vertical heights, which helps the locals to navigate the many rocky plateaus and stone pillars on which they live. Everything feels dense, packed in between sheer cliffs and rapid-flowing brooks and rivers, gushing with glacier waters.  
  
Funny thing is that these people are originally Ascalonian. An old man here tells me of a time when their people fled south from the Foefire, and settled down here. Like the Ogres, these people here have ancestral tries to a distant homeland that has all-but forgotten them. I wonder if there are still norn in the Far Shiverpeaks, or even further north, out beyond the frozen oceans of the Kodan. The dragons split many of us apart. Finding some small trace of what we left behind is encouraging. It suggests that the dragons were able to drive us away, but not destroy us. I find strength in the knowledge that the times have changed. It is us who know fight back against the dragons, rogue gods, undead monsters, rather than flee when they bare their fangs. No backwards step! Let those be the words of our time.  
  
The village here is peaceful, thankfully, with the only visible threat being groups of harpies that seem to nest in the higher nooks and crannies of the cliffs. Lance, who rejoined us here, informed us that the Priory group was seen further into the mountains, which makes me suspect we will not linger here long. It seems that one place out here at least has found a measure of true tranquility. I envy them for it.  
But then, the high mountains in the upland are capped with snowy peaks, and they beckon to me. I can almost feel it on my skin. It isn't home, but it should at least get the damned heat off and away.

# 64th of Colossus

Highjump Ranch.  
  
So, weird day. I rode out to Makali in the morning, to follow up on Athelstan's entire story. He's been hanging around camp, and I suspect we're not entirely sure what we want to do with him. He said we should ride out to Makali in order, to see if they could bring some clarity to the situation, but... Well, they confirm they knew him, and that he went out with some of the Cavalier to try and do something about that Awakened camp we shelled some days ago. That's about the extent of it, though. Apparently he's perfectly coherent, just has his memories jumbled all together, which makes it difficult for him to gauge when or what is going on. I think that at this point we're going to see if he regains some sense of *when*. If he doesn't, I suspect we'll make arrangements for him to be sent all the way down the line back to Tyria.  
For her part, the Warmaster seems remarkably coherent about the entire deal. It's not every day that an old dearheart comes poofing out of thin air, in a questionable mental state. Not sure how I'd react to such a thing, but I suspect it'd be troubled.  
  
Day duties were more exciting than planned. The entire valley here's been considered to be very low threat, so we had the newest First Crusader of each squad run recon patrols around the area. I had my folks tack up further into the hills under Iluoana. Slow going, first of all. The terrain is incredibly difficult to navigate, and often simply drops away into cliffs and canyons with no preamble. It certainly makes the use of large domesticated hares who can leap a cliff seem less like a luxury and more like a necessity. We had to traverse some incredibly dangerous drops, and scale cliffs slick with rain. The First Crusader seemed to handle the troops decently enough, with a few notes that I'll pass on some other time. Going off on her own to climb a cliff while we were all at the bottom of it is a more solid wrinkle. Can't have her think she's in the scouts when she's in command.  
Either case, we wore poor Calder out to the bone, making him cast mesmer portal spells at an alarming pace to get around the biggest terrain hurdles. Once we made it all the way to the top, I realized that the locals saying the place was inhabited by giants, they were being very literal. We crested the plateau, and there were two of the fellows fighting over something right over the ridge. More of them seemed to wander and loiter around a strange rock structure that seemed like some sort of Elonian wayshrine. It was difficult to see, because that high we were running into drifting fog banks, but it seemed clear that there were more than a lone giant or two up there. Alexina noted that they looked different from the Tyrian giants too; more eyes. Back home, real giants are rare enough that spotting one's a notable find. Out here, they're a lot more common apparently.  
We fell back soon enough, and returned to camp. Finding out way to the Priory expedition might prove to be slightly more complicated than expected. Maybe there's other routes through the mountains.  
  
Anyway, it's been a long and physically arduous day, so I'm going to rest up.

# 65th of Colossus

Highjump Ranch.  
  
No duties today, just medical check-up. No one was surprised to learn I'm still as steady on my feet as I was yesterday. We're making sure we're all physically fit to continue our trek into the mountainside, since it'll be a sharp drop in temperature, and the air's likely to be thinner. That, and from what we've seen yesterday, it'll be really hard going. Of course, the norn here are all ready to get going, but then we've all had more than enough of the desert flats and the heat. A little mountain air will do us good.  
Klixxa reported in some sleeping issues since we passed by Lommuld Kraal. Here's hoping it's a temporary thing, and not some sort of ley-line magic infection. Those seem to be common. Spirits, we didn't use to have to worry about getting near to magic, but things have changed. Here's hoping Klixxa's just suffering some mild migraine, like me a few days ago.  
  
Anyway, we're making ready to venture into the mountains, but in the meantime we enjoy the peculiar hospitality of the hillfolks. They welcome us with bright smiles, and offer us coffee and tea made from strong herbs. I found an old bland man called Yakub who smokes a pipe filled with crushed iboga petals that he says 'allows him to see the stars'. It's a strong smoke alright, but I've not tried more than a few puffs. It was... interesting. Much stronger than anything I've smoked before, though not as strong as the truffels and mushrooms you can get from the foothills. The iboga are common enough around here, and they're apparently fairly vicious critters when it comes down to it. I might consider getting a pouch of it for Kristen, cut it with a pipe or scatter it over a brazier.  
Ah... You know, the prospect of going into the mountains is betraying. It almost feels like going home, but there won't be norn lodges, smiling wives or laughing children waiting for us. Still, you know. One step at a time, and no backwards step.

# 66th of Colossus

Highjump Ranch.  
  
Scouts came back from recon, and it's about as we expected out there. There's no way up for the animals, so we'll likely have to pill in the supplies by sled. The good news, they found an old Priory camp, so our lost expedition's almost certainly within reach. The downside is that we'll need some extra time to set up alternative transports, and sort out all out kit for what is due to be transported and what isn't. Given we're not lugging the yaks into the mountains, it means leaving behind a good fair amount of ordnance and superfluous equipment.  
  
The rest of the day went by quietly. I'm feeling morose and a bit homesick, but that'll pass.  
Can't wait to see the mountains. I hope it'll do good to cheer me up a little. Right now, it feels like another Wintersday will be spent far away from home. I hope the Warmaster pulls through on getting us some leave.  
We had an idea to get two pines for the Chapter, and do a tree-off. Would be a good way to waste some time in case we're forced to sit it out here again.  
Spirits, time flies.

# 67th of Colossus

Highjump Ranch.  
  
Work on prepping for a mountain-crossing. Slow going.  
I'm not feeling too well, but it's not a physical illness. More just an absence of focus. I like the manual work, because I can just zone out and let my mind go over the familiar motions without too much thought. I wonder if this is how golems feel.  
  
I guess we just take it one step at a time.

# 68th of Colossus

Highjump Ranch.  
  
All the notices went up, and we're now on a timetable to ready up and head into the mountains, chase down these Priory folks. I wonder what they have found up there that has made them so forgetful about checking back in at home. Given they apparently lost an Explorer on the way, I hope it was worth it.  
Everyone else is preparing, the First Crusaders keeping them from growing too lazy or complacent in their duties. Makes me wish I still had the rank, you know. Less tiring, if you can believe it.  
  
Spoke to Iluoana and Alexina, separately. I told them I want this charade over with. They don't need to like each other in order to perform their duties, but the recruit has to give the First Crusader due deference where needed, while the latter needs to maintain her professional distance. Spirits, I know it sounds conceited, but I wish I had myself as a First Crusader. Just the Tzahr Chapter.  
We'd probably get stuck in a mooting loop, or all die of fatal melancholy the second we'd be out of sight from Kristen and the pipsqueaks for more than a day.  
Anyway, I hope this is the last I hear about this niggle for a while. More so because it all seems to be based on some personal, and very unprofessional, misgivings on either side.  
  
There is an observation platform out east that looks over the Lommmuld Kraal in the distance. You can see for miles, into the distant, baking, flats and the purple haze of the Brand. It's a beautiful view, the border between three different areas of the world. It reminds me a little of the Keep's eastern overlook, in Gendarran. It's moments like these I can understand a raven's desire to soar out across the land. Everything looks so much more tranquil from afar. Maybe I'll sit out tonight, smoke a handful of the Jacaranda petals, and watch the stars come out.

# 69th of Colossus

Highjump Ranch.  
  
Long sleep, and then a day working. We're all set to proceed up into the mountains tomorrow.  
It's been a long day, and unless you want me to bore you with the minutiae of how I set about checking supplies, I'll save my words for tomorrow. There's bound to be something up in those mountains worth finding.

# 70th of Colossus

Fortune's Vale.  
  
And up into the mountains we went. Spirits, call that a trip and a half. Scaling cliffs, and a narrow encounter with a wandering giant were only the prelude to us losing half the day bridging a collapsed Dwarven bridge over a ravine. It was worth it, though. The Priory found an old Dwarven mine, a vast honeycombed ruin dug directly into the mountains. The interior is apparently swarming with Destroyers, which means we can guess what happened to the original inhabitants. Seems the rite of the Great Dwarf has not ensured victory on all fronts of the great underground war. I wonder, if Primordius wasn't sent back to sleep, if they would be surging out of this mine, infecting the mountainside.  
As it stands, the view is majestic enough. It seems like they dug out a crossroads in the middle of a peak, leaving the rest of the mountain to soar high overhead. There are hundreds of gaps abandoned chambers and mine shafts dotting the sheer cliffs around us, and even more going deep below the ground.  
We've set up camp in some of the larger chambers hewn-out at ground level, and the Priory have made good work of clearing them from debris and making them livable again. The snow is welcome too. It's not home, but this was worth it.  
  
I wonder what I would've done, had I found the place first. If not for the Destroyers infesting the lower reaches, it would have been a perfect place to found a hold. The Dwarven stonework could've been restored to its former glory, and then added to by the craftsmanship of the norn. Spirits, you could even try to trade with the people in the hills, and the Ogres in the Kraal. Perhaps even the giants we encountered may be swayed into peaceful co-existence. And if not, I suppose it will always be worth testing one's mettle against a giant. I wonder if they are are vicious as the Jotun can be?  
Ah, if things were different. I can see the potential of what such a place could be. Though, perhaps, it is a little to far away from home, still. We are very far south, after all. We never set foot here, even when the Dwarves were still plenty.  
  
I suspect we will be going into the depths, sooner or later. I am worried about what we will find.

# 71st of Colossus

Fortune's Vale.  
  
Into the depths we went.  
Spirits, it was no less impressive. For some reason, I expected narrow, claustrophobic corridors, and a deep, underground darkness. What we found was something else entirely. Large, swooping halls and thoroughfares, each grand enough to house a host of warriors worthy of the greatest tales. There is a chasm going down all the way into the heart of the earth, with galleries running all the way down. This place is vast; much more than a mere mine, but a fortress, a city. An entire civilization could have been housed within these halls, and they'd have had room to spare.  
Alas, it seems that it has been lost to the Destroyers. There Priory teams on the first levels inside, and they were already trapped in by roaming swarms of cave spiders and Destroyer monsters. No doubt they pour in through the fissures below, and I suspect things will become more difficult the deeper we go. If not for the Priory, I suspect I'd be given orders to have it sealed. Looking around, this would not be materially difficult, but it would make my heart bleed to see so majestic a home be ruined beyond all recovery. Still, it would take years to reclaim this place fully, and an army we don't have. I wonder if the Dwarves that lived here are still waging their war below, and how close they are.  
  
Speaking of Dwarves, the Priory expedition had one. Or, well, part of one, which seemed to be carried about. It's strange to see a disembodied stone head speak in a gruff voice. Hearing about the Rite of the Great Dwarf, and actually seeing a living boulder are two different things. I thought Ogden Stonehealer was the last, but it seems he is at least joined by one more, if partial, kinsman. Thankfully they seem to be as stoic as the rock they have become. Seeing the ruins of your people like this sounds like a bitter thing. Or, perhaps, he sees that the glory of the Dwarves still retains its splendour and luster, even in decay?  
  
There's more than just Destroyers down there too. We had to pass through a magically sealed "runedoor", into a chamber filled with ice, and guarded by ice imps. One of the Priory's scholars had wandered off and fallen through the ice floor. I wonder how many other strange things are still sequestered below? I suspect the Priory would direly like to find out, but even they aren't suitably equipped for this kind of work.  
  
No sign of Balthazar or any Awakened, though. No doubt we won't stay long, and continue our hunt for the rogue god. We'll see what other places we'll find.  
I understand my da better now, you know. The prospect of seeing what's over the next horizon.

# 72nd of Colossus

Fortune's Vale.  
  
Encountered a Djinn, and... uh. It was an experience and a half.  
We sent out to look for the last of the scattered Priory group out here, whom apparently wandered over south to investigate some more outlying ruins. Sure enough, there's more signs of Dwarven construction out on a ledge further south, but that's not what ended up catching our attention. Hidden along the southermost edges of the peaks was a surprisingly ornate Elonian structure, halfway fallen into ruin and swarming with imps. We had to scale several sheer cliffs, and the bridges leading into the structure were also heavily damaged. There was a heavy flow starting below it, that rushed out like a giant torrential waterfall, and disappeared down into the depths below. I was getting closer to see how we could get ourselves across when I saw something ripple in the water before is simply reached up and grabbed me in a tendril, and then dragged me away inside its lair.  
It was a surprisingly elegant dome, covered in ornamentation, with pillars adorned with the same blue brick we saw in Amnoon. Inside, in a pool of water, was a strange spirit-like being that seemed just large enough to make it feel the dome was built for him. Or it, perhaps. It asked me some strange riddles about places and things I didn't know about, and then suspended me in a ball of water some ten meters above the ground. I could breath in it alright, but I couldn't move out of it. It just seemed to keep me pinned in place, no matter how hard I swam or flailed about. My host left me to my struggles, I suspect as penance for not being nearly as entertaining as he'd hoped.  
  
Eventually, the Chapter was able to make their way across and free me, though not in the most elegant way. They fired some magical bolts at the bubble, before catching me on some flesh-thing Astrid conjured up below me. It popped like a blister, and showered everyone around me in gore. I would've retched, if the entire ordeal didn't leave me badly winded. I have a solid purple bruise across my back from smacking down on it, which is going to be a sore ordeal for sleep and wearing armour. The Djinn returned soon after, and attacked us as we approached. The skirmish was brief enough, but I don't think the Djinn was tfighting for his life. When he grew bored, he stopped fighting, and decided to speak. Apparently he brought the entire place, the dome, the bridges, everything, here from Elona, and decided to make the abandoned mountains his home. That alone speaks of unimaginable power. I don't think it was malicious, it's just... Djinn are strange creatures, from the sound of it. It literally disappeared up it's own arse shortly after, and let us all leave none the wiser. At least it didn't seem to have gotten a hold of any of the Priory's people.  
  
I'm going to lie down now, though. I'm a little woozy.

# 73rd of Colossus

Fortune's Vale.  
  
So, against better judgement, and our adventures these last few days, we went back into the deeps, back to the room behind the runedoor. The Priory asked if we could mount an armed expedition, and go down there to figure out why it's filled with imps, and strange ice formations. We got the Explorer who we pulled out of there the day before yesterday with us, to record any findings. Ended up being a bit of a bust. It is a sort of gallery-like corridor, with an arched ceiling to support the weight of the mountain above it. The floor is made out of a thick sheet of ice, origin unknown. It's just there. Some parts of the ice are clear enough to see through. Oddly, below it seems that someone flipped same gallery around, with the floor arcing away to create an inverted archway. It's not an exact mirror-image, but there's plenty of other nonsensical architecture that doesn't seem to have been built with any specific purpose. Calder suggested it might have been a cistern of sorts. It was infested with oozes anyway, and we'd have to drop down a hole in the ice to reach it. Klixxa made an in-situ assessment, and decided to abort the mission, considering the large amount of unknown involved. It wasn't the smoothest action I've seen, but Klixxa has much better insight into these things that I do. I'll admit I was curious to go down there, as I'm want to do, but this time it wasn't my call. At any rate, we're not the Priory. There wasn't anything for us to do down there except get stuck knee-deep in ooze goo.  
  
That's about the extend of it. Outside of the mine, it's calm enough. The sheer scale of the delving is numbing. They literally quartered a mountain's peak, and then bored into the core. Imagine what this would have been like with the Dwarves still here, axes high. I suspect they would've looked at the odd ice room, shrugged and told us it's just supposed to be a larder or something.  
  
The Priory's taking tally of all their Explorers and Scholars. They're apparently prone to wandering off whenever they fancy, and there's a number of them still unaccounted for. Here's hoping all the numbers fill out. Not that I'd mind delving deeper into the region, but I'd rather not have more dead Priory on hand because of their carelessness. Spirits, I hope Freyj and Grace are more sensible when it comes to venturing off out on their own.  
Eh, who am I kidding.

# 74th of Colossus

Fortune's Vale.  
  
You'd almost forget we were in the baking desert not fourteen days ago, with the way the snows fall and mount in here. The Dwarves were clever, they built a giant drain in the middle of the Vale here, which drains away the molten snow. I know there's a vast underground water flow below here somewhere, as it cascades out below the home of our capricious Djinn friend. My back's still sore from that.  
  
Most of the Priory seem to be accounted for, though they're still trying to work on a few more stragglers. I spoke to a couple of them, some knew the Explorer, Kelak, we burned over at the Kraal. I asked if they could tell me about him, but things were a little sparse. One Asuran Scholar was happy to talk, but I didn't understand anything he said to me. I think he was trying to explain something about a theory he and Kelak had worked upon. Something about migratory birds flying across the Crystal Desert because they still think it's an ocean. Apparently there are seasonal flocks that try and fly over to Vabbi, and die en masse. Kelak apparently found a sea of bleached bird bones not so long ago.  
An interesting find, though I'm not sure if I understand the theory behind it much. Seems like a strange concept.  
Still, it is something to remember Explorer Kelak by. I urged his friend to write about it. Let's just hope he'll think to attribute Kelak's part in it all, and not let his ambition overstretch his respect for the deeds of the dead. It's difficult to know with Asura.  
  
Asides from that, I've been looking around more. There is just something about this place. Some lingering presence of something great. Faded grandeur, perhaps. It is like finding an ancient statue of a warrior, the words engraved at the feet worn away with time. We are left to wonder what greatness they were once known for, with no-one left alive who can remember.

# 75th of Colossus

Fortune's Vale.  
  
A day at rest. We're leaving the Priory one more day to figure out where their missing people are, before we set out patrols to recover them. In the meantime, the First Crusaders have been running the troops through some drills to keep them moving. Considering, it should do well to keep their bodies warm.  
  
The cold is making me melancholic. I keep thinking back of my little girl Hejja.  
Spirits, I hope they can spare us a trip home back over Wintersday.

# 76th of Colossus

Fortune's Vale.  
  
Priory tally came in only one man short, which is a surprise. Anyway, we set off to collect the fellow, who went off into the mountains to study the local wildlife. We found him easy enough, near another large Dwarven ruin at the very top of the peaks south of us. Unfortunately, the area was overrun with all manner of aggressive wildlife, including a sizeable pack of griffons. A pity, because the ruin looked just as majestic as our current location. I wonder what it was. Some sort of keep? There's also impressively large species of mountain minotaurs roaming around. It shows that they've not had much predators preying on them anymore, not like in the Shiverpeaks. Minotaur bulls that large would've been shot down for a Great Hunt long ago, or run afoul of a worried homesteader with a smoothbore musket.  
  
Anyway, it means we're set to leave this place behind, and return to our hunt on the war god. I wonder how much we've missed out on, up here. Marching in the wrong direction for as long as we have can be a costly mistake, but the question is if Balthazar was even aware to capitalize on it. We've neither seen nor heard anything about him or his Forged army since we arrived late for the siege of Makali, and Vlast's death.  
  
I worry, really. If Balthazar did not go north, there's not many options left open. East, towards the Branded, and south, towards the Desolation and Elona. So it's a toss-up between the two most hostile places known to history.  
Knowing our luck, we'll march straight into both.

# 77th of Colossus

Highjump Ranch.  
  
Up and out, it seems. Back down south.  
The journey's left me spent, so I'm going to keep it short.  
It'll be a few days of marching now.

# 78th of Colossus

Makali.  
  
We're only here in passing, truth be told. Seems most of the damage is in the process of being fixed, and people here are resuming their usual, hard, lives. We're continuing onward south though the pass back into the Crystal Desert properly. From there, we'll see what the intelligence says. It's probably too much to hope to be sent back home, but you never know.  
  
It's been a strange place.  
Walking below the ragged, but colourful, pennants folks hang up here, I can see things that remind me of home everywhere, just always ever so slightly different. The Koda hang pennants and flags from their sanctuaries too. The merchant at the stall selling salted sand-shark could be selling smoked salmon. The open tents are made out of thick cloth that wards out the sun, just like a hunter's tent is made sturdy against the snow and wind. But these people aren't norn. They laze in the shadow when they can. They haggle easily, and smile with every word while they do it, their eyes alight with the mischief of bargaining. They have simple things, invested with simple craftsmanship, which lends to them a simple elegance. Their rugs are rough-woven, but beautifully dyed. I suspect that laziness and patience are much the same. They are unhurried, calm in the face of the dire circumstances that surround them. Just like the people in Amnoon were about their precious water. That, too, reminds me of home.  
  
Anyway, I know I shouldn't hope, but there's a small part of me wishing that there'll be an airship waiting for us in Amnoon. Much as I can wonder at the places and peoples we find here, it all feels empty if I cannot share it with my family in some manner. Kristen's absence looms over everything I experience here; not in a bad way, mind. I just wish she was here with me to share in all these wonders.

# 79th of Colossus

Amnoon.  
  
Doesn't seem like we're getting any time back in Tyria. Or at least, if we do, we haven't been told yet. Still, we're resupplying in Amnoon for now. We had some Forged spotted on the march here, so at least Balthazar hasn't magically ceased being a threat.  
For the remainder, I think everyone's taking it easy. Amnoon is as hospitable as it was before. I preferred the heights and the majesty of the Dwarven lands, but not by much.

# 80th of Colossus

Amnoon.  
  
Still in the city. No word yet, but it might seem we'll be putting down for an extended period of soft-leave here. Not what I wanted, which has made me oddly resentful about this entire place. I just wish I didn't have to be here. Seeing the troops splash around the waters of the bay, or laze along the harbour, I wish I could board one of the many boats at anchor, and just sail home.  
  
It doesn't matter. I'll write a letter home, as woefully inadequate is that always is, and just let it all crash over me. I don't know what else I can do. I suppose there's the bet the Warmaster and I made about what's in Fortune's Vale. Might be worth digging up a casket of local brew, and at least make the best out of a bad situation.

# 81st of Colossus

Urgh.

# 82nd of Colossus

Amnoon.  
  
So, minor incident. Vatorn and Iluoana ran into some local weirdo who apparently decided to threaten Carbine over... something about her past. Apparently this one evil lady that we all thought was dead, might not have been dead at all. The fellow went on to try and blackmail them, and threaten Carbine into the bargain.  
I'm not sure how credible it is, but we've put her into protective, and heightened camp security. This feels like the same old story. The White Mantle, the weird Sicarius cultists, they always try, but they never really accomplish anything of note. Not against a guarded encampment.  
  
Asides from that, we've had some more people pass by the camp, mostly mercenaries who are interested in hearing what the Vigil is up to, though we can't tell them too much. One norn lass was here, apparently lost her entire hunting back against the Forged, before she was rescued by another Sylvari mercenary. Sounds like things are still rough out there. The prospect of more Tyrians flowing into the area uncontrolled is troubling; a good way for people to get themselves killed by rushing into something they're not prepared to face. Spirits, we're hard pressed enough, and we're an organized fighting force.  
  
On more immediate concerns, asides from Carbine being shaken badly, apparently Vatorn's been experiencing some strange visions, which were conveniently unreported. He's been mandated to check in with medical and Occult. From the sounds of it, he's been hexed. Sinclair's apparently bought into it, and didn't think to have him checked into medical for eight whole days. Astrid blew a gasket, of course. I'll be honest, a First Crusader in Blade pulls that sort of stunt, I'll have them out on their ass soon enough. A veteran, too. Just...  
  
The desert's wearing all of us thin.

# 83rd of Colossus

Amnoon.  
  
As expected, all is still quiet. Just more of the regular chattering, and people going about their usual routines. We rescinded folk's ability to wander into town, however, which means we're pretty much stuck on this beach for now. A pity, as I was thinking of going out riding more often again, now that we're back in relatively safe havens. I suspect we'll remain heightened awareness for a few days, but then dial it down again. After that, I suppose I'll spend Wintersday riding along the irrigation channels.  
  
Pity I didn't have a chance to send anything home for the little ones.  
Spirits, it just feels like 1326 all over again.

# 84th of Colossus

Amnoon.  
  
Nothing of note, asides from me being grumpy.  
Checked in some odd munitions carried in by a recruit back into the armoury.  
  
Same shit, different day.

# 85th of Colossus

Amnoon.  
  
Still locked up in camp. Getting close to 1331 now, I've realized. Seems like we'll be spending it here.  
I'm starting to resent this place, through no fault of its own. Just... it's not home, and I resent having to be here.  
  
Oh, Vatorn and Carbine asked me to allow them to have a relationship. Considering all the ruckus with Mai's state of mind, death threat and such, I had to deny the request. Bitter irony that I'm not the only one who doesn't get what he wants for Wintersday doesn't cheer me up.

# 86th of Colossus

Amnoon.  
  
Spirits, I was so ready to just accept the disappointment, to embrace this vague sense of dutiful self-pity, and sit it all out on the sideline with everyone else. And the Alleshia does what she always does and finds a seam.  
I'm getting sent back to Trinity, along with the Tactician, tomorrow. We're to debrief Warmaster Ironhide in her stead, and then lay over for a few days while the airship goes through overhaul and re-check. It means I'll have a few days to spare, with gate access to the Priory, and from there, Lion's Arch and Hoelbrak.  
  
It itches me, you know, to get a few days because of a technicality, and a bone that the Warmaster is throwing me. It itches me that the other folks are going to remain here. No doubt they all want to go home for a few days too. Don't get me wrong, I won't say no to seeing Kristen and the children, even for a few days, but... eh.  
A few snatched days for two officers, and nothing for the rest doesn't seem fair to any of us. I won't complain, not to anyone but myself, but it's a niggle.  
  
Anyway, we're boarding tomorrow morning, and are due to land the day after, in the morning.  
It'll be good to be home.

# 87th of Colossus

In transit. Headwind, which means a strong south-south-east breeze.  
A passenger this time.  
  
We'll be arriving in Trinity after dark, and then tomorrow it's a full day debriefing.  
It's going to be two long days.

# 88th of Colossus

Fort Trinity.  
  
Been a long day. We arrived overnight, laid in for a few hours of rest before dawning, and then went on an extensive debrief and threat analysis report that ended up going on for hours and hours. It's clear that there's some real questions about our deployment in the region, especially when Palawa Joko's concerned. But, I spoke frankly about the situation, and the line of questioning did hint at future engagements with the Awakened troops, if not as a main objective. A few points of order include that Balthazar is almost certainly trying to accomplish something with Kralkatorrik, with the current theories ranging between an outright alliance between god and dragon, to something a little more one-sided. Either case, Balthazar is a wildcard, and he is almost certainly not our ally, so letting him get toe to toe with an Elder Dragon is almost certainly bad for us, and everyone involved. We were also thoroughly briefed on what will be expected of us when we return, which includes tracking down Balthazar at all costs. We're to deal with the matter of Elona's sovereign and his armies as the situation requires, but we should't be concerned with something as trivial as border integrity in his case. That all but means we've been told that we're to march straight through the Desolation and into Elona proper should that be required of us. Here's hoping Balthazar didn't end up squatting down on the southern shore of Kourna, or we'll be in for a long, long, long campaign.  
  
Anyway, it's late evening now. I was hoping to leave for Hoelbrak when the briefings were done, but they went on longer than expected. I was also debriefed by several Order of Whispers and Priory folks, all of whom asked me about different prospects. The spooks asked a lot about the local population, and this "order of shadows", but they seemed generally disappointed with what I had to say. I did enter a note about Mai's situation with one of the Lightbringers.  
The Priory folks took longer, and they had a scribe take notes about my descriptions on local fauna, and creatures. They were especially interested in our encounter with the water Djinn, which lead to the entire thing taking a good two hours longer than I had expected. Right now, I could leave, but I suspect Kristen will be asleep by the time I arrive. I'd rather sleep over, then wake up bright and early and perhaps surprise her with something nice come morning.  
I'm tempted to feel irritated, or robbed of a day, but the Warmaster bought me those few extra days in exchange for this extra duty. Seems like a small enough price to pay, when you look it at that.  
  
Trinity's quiet for the remainder. Only a few ships on station, and there's no major muster going on. You know, after a while, you start to see the differences between the war footings of camps. There's no First Crusaders running drill, and everyone's lazying about. There's occasional Risen that wander nearby, heralded by a sentry's bell. It keeps the local troopers occupied, I suspect, but it's never more than a mild skirmish.  
Dragon news, though, says Primordius and Jormag both went back to ground. I'll hear the details on Jormag from Kristen tomorrow, I suspect. I might drop by early enough to see what the first catches are in Lion's Arch, and bring sweet something back, before she dons the Leopard's pelt. Valharantha'll have to suffer through the day without her shaman's apprentice, I fear. I claim the next few days!

# 89th of Colossus

Hoelbrak.  
  
Evening now. Or, well, night.  
Early up and then through the Asura Gate to the Priory, then the pass through to Lion's Arch before first dawning. I managed to get a pail of fish balls in sauce on the promenade, and then home through Hoelbrak. Almost took a conscious effort not to just bolt down slope into the lodge. Walked into Leopard's house with a helmet filled with fresh bread under one arm, and a bare head.  
Kristen was still asleep when I found her, but little Hejja was awake. I tried to be quiet, but Kristen doesn't yet sleep so deeply she can't hear me shuffle around in armour. I think I might have spooked her for a second, looming over the crib. Spooked the little girl, sure enough. Oh, she's a beautiful little trotter now, all wide-eyes and a small fuzzy crown of hair. Not so much the little pink lump she was when I left. Of course, she took one look at me, and started bawling. No idea who I am, after all. Just a stranger, smelling of spices and curry fish balls, hah. I gave her a kiss on her head, before putting her back in Kristen's arms. Then all was right again. Took a moment to get over the bewilderment and surprise. Heh, guess perhaps ambushing them both while they were still in bed wasn't the most *flattering* situation for sweet to be in, but it passed in a heartbeat. Kristen took Hejja to her breast, and then I was finally home.  
  
Spent much of the day just talking about everything that's happened. I don't talk about it much, but it's one of my favourite things to do. No boasting, just a honest telling of the things we saw and fought. Kristen's received many of the trophies and gifts, so she doesn't need the embellishment. Had to show the Hydra's bite scar, though. It wasn't there when I left off, after all, and sweet does so like keep track of it all. Spirits, we'd have never gotten out of the bed if not for the little one getting restless. Can't blame her either, a belly full of milk only goes so far for keeping you locked up in a crib, hm? Da showed up not long after with Reuzen in tow. Was good to see them both too. My boy's walking and talking now! Da had to carry him up the lodge stairs, but he ran over to me all by himself. Spirits, they're all growing up too fast for me to follow. He remembers me, though.  
Da looked well. He's getting fatter, which isn't surprisingly, but he seems to have found a bit of a place here.  
  
You know, thinking back, it's all a little overwhelming to put into words. Things have changed, as always, while I was away. The wild huntress that I met in Southsun, who would never stay in the same place twice in a row if she could help it, has become a mother and a respected presence in Leopard lodge. It's a change she wears well, though I feel it has made her older. Not in the way she looks, mind, but in the way she is. It suits her, I think.  
And da's here too, a quiet, gentle presence. He doesn't speak much still, but Reuzen clings to him like glue, and even Hejja breaths quietly when he's near. He keeps that jade orb near her when she becomes restless, and she falls asleep steadily. He likes saying the wind speaks to her. I'm a little jealous of him, but I understand the notion is foolish. Ironically, I think da is a little jealous of me too, when I speak of the distant things I've seen, and the battles I've fought. Still, we're both exactly where we need to be, and we have both embraced our place in life. I think even a Kodan would be pleased with the balance we have forged from life's iron.  
I didn't get to see Hrist today, nor Usha, but da tells me they're both around. I might look them up tomorrow, or the day after, if time permits.  
  
Ah, Kristen though... There are many tales to tell. I think ale now, and a good hand of iboga petals in a long-pipe later, around a dimming fire. When it's just us two.

# 90th of Colossus

Hoelbrak.  
  
Good night, that. Snowstorm rolled over the Mourn, and after Hejja was asleep Kristen and I went out into it. The roar of the wind and whipping snow over the ice. An hour or so of braving the torrent together. A breath of iboga made the shapes in the shadow dance and move. The heart of the storm became the hearthfire, long shapes cast in the wake of the light. A beautiful shadowplay conceived by the mountains and the night.  
  
The hangover today's part of the aftermath, I imagine. Hejja's woke up early, as they're want to do at that age. An infant's wail adding to the splitting headache, and since neither Kristen nor I were much for coming out of bed at dawn, I put Hejja in between us for a few hours. She likes pulling on my whiskers.  
  
Day itself was one of those slow ones. We had the good grace of getting out before noon. Went to the Great Lodge for a hearty meal which ran off into an extended war-table. Folks passed us by, old friends, and folks who've heard of me through Kristen and Da. Plenty of stories to be shared over a mug of ale. Spirits, I must've retold the story of the Hydra hunt and my encounter with the Djinn half a dozen times each. Out here, seems life is still going as it usually is. Braham Eirsson is in the north, trying to find a way to get to Jormag, who's buried himself beneath a mountain of snow and ice. The joke that perhaps Tzahr "Mountainsplitter" Davidsson should go and help resolve that issue rang out more than once. Much as I would like to finally make good on the oaths I swore when I founded the Companions, I don't think the time is right. The fang was cracked, but Balthazar put Jormag and Primordius asleep. We can't ignore that to go off trying to hunt down a beast that's retreated into its lair.  
I think some of the more brazen and brash folks would think I was making excuses. There's a sort of desperation there, hidden between that veneer of boastful violence. No, we go when the time is right.  
  
Da and Usha joined us later, with Reuzen and the cubs. The little furballs have grown well. Reuzen's got the size on them, but Snow and her brother are steadier on their feet. They can be a little wild, leaping off of the stairs and digging their claws into the wood. It's the sort of thing that ends a day with scrapes and bruises. Da's told me Hrist doesn't like him playing with the cubs too much. I'd be lying to say I wasn't surprised. Hrist hasn't exactly struck me as being the involved sort of mother, but I suppose I give her too little credit. I don't mind anyway, it reminds me of my own youth with Usha and Timur.  
Usha's doing well, for that part. She looks more tired than I remember her being, but she's still got the good humour. Her winter-batch in the brewery is late, which means she's missing a good part of the holiday sales. That being said, she's not concerned. Apparently business' been good, and she's still got a stock of mid-season product that's selling. She'll set me up with a sample to take back to the Crystal Desert.  
  
I mostly try not to think about when I have to leave again.

# 91st of Colossus

Hoelbrak.  
  
Times passes, as always, in relative quietude. It's strange to find yourself surprised at walking up alongside someone, with a feeling of peculiar displacement. The noise isn't much different from a war camp, but the smells are. I can smell the oils in Kristen's hair, rubbed into the skins and wood, and the whiff of the talc powder from Hejja's crib, mixed in with the woodsmoke and incense drifting up from below. It's the few seconds of not-belonging that strike me, before the mind realizes where it is.  
  
Snows were falling pretty heavily, so it was one of those days. I think next time I have long leave, we should have Da take care of Hejja for a day or two, and then Kristen and I can do some proper hunting in the mountains. It's been a while and I miss our early adventures alone, packing around Yak's Bend, and shooting Drakes in the glaciers. Besides, I grow tired of having to merely tell of great deeds to my sweet, rather than experiencing them together. Now Jormag's been denied to us for a while, we'll have to find something else to sharpen the blade on.  
  
Talking about blades, I had a moment to find Valla Holmgard, and ask her for something special. I put the last chip in on the dragonbone handle I've been carving in between the long desert days, and I think it's ready for a proper blade to be fitted to it. Good steel would do, but I brought in the Forged Devourer talon trophy I took from Godfall Tower, and asked for the blade to be forged from the same metal. A trophy blade, worthy to be an heirloom. I'm sure Holmgard will have the skill to work it to form. A dragonbone hilt, set with steel forged by the will of the God of War himself? Now that will be a fine thing to hang over the mantlepiece.  
  
I spoke to Kristen at length about Fortune's Vale, and about settling down our own lodge. I must admit I feel like we're overdue a place of our own, rather than relying on Knut's continued hospitality. Kristen, however, is very much still bound to this place through her apprenticeship with Valharantha. I am not sure if I feel it is a just reason, or just a convenient excuse she uses to balm my worries on the matter. Perhaps both.

# 92nd of Colossus

Hoelbrak.  
  
Last day, as tomorrow before dawn, I am expected to be back in Trinity, and then back into the sweltering desert. Usha has decided to hold a moot, both to give me another memorable send-off, and as an occasion to inaugurate her winter's brew: "Sleepy Dragon Stout". She's given away four kegs of the stuff, and a fifth small keg for me to take along back. It's only due to start in an hour or so, so I'm taking a moment now to pack, and make sure everything is in order. I don't intend to waste much time come the morning, spare those precious few last minutes to say goodbye to Hejja and Kristen.  
  
I hope they're all doing well in the desert. Getting these few days has been a gift, and I don't think I've squandered it. Getting to hold my little girl again was worth it alone. I'll thank Alleshia for that in a few days' time.  
But now, I think, time to sing, dance, and enjoy life.

# 93rd of Colossus

Transit.  
  
Hungover to shit. Not a good idea. Keep being sick.  
We'll arrive tomorrow around noon. Ugh, I'm not sure how much longer I can be in here. The deck keeps flipping my stomach over.

# 94th of Colossus

Amnoon.  
  
Well, back in Amnoon. Ironically, I arrived back on the self-same day Blade was on soft leave, so half the camp was empty. Anyway, we disembarked with a bunch of the new folks they sent along, and are they're now working on getting the remainder of the cargo unloaded. I'll be catching up on the command notes, since there have been a series of minor incidents that I need to catch up on. One apparently involves some "Priory" people acting up to no good here in the city proper.  
Anyway, turn of the year tomorrow, and then I expect well start 1331 with a march south.  
  
New recruits seem decent so far, a lot of norn. I can't imagine how the reserves must be looking, if they're sending us norn recruits in the desert. We're also sending Carbine back to Trinity. Some Order of Whisper spooks want to talk to her about this entire "threat" thing that's been going on. Seems they're aware of something, then. Anyway, she'll be off and away for a while. I guess that does put round into the Vatorn - Mai thing. I suppose I could gloat about how I was correct that the entire situations was too volatile for it, but the notion mostly leaves me indifferent.

# 95th of Colossus

Amnoon.  
  
Well, into 1331 we go. Lance's on leave, and most of Blade's scattered around, having celebrated most of yesterday. It's just me an my pipe, sitting on the port beacon, and looking out to the west. First the coming and going of ships, slowly dipping below the horizon as they sail out of the bay, and into more treacherous waters around Orr. Then the setting sun, which turns it into a trembling red haze, as if the sea is swallowing up the dying light. And finally, the slow pinpricks of the stars as they come out. Dwayna's Heart, over Orr. Hah, ten years ago, any Marriner saw the Heart over west, he'd know he was well and truly lost. These days, ships sail to the Crystal Desert and the Ring of Fire with relative impunity. Is the world opening up again?  
  
Of course, I'm prone to melancholy, so my mind drifts to home a lot. The years march ever onward. I'm glad, though. I would like to see what the future holds. What battles will we fight, and what names will we make? I'll see my children grow up, and perhaps this is the year where we finally slay Jormag, or perhaps we will slay a God, and liberate a kingdom? A time of heroes.

# 1st of Zephyr, 1331.

Amnoon.  
  
Welcome to the new year!  
Dealing with some matters in camp today. Iluoana had a little wrinkle with one of the recruits, but that turned out to be less of an issue than it was reported being. A misplaced joke turned sour, essentially.  
For the remainder, we're getting an unusual amount of local botherers being difficult, though nothing we can't handle. Apparently even the local Cavaliers forgot about the deal we made with them when we arrived. I'm not sure if that's just the locals having the memory of a Skelk, or some sort of ploy. Either case, they'll have to fish up Lieutenant Noor, because we're not going to be moving a muscle unless it's of our own volition. "Occupying the beach." Some priorities these people have.  
  
Anyway, we're due moving out one of these days, so that'll be all over. I wonder, is it really just me, or is everyone actually trying to piss me off these days? I'm not sure if I'm being grumpy, or everyone started 1331 off with a bucket of sand in their boots, including me.

# 2nd of Zephyr

Amnoon.  
  
I went out riding for most of the day. It's been a while since we were in a good place to saddle up a raptor, but Amnoon is a good place. Toured the irrigation fields and the refugee camps. The fields are still dangerous, though after the recent harvest there is no sea of fronds that obscures your vision. Plenty of people out, though. They don't till the soil, like the Krytans, but they work with shovels to dig out the irrigation ditches, and then plant seedlings. In the baking sun, it is easy to see that without their ministrations, the soil would just turn into hard-pack, before being reclaimed by the sand seas. Norn are not prone to working the land like this, which is funny, coming from a baker. The Shiverpeaks make for poor farmland, though thankfully, the Krytans grow plenty. The Charr in the east also know their fair share of farming, but they are typically ranchers. Charr raise beef, norn raise Dolyak. We didn't use to, mind. I think we learned that from the Charr and the Dwarves both.  
Either case, working the land like they do here, it is a thoroughly human endeavour. Everyone working towards a common goal.  
  
I spent as long as I could out of camp today, I'll admit. Came late enough to have bypassed most of the silliness inherent in a military camp that's been idle a bit too long. I got into a rather weird conversation between Astrid and Inkblot, which was taunt with some very awkward sexual tension, though I'm not sure if that was between those two, or someone else. Eh, young people. I suppose everyone's got urges, and all this sand can't be doing anyone any good.  
  
That asides, we're due for march on the morrow. I think I've had my fill of this slice of Amnoon harbour for a while.

# 3rd of Zephyr

Southern Waystation.  
  
Started march, headed due east, along the road. We've been here before, this is where those people were holed up, when the Forged were encroaching on the area. It's not that different from the other waystations, low walls that are meant more to keep bad weather and wildlife out, but are not suitable for war. It shelters an oasis, and supposedly it was one of the big stops on the way to the borders of Joko's domain. These days, a huge Forged citadel sits up road, and controls the access south. Seems our foray north allowed the enemy to entrench themselves here, which will cost us time, and require us to commit materiel and people to destroying the camp. Thankfully, we found an overlook from where we can easily shell their position. I don't think the Forged are prepared to deal with modern artillery.  
I spoke to the Warmaster as well, I'm going to start converting our arsenal into charges, as we can roll them down slope into the Forged with impunity. It'll drain us of all our explosives until we get resupplied, but it'll lay waste to their position. Hopefully that'll be enough, so that when the inevitable hammerblow of the assault comes, we'll shatter them.  
  
No rest for the wicked. Spirits, if the Forged are entrenching themselves this badly along the line of advance, we'll need more troops, and we'll need a lot more heavy weapons. I can only hope this doesn't drag down into a lengthy siege, because that is something we can ill afford. If the Forged attack us, we'll have a much harder time holding the Waystations against them. Unfortunately, it seems that the servants of the god of war happen to know how to make fortifications.  
  
Rest now. Long days ahead, I think.

# 4th of Zephyr

Southern Waystation.  
  
I don't want to be the Forged whenever I'm going to start dropping these ordnance packages on their heads. We've rolled out the entire engineer supplies, and readied them into a series of high-explosive fragmentation bombs. Enough to crater a small mountain. Who needs air-support, when you have Vigil Ballisticians?  
  
Anyway, today we spent some time securing our rear. Turns out that there's a series of caverns leading to... I don't really know how to describe it. A bowl of sand set in the middle of the mountain chain to our south, in the middle of which stands a single tower, half-sunken in the sand. The entire area is lousy with magical anomalies, swirling pools of sand and magic, and sand that somehow seems to be falling upwards. The scouts brought in a report before, but it's something else to see it with your own eyes. Occult's running theory is that it's some sort of Djinn spire. That does seem to make sense, considering what we've seen in the Highlands, north. Regardless, there was little there asides from wildlife, and the spire had no discernible entryway, so we fell back.  
  
Wish that was the end of the day, but not yet. Had to put a boot down when it came to First Crusader Iluoana's incessant whinging. Lass is pushing people away in her wallowing self-pity, and then complains that everyone's been pushed away. I hope getting a verbal smack around the head will bring her around. It's starting to test my patience.  
In other news, both Woodknead and one of the new medical people ended up brushing too close to some Iboga spores, and had to be sequestered in medical. Some weird things were said. Things best not repeated, I think.  
The good news is that I got some Iboga petals out of it. Might be worth stuffing a pipe before sleep, calm the nerves and give me a good rest before tomorrow.

# 5th of Zephyr

Southern Waystation.  
  
Well, we did it. We strode up along the ledge, and dropped all of our ordnance on top of the Forged, wiping out much of the garrison, asides from a few outliers. It made the assault by the ground troops a lot easier. It was still some hectic fighting. I have to admit, I was so caught up that I overextended, and Blade followed up and left the rear exposed. A sloppy movement on my part that could have cost us, but I'm glad it didn't.  
  
The Forged were doing... something. Occult's thinking they've been making more of them. There was a large crucible of sorts, trapping spirits. Living priests of Balthazar were channeling magic into it as we stormed them. We managed to slay them, and disrupt their ritual. Throwing the explosives into them, though. Spirits, we scattered them. It felt mighty. Tzahr Godsmote indeed, smiting them from up on high.  
  
I'm petered out, though. Tired. A good cigar, and then sleep. We'll see what tomorrow brings.

# 6th of Zephyr

Southern Waystation.  
  
And as always, the quiet after the storm has passed. The gentle settling of snow and stone after nature's wrath has passed over it. A moment often forgotten by the Skaalds. They speak of the quiet before the storm, or the heart of it, but rarely the peace that comes after rage. The exhaustion of having depleted all of your energy in one roaring blast, coupled with the exultation of still being, somehow, alive. Of course, as warriors, we make our own storms of violence and fire. We come out the other end of it, looking forwards towards the next one. We, too, rarely ponder the devastation we leave behind in our wake.  
  
But, it seems our actions have done their work. The Forged have been stopped, and the way ahead us, though hard, lies open to us. We smashed them. Balthazar may be their patron, but *I* am their god of righteous destruction. Tzahr Godsmote! And then on, deeper south into a damned land.

# 7th of Zephyr

Southern Waystation.  
  
Sometimes I hate my job, sometimes I love my job.  
It's an experience to be out here, to see these things, in this strange country. It's funny how something so exotic and special can quickly become almost mundane. We lose our sense of wonder so easily. I do too, truth be told.  
Just have to make an occasionally, conscious effort to see the wonder that's in front of you.  
  
That, and I suppose, if you sit down and have nothing to do but stare out the sand, it does give you some time to ponder the beauty of the land. I suppose it'll grow mundane enough in due time. Sand just becomes sand, and all the little wonders and magic stops being special. Everything's like that, eventually.

# 8th of Zephyr

Southern Waystation.  
  
I am losing my mind. Inkblot was giving a training regarding desert survival, when it surfaced that some people apparently don't know how to light a fire using the flint and steel in their kit. A fire. That thing we light every single day. The thing we use to boil some water, or to heat up some packaged rations. How anyone is able to be here, without having that very basic kernel of knowledge boggles my mind. How? How does that even happen? In what world are you born that you don't come away with the most basic survival skill in Tyria?  
What a colossal shortcoming for the unit. I've had the entire squadron tiered back to recruit until it's fixed. Under no circumstances should someone who doesn't know to make a proper fire be allowed to call themselves a Crusader. The sheer incredulity of it all. Inkblot started working on correcting this shortcoming, with a little help from myself, but the recruit only managed to smash the tinderbox into her hand.  
Spirits, we're getting close to taking these people into the bloody Desolation, a place that daunts *me* with the sheer hostility of it all, and they can't make a bloody fire. Sometimes...  
  
I even asked Bear for some advice, though she was annoyingly silent. I suppose that is not uncommon these days, being so far away south. I feel it is a personal failing. The unit of well-armed soldiers under my care revert to hapless children on a dime, unprepared for the hurdles that lie ahead of us. Well, no child of mine will bear a weapon worthy of a hunt without knowing how to build a campfire, mark my words.

# 9th of Zephyr

Southern Waystation.  
  
Here we are again. A quiet day. Spoke with Force, he thinks I'm being too harsh about the fire-thing. I see his point, but I can't help but disagree with it. I'd rather send them all back to Trinity and the Keep until they learn how to be proper soldiers before they get put under our care. It is better to have a few heroes worthy of legend than a rabble of fools, is the way I see it. It actually disgusts me to think how unready some of our soldiers are.  
  
Maybe I am being too harsh.  
  
You know what I really miss right now? Minotaur hunting. In the mountains near he Foothills, where they trample across the mountainside. The snow crunching underfoot, putting arrows through the softer tissue at their throat, or cutting them down as they pass in the charge. The mighty bray of the bulls as they charge. You can actually feel the ground shake, and you wonder if perhaps this is the one time you slip up and miss the killing blow. It's the little brush with death that makes it worthwhile.

# 10th of Zephyr

Squaross Kraal.  
  
We advanced further east, deeper into the contested territories. We bypassed the Forged citadel we destroyed a few days ago, and pushed on into the canyons beyond. People used to live there, but the Forged pressing in on them have backed them into a corner, trapped beneath rock, the indiscriminate violence of the war god's minions, and the corruption of the Brand. Large scaffolding and mines web the canyons, many of them collapsed and overrun. A handful of people shelter further south, in the remains of a village that used to belong to the Zephyrities. We've encamped up higher, near another group of Ogres living dangerously close to the edge of the Brand. Like their cousins further north, in the highlands, they refuse to leave their homes. It is a death sentence, albeit a slow one. Still, they've clung on to what is little more than a nook, perched on a mountain spring. The brand literally hangs over our heads, and to the north of us, vitrified sands run flat on north. If you stand guard, you can see a strange pyramid loom in the distance.  
To the west, the only other way out, lies the sprawl of half-rigged mines and remnants of the Zephyrites, infested with Forged constructs lying in ambush around every corner. It's a precarious possition to be in. I suspect that, if not for the stubborn Ogres here, or the refugees sheltering in the ruins below and to the south of us, we would not linger here long. We'll do a little work on making the "Kraal" here a little more defensible, before I suspect we'll turn our eyes on destroying our foes.  
  
Happy 37th winter, Tzahr.

# 11th of Zephyr

Squaross Kraal.  
  
We've set into the mines and the surrounding area. Luckily, the Forged seem less entrenched than at first glance. Most of them we found were run-offs from the main citadel straddling the exit to the canyon maze. The mines bore through the rock, and allow the Forged easy access through some of the lower levels. Still, following the blows we struck them, they were easily dispatched by our kill-teams. Blade's also rectified their glaring inability to make fire, so they may call themselves Crusaders once more.  
The real danger in these mines, however, seems not to be posed from difficulties with the Forged, but rather unbound magic. There are elementals running rampant all over the scaffolding. We even found one of those anomalies, hissing and fizzing about. We managed to disperse it, but doing so doesn't seem to have done much good to the Tactician or Klixxa. I think everyone felt ill by the end of it, truth be told, but we had to actually call in medevac for Maeva.  
Still, I suppose it is good to know that the situation is not quite as dire as expected.  
  
You know, this place might be horrid, but it's still beautiful. The entire sprawl, hung with the many pennants and lanterns of the Zephyrites, the walls of the cliffs painted with sigils and icons. Somehow, the purple crystals of the Brand add to it, in a perverse way. It must've been just as beautiful as their Sanctum when it was all still whole. Spirits, looking at them now, there is so preciously little left of them. I suppose they have faith, in Glint, and the future. How else would their spirit endure in such troubled times? We're all lucky to have homes of a sort to return too. I suspect it is a lesson: if we don't stop the Elder Dragons, they will destroy all of our homes before the last dusk.

# 12th of Zephyr

Squaross Kraal.  
  
Went into the Brand, to look at that edifice out there. Things went poorly.  
Had to cut off Rodent's leg. Big Branded... thing jumped out of no-where, and laid into the troops. We destroyed it, permanently or temporarily I don't know, but we came away with several injured. Worst part is, we still don't know what the entire structure is supposed to be, asides that we best steer clear of it. We can't even attempt to destroy it, since we have no ordnance left.

# 13th of Zephyr

Squaross Kraal.  
  
Just another day. Roderique's still alive, which is a small mercy. Calder came to tell me I made the right call, which... well, it does a lot, surprisingly. It weighs on me, true enough. Spirits, I thought it would be easier to live with. I did the right thing. It's the doubting that will get to you. I try just not to think about it, but it's not as easy to keep your mind occupied as you might think.  
  
I'm just tired. Spirits, I wish there was a shaman here. Or Kristen. She'd have something soothing to say. I know there's people I can talk to here, but... I don't know. They're not the people I *want* to speak to.  
It'll pass.

# 14th of Zephyr

Squaross Kraal.  
  
Not much out today. It's one of those strange case where, if you close your eyes, and stand in the right place, you could be almost anywhere else. The rush of water, the sounds of the wind, and the Ogres conversing in their bass tones. They speak about mundane things. Everyday survival, the training of animals, almost as if they were blind to the dangers that loom all around them. I wonder if they are aware of how close to the precipice they stand, or if they simply refuse to acknowledge it in the first place.  
  
Didn't sleep well today. It'll pass.  
Thinking of home to distract myself.

# 15th of Zephyr

Squaross Kraal.  
  
Orders are in to move out, heading through the canyons south, and into the Riverlands. Since Palawa Joko diverted the flow of the Elon, it has turned from the barren desert of antiquity into something else. No longer a wasted plain, but a land drenched in the lifeblood of the Elonians, in more way than one. As we go south, we come closer and closer to a reckoning of sorts. Our goal is not to fight Palawa Joko, but our pursuit of the rogue god Balthazar may demand we go through him anyway. The troops, they don't all seem to understand. What Balthazar is doing may well destroy everything we know. Palawa Joko might have an entire kingdom, but Balthazar is a *god*. We remain a few steps behind. I suspect our diversion into the highlands will come bearing a strategic cost before long. If Balthazar is, as I suspect, moving south into Elona, we will have to follow him, step by step, or die trying.  
The notion does not fill me with confidence. I worry; by the time I have slain every Awakened and every Forged in Elona, my children will have children, and I will be as grey and Elder Ranek.  
Better sharpen the sword, I figure.  
  
While the soldiers trained today, Astrid and I went down the canyons and visited the old Zephyrite village. It is filled with refugees, with only a small few being warriors. And yet, they fight hard. Sticks, rocks, anything that may do is turned to a purpose. They fight for their lives, keeping the Forged that still lurk amidst the canyons at bay, while others try to pass on through to Amnoon. With the Forged citadel up the road shattered, it is safer now, but not by much. The road is long and dangerous. Attacking unarmed travelers is cowardly. How far the mighty humans gods have fallen, that the one that once stood for honour in battle has become nothing more than an honourless raider. I'd destroy them all, if I could.  
The remains of the village are beautiful. Like the Dwarves, they cut their homes in the sheer rock. Unlike the stout-kin, though, they did not embrace the stone. Rather, their homes are covered in bamboo-lattice and wicker that makes it all seem much warmer and brighter than you'd expect. Their coloured pennants still fly in the wind, and they have painted the clouds themselves along the upper reaches of their homes. I admire these last vestiges of a lost people, and I do not begrudge the people that make it their home now their choice to live in the ruins of others. Perhaps, should Balthazar's armied be felled, they may bring life and joy back to a place that deserves it.

# 16th of Zephyr

Squaross Kraal.  
  
Well, we're leaving tomorrow. It feels like we are mostly abandoning these people. I know that's not entirely true, mind. Our action against the Forged, raining death on them, has given done much to clear the road back to Amnoon, but... The Brand still looms here. Just having spent a few days nearby starts weighing on the mind. The sheer malice of it all is infectious. I thank the Spirits that Hejja and Reuzen will not grow up with a sword hanging over their heads. And now we make to leave, having marched into the Brand once, only to be battered by the Dragons evil and driven back out. Why do we even bother to venture into that corrupted wasteland anymore? There is nothing to be found there. There is so little purpose in fighting back an infection that will return the moment we look away. What difference have we made for these Ogres? Nothing. If not for the wards inscribed in our armour, and the heavy masks we clamp to our faces, to venture there is to dance with death. Of all things, it is our erstwhile Marshal that I lament most. How dearly I wish he would have found a way to halt the Brand, just like he cleansed the Artesian Waters of Orr. Then at least, it wouldn't all feel so futile. But today, what is our hope? Spirits, I loathe these Elder Dragons.  
  
My foul mood asides, someone who cannot be known returned to us today, along with the resupply. We had sent out Roderique back to Amnoon. Spirits, but that still weighs on me. At least she can return home, and perhaps find a way to live with I was forced to do to her. Bah, I shouldn't dwell on it. It was the right choice. To doubt that is to invite insanity into my own head. Never court blame for a righteous deed, especially not from yourself. It has toppled larger mountains, and laid low taller peaks.

# 17th of Zephyr

Augury's Shadow.  
  
An impressive name for a place entirely undeserving of such.  
We marched south, through the old Zephyrite village of Destiny's Gorge, and then into the sparse rocky outcroppings that eventually flow down into sand dunes. Further south, beyond the horizon, flows the Elon river, one of the mightiest flows in known Tyria. Once we cross it, the Desolation looms, before the legendary lands of Elona. But that is further south. Right now, we stand in the shadow of Augury Rock, a site considered holy by many. Unfortunately, the Brand has reached out and enveloped it entirely, digging its claws deep into earth. Our camp is surrounded by stretches of Brand on three sides, kept out only by good humour and some hastily strung up tent sail. I have never felt so acutely vulnerable as in here.  
Tomorrow, the digging starts. The ground is fine sand, which means it'll be hard work, in punishing heat.  
Joys.

# 18th of Zephyr

Augury's Shadow.  
  
Damn sand. We're not done with the digging yet. Spirits, at this rate, it'll taker more than a few days to just build a line of sandbags that I can crouch behind. We should dig a moat, and stake it, really, but in this soil that won't last us very long. You have to dig fairly deep to get to a good soil consistency. Top layer's just all loose sand.  
  
Deployment today cut into the work schedule, too. We moved over into Augury Rock itself. The Warmaster wanted us to clear it, and have a look at what has become of the legendary place. We had to make our entry through some ancient magical pedestal that teleported us straight into the center of it all. It was impressive, alright. Old. The rock itself is hollow, large statues of the Gods flanking the approach, and towering over it all. The Brand has wormed its way inside, and we found Forgotten creatures corrupted by the Brand. We destroyed them as we found them, buying us some time to explore the area. The weirdest thing was that... well, as we fought off the Branded, people changed. Copies of them appeared, and started attacking us, as if made with a Mesmer spell. I was suddenly face to face with Inkblot, or something that looked like her. We 'killed' it, which just caused it to disappear like smoke. It was so bewildering, I almost thought I had just imagined it.  
There were also weird plaques found all around the place, though it was impossible to read what they said. The text seemed to flow and shift, and defy any attempt at reading them. There was also a soft chiming that rang around the place. When we pushed deeper, below, that's where things became really strange. There are ghosts down there, guardian spirits that still remember. Their vault lays empty, asides from a crumbling Forgotten statue and some relics.  
The entire thing was just so... surreal. Thinking back to it, I almost feel as if I dreamed it all.  
It doesn't help that we were just... thrown out. On a dime, we were simply teleported out, much the same way we came in. There is ancient, old magic in there that not even the Brand managed to corrupt. I can't help but feel we somehow failed a test. Either way, I suspect the prospect of ancient Ascension is now out of reach.  
Another place of legend that turned out so much less impressive than it was all built up to be.  
  
Still, I suppose I can say I have been in Augury Rock. It felt like a part was missing, just like the Tomb of the Primeval Kings. As if they were somehow lessened, and we were just seeing the fringes of what their greatness once was, or might yet still be. Don't get me wrong, they all carry the weight of history around their shoulders, but on closer inspection, you realize most of it is just the dust of age. I wonder if Augury Rock was always like this, or if people once truly came here to seek a higher state of being. I remember seeing Tarir, in Maguuma. That was different. You could feel that you were standing near something truly important, and were part of it. Out here, in Elona? It just feels like we are by-standers.

# 19th of Zephyr

Augury's Shadow.  
  
More digging in the morning. It's like building sand castles on a shore with tide. In the morning, half of the furrows we dug had been dusted in by the wind, and there's sand accumulation along the line we're trying to throw up. Anyway, a few hours, and it's a little higher along the ridge, but, uh... truthfully, I think it might be a lost cause.  
  
Anyway, weird day today. Patrol duties out into the Brand to the east, which turned out to be fruitless. The area's lousy with active Brand, settled down in the lower recesses between the glassed-over sand dunes, making navigation extremely dangerous. There's Forgotten teleporters around the area, but none of them lead anywhere. I eventually called off the patrol. The Branded are active enough to pose a threat, and we shouldn't linger in the area longer than strictly necessary. So, aye, nothing much to report there, asides from how much I despise the Brand.  
  
Lance fared differently. Apparently, Sinclair's wife was out here, chasing something or other. She's in a bit of a bad shape, but gave birth to a child. Aethel Sinclair. The situation around it all is a bit unclear, I remember seeing passing mention of some concerns and their subsequent dismissal in the officer's paperwork, but I didn't take an interest. Strange place to bring a child, if you ask me, and foolish. I don't approve of it, but then, it is hardly my place to approve at all. I had to ride out on Tuhaibei to find a wet-nurse, while the mother recovers. I had to ride south fairly far, until I found a village. Didn't take long after that, though. Alleshia cracked open the keg of Sleeping Dragon, though I think that was less of a celebratory thing, and more of a, uh... exasperation thing. Sinclair's also didn't exactly strike me as pleased, which... I don't know. Also wonder why someone keeps praying to Grenth for people to live. Seems a bit contradictory.  
Either case, I'm dog tired. Digging, marching, riding... Just exhausted.

# 20th of Zephyr

Augury's Shadow.  
  
If I keep digging like this, i'll become a dug.  
A dug dig.

# 21st of Zephyr

Augury's Shadow.  
  
I've become a dug dig. But, the good news is that we now have a decent... well "decent" sandbag line around the encampment. It won't stop the Branded from barging into the camp if they're really determined, but it'll be less of a wash if they do. At least now we can actually hold some of the ground. Pity there's no woodland nearby, we could do with a palisade...  
You know, thinking about it, erecting fortifications is strangely satisfying work, in the end. Out here, it is like building a big sand castle. One that's supposed to keep out a tide of horrors, mind, rather than seawater, but the principle is the same. Makes me wonder if I missed my true calling as a mason; though I suppose I am a reverse-mason, of sorts. There's a tragedy in the idea that great builders and great destroyers are both sides of the same coin.  
  
Asides from that, no deployment. There's still refugees passing through the camps, though many here are the so-called 'Followers of Ascension'. They have come from all over the world, including Tyria, to conduct the pilgrimage to Augry Rock. It is unfortunate for them that their efforts were in vain. They're persistent, however, which is dangerous and foolish in parts like this. We're here only in passing, but the Brand will remain. If these people stay here, they will run afoul of any of the deserts many dangers eventually. But, I suppose, they have a choice to make, even if it is misguided. It leaves me with the same distaste and resentment. Death because of blind faith, or errant stupidity is a waste.  
  
No I'd rather march to my death, knowingly and willingly.  
Bloody ironic, isn't it, sweet?

# 22nd of Zephyr

Augury's Shadow.  
  
All is calm. I can sit in comparative shade, and talk nonesense with others. Try and forgot, maybe for a small day, the war we're fighting. There is peace to be found, if only we turn our gaze inwards, and look at what we are in the moment. Nothing but stones and pebbles in the riverbed. If the stream takes us up, we have no choice but to see where we are carried. Whether we watch the passage of years, or are swept up and brought down from the mountain spring to the ocean's breath; no stone ever wondered if he could convince the water to stop flowing.

# 23rd of Zephyr

Augury's Shadow.  
  
All quiet, for now. Couldn't sleep very well. It's still too warm out here. I try not to complain, but Spirits, sometimes the heat just gets to you. Anyway, we're moving camp come the morrow, down south. Closer to the river Elon. I wonder how it looks, this legendary river. If it's anything like Augury Rock, or the Tomb of the Primeval Kings, it will be suitably impressive, while also being mildly disappointing.  
  
Either case, I look upon the work of my entrenchments with a sense of mild pride, while also grudgingly admitting they did not see any use. Is this what it feels like to forge a sword that will never be swung? Strange. It's a pity, because I worked long and hard to shape mere sand into something halfway decent, and now we're leaving. I doubt the locals will remember to maintain them. In a dozen days, they'll have sagged with the wind, before they tumble over, and are buried beneath the constant winds.  
At least the prospect of going south means we'll be out of the forsaken bloody Brand for a change. Good. It being so close gives me the feeling of walking around with a blade hung over my head by a thread.

# 24th of Zephyr

Skimmer Ranch.  
  
Which is a... well, this place is strange, that's what it is. It's a small island, surrounded by deep and fast-flowing water streams. On the south side, the wide expanse of the Elon river flows, while on the north, west and east, rapid sandflows rush to join the wide embrace of Elonia's erstwhile lifeblood. The streams are very fast, very strong, swirling up the sand that mixes into the water from the sand dunes further north. I'm told they're lethal. Once you fall in, the current is so strong that you're swept off your feet, and dragged under. Then, if you don't dash your brains open against the riverbed, you'll either drown, or essentially be flayed alive by the rushing sand.  
Thankfully, the Elon itself is more welcoming, with clear blue water that is only ankle deep in some places, but flowing so wide that you cannot see the opposite shore from where we are. Instead, it is more akin to a floodplain during the high-season. South, as far as the eye can see, it becomes a freshwater swamp, marked by the vast stone pillars that rise out of to stand sentinel over the waters. It turns the entire area maze-like, and thick with lush green vegetation. It is not what I expected. Spirits, it barely even resembles a river!  
This 'ranch' itself is a strange place. Part of the Elon flows into a low basin, like a large water bowl. Overtop, the locals have built a large dome, ornamented much the same as the beaten-copper and gold hawks we saw in Amnoon, and surrounded by various smaller pyramid buildings. Within, the locals here, who identify as exiles and refugees of Joko's kingdom, raise a strange sort of creature. It is flat, and shapes like a manta ray, except it has large air sacks below its thorax. It is able to suck in air through gills in its body, and expel it again with such force that the creature seems to hover over the ground, riding its own updraft. The locals use them as riding animals to navigate the floodplains, though I can't say that I am much a fan of the idea. Inkblot already tried sitting up on one, and I actively winced as I saw her hover out over the sandflow. Spirits, I only just told Vatorn off yesterday for his plans to self-teach him how to ride a raptor into battle. These 'skimmers' are much, much worse. Getting thrown off a raptor is dangerous enough, and they're only two meters high at the shoulder. These skimmers, they hover up as high as my crest! Spirits, that's high enough to break a leg while trying to dismount, let alone getting flung off because you thought flying a living airbag into dangerous situations is a good idea. Bah!  
  
Anyway, it's a nice change from the dry desert between here and Amnoon. We had rain. Rain! Quite a lot of it, actually, like a downpour hammering down onto us. I suspect it has to do with the Elon's flow, those monsoons. I'm not complaining though, it's still hot, and the swampland makes it damp beyond belief. The rain is a welcome way to cool down, and it serves well enough to clean the grime and muck off of my gear, and wash the sweat off my back.  
  
But yes, despite the relative beauty of the area, there's Forged around us. A scout report noted that there's a rather large presence of them due north, separated from us by a canyon and a sandflow, but we also saw some Forged incursions south and east of us. They can't freely cross over onto the island, but I've still set out plenty of sentries to ensure we'll know when they do. One concern is a large, impressive looking tower that overlooks us on the southern side. There's a legitimate concern that it could be used as a perch for a sharpshooter to pick off people inside the camp, so we're likely going to set out some folks to secure it come the morrow. Can't be too certain, right?  
  
Shatteredshield and a new recruit went about spearfishing earlier. I turned in before they put their food on the fire, but I hope there's still some left come the morning. Proper freshwater fish? In the desert? That sounds almost too good to be true. I'd relish some proper eating. Spirits, even thinking about it now, I'm tempted to see if they're putting anything on the fry. I shouldn't; I'm tired, and I already scoffed down some field rations earlier. Can't have sweet thinking I'm going fat, eh?  
  
Iluoana said something that made me chuckle. Apparently, she remembered a while earlier, when we were in Ascalon, that I took the folks out to the Desert gate, and told them "one day, we'll march through here, and into Elona".  
Now, today, sitting on the bank of the great river Elon, I find that an oddly satisfying thought. We've come far.

# 25th of Zephyr

Skimmer Ranch.  
  
It seems we are always one damn step behind. Around noon today, right before we sent some scouts up on that rock pillar, there was a major Forged incursion at the base of it. We readied ourselves for a fight, but they didn't attack. Instead, there was a large blast at the top of the pillar, before an airship with Lion's Arch markings swept in at the summit, and flew off before we could anything. We kept thinking we were going to be the target of an attack that never came, which unfortunately meant we were on the defensive almost the entire time. Slow, too damn slow.  
Of course, by the time we got ourselves untangled, and deployed a squadron up there, it was too late. The mysterious Lion's Arch ship's flown off due south, and asides from some Forged remnants we found little but a large scorch mark. Klixxa and Maeva seemed pretty sure that Balthazar had been there, likely the cause for the furious detonation we saw. Whatever he was fighting, and I am assuming he was, didn't leave much remains behind. Spirits, Klixxa had to tell me there were traces of blood in the blast residue, that's how little is left of whatever happened here. So, we leave with empty hands, and many questions. I can't believe we were literally stood gaping at our prey, and froze. It's understandable, of course: one doesn't leave a fortified position to sally forth unless there is a clear goal in mind, but... it chafes me that we were so close.  
More, who did Balthazar fight, and why did an airship of all things swoop in after? It seems we are not the only Tyrians involved here. Raven's many riddles confound me if it is the Order of Whispers playing their shadow games around us again! Bah! Today I am the master of impotent rage, though I vented some of that frustration on the Forged scrapheaps left behind in the wake of their master.  
  
The thrice-damned mosquito bites don't bloody help either. My legs look like a Blood Legion encampment.

# 26th of Zephyr

Skimmer Ranch.  
  
In search of Balthazar we went, following his curious appearance yesterday. We spent a large part of the day wading through the Elon, looking for something, anything. Any trace as to where Balthazar is, so we can destroy him and end this endless chase. It feels like we've been hot on his heels since Ember Bay and Draconis Mons. Always so close... just beyond the next ridge, it seems. And yet, we've not seen anything.  
  
There are ruins aplenty in the Elon, though, and more than one sight to steal your breath away. They're all filled with strong magical currents, just like so many other places in the erstwhile dunes of the Crystal Desert. Against all expectations, we found people, too. Elonians, they say, hiding in a cove sheltered by the remnants of ancient kingdoms. They could be mistaken for smugglers, too, as they have a way around the massive structure Palawa Joko built to seal off the mouth of the river into the bay. We saw it up close; giant statues of what I must assume are Palawa Joko, spanning the flow, and blocking passage for anyone who tries to pass. I don't care if they're smugglers or refugees. Bypassing the tyrannical laws of an undead lich is of no specific concern to me. It's not been said outright yet, but we all know Palawa Joko and his Awakened are our enemies. If we keep pressing south in our wild goose chase for Balthazar, we'll realize this soon enough.  
  
One site of interest was the so-called Throne of Pellentia, which was shown to us by those refugees I saw earlier. It sits atop a rocky outcropping that would've made for a commanding position over the sand dunes before the river was diverted, though now there is barely anything of the walls left standing. The magic in the air was palpable, though. Like a physical resonance that thrums through your bones and soul. I was told by one of the recruits that it was built by Turai Ossa, the hero who defeated Palawa Joko so many years ago. If that's true, then I hope his spirit watched us kindly from the Mists. We are set on much the same path as he.  
  
The river itself is beautiful from afar, clear blue waters and lush green trees. Up close, it is a mire of bugs and humidity. I suppose one will find fault in anything if they look hard enough, though I feel I can appreciate the river for what it is. It a force of life, and therefore also of death. It is to be respected as a friend and a foe both.  
I hope to return here one day, in better times, for better reasons.

# 27th of Zephyr

Skimmer Ranch.  
  
All quiet, again. Paradoxically, it seems as if Balthazar has just... disappeared. Elusive gods make for poor hunting, it seems. It makes me wonder if we can even track him. We're forced to be reactive, to wait for Balthazar to make the first move. It is not a tactical advantage I would wish to give the God of War, but it seems we have little choice. What strikes me as curious is that Balthazar has not come to meet us in battle. Yes, we fight his legions as we find them, and we are not allies, but we are not the foes he seeks to destroy. I wonder if he even thinks we can challenge him? That would either mean we are direly underestimating our opponent, or imply Balthazar is so monstrously arrogant to think he can ignore us.  
Of course, the natural question then is: who *is* Balthazar fighting? Why forge an entire army, and drag them through a bloody rampage, driving south into the borders of Elona? Is Balthazar making to fight Palawa Joko, or he seeking another, larger foe? I wonder if Balthazar is simply trampling over Joko's dismal realm in passing, turning Elona into a battlefield.  
  
Anyway, it's all quiet in camp. Best not to ponder on things too much.

# 28th of Zephyr

Skimmer Ranch.  
  
Iluoana is missing. A foraging group got ambushed by Awakened, likely captured her. From what I can tell, Inkblot and she fought a rearguard action, in which Iluoana failed to make it out. We responded quickly enough, but we weren't in time to recover her. We found a sword, and tracks leading to the Bone Wall, a place even we can't assault with impunity. I won't lie and say that I didn't dread the prospect of having to cross south towards the Desolation, but now? I will tear down that wall with my bare hands if needs be. How *dare* they think we will let these things go unpunished? Bah.  
  
It's hit the camp, though. I think Inkblot's taking it the hardest, with Carbine not faring much better. They will need to cope. We need to be ready, and focused on the next few days if Iluoana is to survive. As the Dwarves used to say: "Axes high!"

# 29th of Zephyr

Skimmer Ranch.  
  
So, the good news is that we received a letter from some local resistance folks, stating that they managed to rescue Iluoana from the clutches of the Awakened. The bad news is that I don't trust them. They seem cautious, which I understand is granted, but remain very vague. They've asked us to meet them in a few days' time. I suspect we'll find out the details then.  
In the meantime, we'll continue to keep on guard. I have no intention of letting my guard down based on a mere note, though I'll admit we'd be hard pressed to track her down without further intelligence. We need more time to conduct recon on the Bone Wall before we can smash it to splinters. I wish it was indeed as easy as just calling in an airstrike, but we can't risk the ship on something like that, until we know the extent of the defenses Palawa Joko put in place. I doubt the wall is just a physical obstacle; it is likely a bastion of layered defensive magic. For all we know, it might shrug off a ship's broadside, and then simply smash the ship out of the sky, cutting off our vital link with mainland Tyria. At that point, we'd be utterly on our own until the Pact realizes the resupply is overdue. That could take a dozen of days. Meanwhile, I only have a few primitive mining explosives left in the ordnance locker. Even if the ground wasn't sodden and we could dig a furrow, we lack the explosives to collapse it, and neither do we have the manpower to establish a siege cordon able to besiege a fortification that large. Spirits, we'd need hundred, if not thousands of troops with heavy cannons and megalasers.  
You know, it might end up the case that we simply *cannot* go past the Bone Wall. It is a fortification that is beyond us. Or at least, for now. I'll have to think of something.

# 30th of Zephyr

Skimmer Ranch.  
  
We're advancing come the morrow. Hopefully a step closer to getting Iluoana back. This place has been odd. It does have the same sense of serenity threatened by imminent danger that many of our campsites in the desert have had. It seems death is always nearby in some form or another, patiently waiting for you to make a mistake.  
  
Anyway, today was quiet.

# 31st of Zephyr

Arid Gladefields.  
  
We've shifted camp, across east along the riverbank. We're closer to the villages on the outskirt here, places that seem mostly to be struck by poverty, and the cruelty of their Awakened taskmasters. Large statues of Palawa Joko stand guard over his domain, and the road south of us leads down to the Bone Wall and the fortifications on the other side of the Elon river's span.  
We've ended up camped in a digsite, amidst old, crumbling remnants of some ancient palace or guard tower. It's not exactly safe, but I'd rather not camp out in between villages who have questionable loyalties. Besides, the supposed Sunspears we are meeting tomorrow did ask us to steer clear of the people, in case the Awakened take issue with them over it. I have no intention of causing suffering simply by my proximity, and turning the home of innocents into our battlefield would make us no better than the Awakened.  
Either case, we're settled down here. The location is semi-defensible, especially after the engineers and I do some entrenching come the morning. Besides, it provides some cover from the howling sandstorms that seem to wash over from the dunes north of us.  
  
And tomorrow, well... We'll see if we have allies here.

# 32nd of Zephyr

Arid Gladefields.  
  
It was a trap. Because of course, how could we be so naive? Athy and a recruit called Bhrom made it out, but both were very heavily injured. We've lost Alleshia, Sawyer, Claridge and Neya. The Warmaster only took a small group to the rendez-vous to avoid being too conspicuous, but that seems to have cost us all dearly. As soon as Athy managed to return to the camp, we set out a search party. This is when we found Bhrom, all-but eviscerated. Looking at the state of the survivors, I worry that the others might have been killed, and their bodies taken away by the Awakened. Of course, saying such things out loud would destroy morale. We need to be strong now, especially since it means we have run out of options.  
The First Crusaders took a recon patrol on the Bone Wall, and found a bastion nearby that seems to house prisoners. The report paints a grim picture. We'll have to hit hard, fast, and even then, it might cost us dearly. But we owe it to them all. There is a slim hope for them to have survived out there, growing slimmer with every passing hour.  
  
Spirits, but I'm tired. We spent all morning digging, and cutting down the sparse date palms in order to shore up the place, and then this news hits us. The worse part is that both Athy and Bhrom are out of it. They can't answer questions, so we have to go off of what we could find out. Either way, it promises some hard days up ahead. If anyone ever thought we weren't going to fight the Awakened when it finally came down to it, they were wrong. The anger simmers, and the sword grows restless. Bear, guide me in the battles ahead, give me the strength to shoulder the burden of command when I lead my allies into battle. Watch over me, so that I can bring them all back to see their families again.  
We're not leaving anyone behind in these forsaken lands.

# 33rd of Zephyr

Arid Gladefields.  
  
A victory, if not the one we had hoped. We struck out, hard, in force. The way we do war best, a single shock attack, so suddenly and ferocious that it stuns the enemy, and prevents him from retaliating. It is the sort of attack that would break lines in conventional armies. Not today, though. The Bone Wall is a vast fortification, and we do not have the manpower to simply batter through it without leaving too many behind us on the approach. No, we attacked the prisoner bastion, cracking it open with what little salvaged mining explosives we had left, before battering down cells, and freeing who we could. Many of Palawa Joko's own people, but only Alleshia from ours. Of the others, we simply don't know where they went. No news. Alleshia herself is badly injured, just like all the others we have found so far, and none have been in a state to speak yet. It is frustrating, since we know have no leads as to where our soldiers are; they could be anywhere, as far away as Istan for all we know. If they are even alive at all.  
At least the Warmaster said a few words before she slumped away into her recovery coma. Apparently she managed to pass on the notion that Balthazar is south of the Bone Wall. Not news I wish we had heard, truthfully. The idea of ordering an attack against it that means to see us punch through it and live is a... well, it stands before me like an insurmountable cliff. The fighting today was hard enough as it was. I could see the flow of the battle. We were so close to breaking, so damn close to the assault failing and being thrown back in a humbling defeat. Bear was with me today. Without her strength, I think we would have failed. Only fate knows how many broken swords we would have left behind.  
  
Spirits, but we might well dash ourselves to pieces by necessity. What do you do when you must run, cannot stand? Admit defeat? Lie there in despair? Try anyway, in the hope that on that day the sun will never set, and the snows will never melt? I know we will try anyway. We will count the costs in the lives of our friends, and call it a necessity. I hope they may fall with dignity and honour, standing tall upon mounds of vanquished foes before they finally topple.  
  
It is bleak. It always is. And yet, the tired smile, and goodhearted jokes, a mouthful of lukewarm mead that is better than an alemaster's greatest brew, just because it tastes of home. Duty is a heavy chain; the longer we bear it, the more we crave the lightness of when it is finally cast off. It does not drag us down, it merely makes us stronger. Our swords may crumble, our words may falter, but out heads remain high, and our backs unbroken. I kiss the blade of my sword, thinking of Kristen, and Freyja, and Reuzen, and Hejja, before I stand to do what so few can, will, or shall. They are always worth the cost.

# 34th of Zephyr

Arid Gladefields.  
  
So, we've finally received the resupply we've been waiting for, which has at least marginally improved the prospects of attempting a direct attack due south. The supply was accompanied by explicit instructions for us to follow Balthazar south into Elona. I'll draw up some plans. Maybe we can do something, but it'll still be bad.  
  
At least they sent us a box of upgrade parts for our air-filters. I remember sending back update notes and prototypes for the gas-hood in 1329. Seems some of this got into circulation, refined, and improved, and now finally sent back to us. We'll need to spend some time refitting it all, and then maybe we'll stand a chance of not immediately dying to the fumes. The Desolation was said to be so hostile that no mortal could traverse it, but I suspect the ancient heroes of old did not have access to the marvels of modern technology. At least I suppose it means we won't need to worry about finding and taming Junundu.  
  
We need time to prepare.  
No news yet from any of our injured about what happened.  
The need to sit tight and prepare troubles me, but I understand it is sensible. Our forces are in a state of relative confusion, and it is easy to blunder blindly into mistakes. We need to wait until we have clarity, or until the enemy shows his hand. Unfortunately, the chances of ever finding back the people we lost becomes slimmer and slimmer with every passing day.

# 35th of Zephyr

Arid Gladefields.  
  
You know, sometimes, you become so focused on something ahead of you that you become blind to everything else around you. I think the prospect of attempting to breach the Bone Wall almost consumed my sanity for a second, only to be drawn back from the very brink. Bear's claws, but I even started dreaming about it, looming over everything.  
And then the scouts found a way around it, to the east, where the wall doesn't stand. A small gap, a smuggler's pass, the road of exiles and refugees. Our way inside the realm of king Palawa Joko.  
  
Now we make ready to advance. In a few days, we'll finally cross the broad span of the Elon, and march into the Desolation. We might be the first living Tyrian army to do so in... well, as far as memory serves. If we were a pack of norn, it would be enough to earn us a featname of renown.  
  
I am under no illusion that this will be a difficult. We might have bypassed the Bone Wall, but whatever comes after will be just as big a hurdle to all of us. We simply need to take it one task at a time.

# 36th of Zephyr

Arid Gladefields.  
  
We have statements back from the Warmaster, as well as a debriefing given by Athy. They both speak of the Mordant Crescent, and someone in dark armour wielding unknown magic to great effect, as well as a woman armed with a great scythe. They cut through the troops in an instant, despite not even outnumbering our own. The Warmaster's account stated that the blackguard was sent specifically to stop the Chapter, though why is unknown. Either case, it bodes ill for my hope that we could have gone into the Desolation relatively unopposed. It seems we will be fighting both the Awakened and the Forged at every turn. There is glory in such a brave, if perhaps foolhardy, approach to the Elonian realm. We will simply have to be careful not to kill too many and give the other side the advantage.  
  
Anyway, the plans are set, and now everything will begin to be put in motion. You'll see, with all this trepidation, it'll turn out to be a mild inconvenience at best. Such is the humour of the world, after all.

# 37th of Zephyr

Arid Gladefields.  
  
All quiet, as we're preparing to shift camp up ahead past the Bone Wall. I wish everything went faster, though. It's easy to understand people getting nervous or letting themselves get gripped by despair because it feels like we sit back and do nothing while our soldiers are in danger. It feels like we should be out there, vengeance incarnate for the insults we suffered in our defeats. The truth is so much more complex, of course. The moment we were put on the back foot, our mindset shifted. Every meter we move outside of our camp is dangerous, a risk. Above all things, we must resist the urge to squander manpower by risking more into the teeth of the enemy. They control the span of the Elon. To think anything else is foolish. We prepare because preparation is key in survival. This is an enemy with the guile and cunning worth centuries. Palawa Joko did not manage to conquer Elona by sheer luck, after all. Regardless, tomorrow we press on.  
  
I was sitting on the ruins up here earlier, the old sand-washed walls and arches that remain. No-one seemed able to tell me what it used to be beforehand. Alevyne joined me, and we had an interesting talk about the future. I used to think that perhaps I would be able to fight all the wars that really mattered, but thinking about the Sunspears, like I did when I first arrived here, changes that perspective. We pave the way ahead with our deeds, so that those who come after us may pick up the sword where we set it down. Perhaps it is not for me to fight the wars of my children, but rather that I stand in the line of battle as long as I can, until they are ready to shoulders the burden in turn. It sounds both worthy of honour, and a thankless task. Some must fight so that all can be free... it doesn't mean just today. We will always face dangers that will need to be faced down. If not the Elder Dragons, then no-doubt some other evil will rear its ugly head.  
It gives me much pride to know Freyja already wields her sword in the same cause. Kristen and I have both done our parts for the Pact, and the defeats of the Elder Dragons. Will Reuzen and Hejja grow up to make the same choices as we did, until in turn, their children are ready to earn their legend in defense of us all?

# 38th of Zephyr

Blind Faith.  
  
You know, there is something to be said for Kormir. We struggle so hard to find our way past the Bone Wall, get struck by defeats, and almost laid low. And then we find a way through and around, and into what is almost a paradise of tranquility and peace. Kormir's statue lies in the corner of this hidden vale, called Blind Faith by the exiles and refugees that pass through it. They find their way out of Elona in much the same way we find our way in, passing through the rocky water-flow, and wading past the knee-deep streams. Scattered islands of verdant brilliance, a sea of emerald peace, lie before us. Kormir herself, Truth, is wreathed in the small pale blue leaves of a species of tree I have not seen before.  
  
We have not truly crossed the width of the Elon yet, as the waters still flow around this little island, but we are south of the Bone Wall, and in the Desolation. We have, in more than one way, invaded Elona with wet boots, through a backdoor left unguarded. One can't help but wonder if it is providence or sheer luck that has balanced the scales for us, if only for the moment. I suspect things will get more difficult the further south we press on. The quiet before the storm, perhaps?

# 39th of Zephyr

Blind Faith.  
  
We got Shadowsmile back. Found her in the wilderness to the south of here, which sprawls unkempt into the foothills, before the cliffs soar up further south, hemming in the Elon in the valley. Not too far from the so-called 'Village of Purity' that lies our west, where Palawa Joko still reigns. I'd like to say we found her, but she apparently found us while we were conducting a recon patrol throughout the region, asserting if there was anything of note along the tangle. Crepsilly looked battered, but she was not seriously injured, asides from the mental state of confusion and distress she was in. It is a mighty relief that she's alive. Her report states that she was able to make her own escape from the Village of Purity following some unknown unrest, before she was able to flee. A local bounty hunter tracked her down, but Crepsilly managed to ambush them and strike a deal that has kept her hidden out here. Since the Awakened did not come for her, we have to assume the bounty hunter kept her side of the bargain. I hold strong hopes that the unrest she mentioned might have meant others made their escape, though I know it is a rather unlikely hope.  
  
We also sent out Fletcher with a party of our humans in disguises to this Village of Purity. While their mission did not go without a bump, it seems that it is far from being as thoroughly under Palawa Joko's sway as we assumed it would. Discontent seems to be common, as these people are suffering under the yoke of a "Clanmarshal", residing in a palace further inland, and maintaining his authority through a garrison. To me, that sounds like two targets for us to destroy, and perhaps buy these people, misguided as they might be, some relief. It aligns with our short-term objectives to force passage south, and it is a noble enough goal, but I worry for the long term repercussions. We will leave, and I cannot imagine that the Awakened will take kindly to a village in open rebellion. It's something to be discussed with the Tactician before we commit, I suppose.  
Fletcher's team got sniffed out before they finished up, but I don't think the Awakened managed to track them down to us. If they did, we've seen hide nor hair of any Awakened coming out way. Rayder's in medical with an arrow wound for it. With some fortune on our side though, I hope the Awakened simply mistook them for dissenters, and didn't think to figure we might have resorted to subterfuge. Granted, it is not our usual approach to things, unless the spooks are running the show.  
  
Asides from returning Neya to us, and the mixed results from the stealth mission, the patrol was uneventful. Spiders and harpies infest the foothills south, but there's no clear passage. The harpies look strange, blue-skinned and wearing crude metal ornaments, as opposed to the ones that plague Tyria. We had to slay a number of them as they became territorial, but I tried not to slaughter them for the sake of it. In the end, we did enter their roost. It is not unreasonable for them to defend their roosts against invaders.  
We also found a strange hound-like elemental that seemed composed of fire and sand. Unfortunately, we didn't manage to see much of it, as it vanished when Azalea got close. Some form of local wildlife, I suspect, like the Djinn and Hydra. I wonder if we'll see more of them.

# 40th of Zephyr

Blind Faith.  
  
Tactician called out a day of soft leave to unwind, even though we're in a dubious location. I can see why, though. The patrol didn't yield anything to imply a threat, and the Awakened don't cross out east past the Elon's flow. Whatever scent they picked up from Fletcher team, they didn't follow up on us, which leaves us out here, nice and cozy. I wonder if, perhaps, there is a something less mundane keeping us sheltered from unwanted eyes. It would surprise me that this shrine to the Blind Goddess carries some aegis around itself.  
  
Either case, it was a relaxed day. Fierceblood and Coox fried up the drake, and we were allowed to swim in the width of the Elon, despite the many drakes infesting the waters. It was nice. Relaxed. Later, what started as a round of drinks spun a bit out of control. My fault, of course, since I brought out the pipe and a bag of Iboga petals, and decided that was a good idea. I thought it was a good idea in the moment, perhaps relax the tone a little, but... Spirits. Stupid, of course. Cinderkeeper saw us, and I suspect she'll file a rather scathing report.  
I'll suspect we'll all bear the consequences come morning  
  
Damn it. Of course, the one day we're supposed to relax, I end up feeling more anxious about having to explain to the Tactician why I decided smoking Iboga petals was a good idea, than going face to face with Palawa Joko himself. At least I have a plausible chance of winning the latter...

# 41st of Zephyr

Cunt.

# 42nd of Zephyr

Blind Faith.  
  
Leave suspended. Stupid mistake. Angry.  
Aed passed Ballistician test. Junior sapper to Ballistician. Nailed all the questions. Good lad.  
Didn't speak to anyone today. Didn't want to.  
Everything's turned to ash.

# 43rd of Zephyr

Blind Faith.  
  
Hollow feeling. The days ahead seem to stretch on without end in my mind, and I resent their prospect.  
Today was dull. Small accident during training caused one of the recruit to be smacked into an armoured Charr. Nothing major, just... stupid. It happens. Everyone's nerves are taunt. I can feel my own patience fray.  
I'm so tired of being here. Unending days of duty undone by a single error, because apparently no flaws or mistakes may ever be forgiven. I could have diverted the Elon with my bare hands and drowned Balthazar in it, and they would have begrudged me the fact that I'd sit down afterwards to rest.  
  
Bah. My bile just makes me angrier. I accept my responsibilities in the matter, obviously, but I'm close to refusing orders from the "Tactician". Who in her right mind levies *a greater* disciplinary penalty for something that, by their own bloody words, wasn't a break in regulation, and then has the gall to claim it was lessened because it occurred on a mandated leave-day *they* issued? Spirits, no doubt if it was up to her, we'd have shot half the poor bastards involved in today's training exercise to gratify some manner of obscene need to set an example. How that woman ever attained her rank is beyond me. A bad example? How about you don't spank human recruits raw in the middle of bloody camp. How's that for an exa-  
  
I need to stop.

# 44th of Zephyr

Blind Faith.  
  
Still angry. Spoke to the Warmaster. I'm not sure if it helped. Told her what I think about Maeva, and how I find it more and more difficult to be forced to obey someone I don't respect very much. I could see it was difficult for Alleshia. She was vague, but she seemed to have the intent to mend it somehow. I know my anger'll fade eventually, but not today. I don't even know if I want it fixed. I feel nothing but animosity now, and I know it doesn't help any of us. She seemed resolutely on the side of my family, though. I admire her for it, but I can't help but feel this will cause tensions between her and the Tactician. I wonder who carries the blame there, me, or Maeva? I suppose we both contributed to making a foolish mistake into a yawing chasm of resentment. She got me a bottle of mead, though, and a reassurance.  
Why is everything so difficult. Why did you not just give me a few days of work, instead of taking all of it away? You can't take away the things I fight for, and expect me to keep going. Spirits, but the jester is being beaten by a heavy-handed fool, and no-one is left laughing at the end of it.  
  
Regardless, everything else is quiet, but not for long.  
It begins tomorrow.

# 45th of Zephyr

Blind Faith.  
  
Our first raid on the Awakened today. Troublesome. We boated across the river into the fields outside of the so-called Village of Purity to the west of us, before storming straight past the village and into the Awakened garrison that lay slightly above it. We took the place easily, outnumbering the paltry Awakened troops on site, and found it mostly... empty. It was covered in thick, black tar, and scattered pits of bones and debris were set alight for reasons I can't fathom. Apparently Palawa Joko brings the locals here in order to Awaken them. We ventured down into the crypt serving that purpose and... It is difficult to describe. To call it an ossuary would be too noble and gentle a term. It was more like the lair of some ancient, primordial evil. Bones lay in heaps, some ordered, some loose, littering the area. We trod on layers of congealed bones and tar, all remnants of whatever foul deeds they perform to bind their magic into the dead. I've never hated anything or anyone more than I've hated Palawa Joko and his Awakened in that moment. Not the broiling, furnace of anger, though, but the cold, steel fury. We are doing the right thing.  
Aed and I blew it up. We lined the columns with explosives, and caved the entire thing in. I hope it stays buried forever.  
  
There are some worries about the repercussions for the villagers. With the repeated dissent, it might be that whatever Awakened are still holed up in the Clanmarshal's palace might come down and attack the town itself. If that happens, we'll intercede, and bring about a pitched battle. If they don't, then we'll occupy the village in the coming days. I saw the palace briefly, and it does not look like a fortress. I doubt we will need to besiege it for very long.  
There are questions about what happens after we continue, but I don't have answers yet. Perhaps our short-term liberation will only buy us safe passage, before the Awakened will return to continue their reign of terror. We can't fight all of Elona, but I can't deny that I feel the need o try, despite the lunacy of the idea. How can we stand by and see innocents suffer, and do nothing? So far we seem to have been in luck. The garrison and the Bone Wall seem all but unoccupied from this side on. Not enough to meet us in battle and stand a chance of victory. Where are Joko's armies? I can only wonder if Balthazar is not paving the way for us by posing to be a bigger threat, if wholly unintentionally.  
  
So, asides from our opening strikes against an entire kingdom ruled by one of the most powerful undead beings in the world, the camp remains, perhaps bizarrely, undisturbed. The Awakened surely must have seen us, and yet we stand secure in the natural fortress of Blind Faith. Spirits, but if peace ever returns here, they should erect a fortress here, to stand watch.  
Maeva seemed to be losing it today, though apparently it is another spat of the strange magic coursing through her. I am not so petty as to gloat over her suffering, but I does leave me nonplussed. I feel worse for Bjorn, truth be told. Imagine having to run around with your dick stuck in a mousetrap, just waiting for the thing to go off at any point. Eh.  
  
Spoke to Vatorn for a while. Not sure why. He didn't seem too quarrelsome today, though he asks some strange questions about honour and loyalty. He didn't seem to understand that I might dislike someone, and still risk everything for them in battle. The loyalty of the pack just... is. If one of us falls, we pick them up.

# 46th of Zephyr

Village of Purity.  
  
So, I was right about the palace. It seems Palawa Joko's servant sought to make an imposing and domineering citadel in order to cow the locals, but it is not so much of a fortification compared to the Bone Wall itself. It has the main advantage of being up high, with only a single, uphill approach. This is somewhat nullified because that approach is heavily sheltered by statues and gibbets meant, no doubt, to cow, rather than be an effective defense. The palace has no battlements, and they cannot see us coming until we are within spitting distance of the gatehouse. The last stretch is where it becomes dangerous. A natural saddle between two small hills makes for a good defensive chokepoint, and there seems to be a stretch of open ground right before the gate proper, where the road splits and continues deeper into the Desolation. I didn't see the gatehouse, but I've had Seleea prepare sapping petards. Knowing her, she'll make them on the high-yield side, which serves me fine for this. All in all, it means that digging a siege line and preparing for a drawn out encirclement is pointless. We just need to storm and breach the gate, and it'll be over before it began. Spirits, if we had time, we could make a storm-gallery, but our guardians will accomplish much the same.  
I've drawn up an assault plan, simple as it is. No doubt we'll put it in action soon.  
  
The village here itself has been surprisingly... calm? We made contact with some of the local resistance, and it seems most of them are ready to make things better for themselves, if not overthrow Joko's reign completely. The locals were able to tell us a few things at least, one being that Palawa Joko is absent, likely in the south, dealing with the Forged and Balthazar. That means that currently, local authority lies solely with a human Clanmarshal and an Awakened Warden. They're our main targets in the palace, or the 'pergola' as they call it. The politics aren't clear yet, though. The Clanmarshal being human might change the way we approach this. There is a large chance that, after we leave again, Palawa Joko's armies will return. If they find this place in open rebellion, I worry what will become of it. Perhaps the Clanmarshal can be forced to make concessions. In that case, should Joko reassert rule after our passing, the blame will lie with him, rather than with the population. It is a... compromise, but I have no illusion these people are anywhere near strong enough to make a stand against Palawa Joko should it come down to it. I hope most will flee north, and flock to the Free City of Amnoon. To stay here is death.  
  
I can't help but feel some scorn for these people, although they don't deserve it. It's just that I don't think the norn would have allowed themselves to be brought to heel so meekly. We'd have fought to the death to hold onto our freedoms. Spirits, we would have done so in the face of Jormag, if not for Asgeir and the Spirits. I find it hard to imagine Palawa Joko brought all of Elona to heel... Perhaps it's dangerous that I underestimate him.  
  
Anyway, I doubt I'll sleep well, under the gaze of the enemy, and our temporary allies of convenience. It doesn't feel much like a liberation, truth be told. Yes, the Awakened are evil, and should be destroyed, but these people are... well, they're tools. We're not liberating them, we're using them as a shield to forge a passage deeper towards our true enemy, Balthazar. I wonder if I'm the only one that sees it this way. I can imagine Alleshia desperately wants to free this people, but she too must understand that we... well, we can't. We're not here to liberate Elona. At best, we will slay those Awakened we find, and perhaps rescue a few people where and when we can, but... What happens afterwards? Do we just leave?  
It is so strange that we are surrounded by the forces of an evil tyrant, and a mad god, and yet I'm still not sure who our real enemy is.

# 47th of Zephyr

Village of Purity.  
  
We've stormed and taken the pergola, though the outcome was different that I expected. The locals set a plan of theirs in motion, and that resulted in a number of surprises, most of which leave me with mixed feelings at best. The approach up to the pergola itself was trivially easy, most as I assumed it would. Asides from a half-reinforced gatehouse, there were little fortifications to speak of, and we were on their doorstep before they could well blink. A number of locals went with us, something I thought was brave but foolish at first, but turned out to be more... planned. I was about ready to blow the portcullis clean off of the gate when the locals rushed forwards and were met by a nervous-looking man dressed in rich robes on the other side. He opened the gate for us, after which we poured in. There was some resistance, but the Awakened troops crumpled easy enough under the weight of our numbers, and we were inside soon enough. It was not as gaudy as one might expect of a palace, but rather disappointingly overrun with Awakened and their drab muck. We faces down the Vizier and the Clanmarshal, both of which used pwoerful magic to stay in the fight a lot longer than any mortal man should. We slew the Clanmarshal twice, only for the Mordant Crescent vizier to pull him back together as if it were nothing. Only after we lopped the Vizier's rotting skull off his shoulders did both of them stay resolutely dead. What happened afterwards is... odd. The same strange noble who opened the gate for us spoke quickly, and claimed to carry on the will of Palawa Joko as the new Clanmarshal. After that, all the other Awakened lowered their weapons, and proceeded to act as if we weren't there. Apparently this was the plan of the local resistance; to usurp the rule. That way they don't live under constant oppression, while Palawa Joko's rule is nominally kept intact in case he should ever return.  
I don't like it very much, but I doubt open rebellion would have served them well. Besides, from the tone of it, most Elonians here were hostile against their oppressive ruler; but not necessarily against Palawa Joko. I don't understand, but my scorn for them only deepens. Are they truly that blind? I suppose I should contend myself with the notion that we at least have made things better, yet they have all made their choices. They submit to Palawa Joko still, even if it is only nominally. Whether for their own survival, or because they truly believe that drivel about Joko being their god-king, I am ambivalent. What's worse is that the immediacy of our military needs is such that we will simply have to accept it all, and move on.  
  
On to better news, we did recover First Crusader Iluoana from pergola's dungeon. She was not in a bad physical state, though apparently they used magic and sorcery to pilfer her mind. Thankfully, I don't think she was aware of much that Palawa Joko's minions can exploit; if anything, the Mordant Crescent already sprung their trap on us, and we're not finally getting some payback. Oddly, the Awakened seem to have no idea who we are, or what our goals are, though I suspect they'll have gleaned from Iluoana's mind that we are in chase of Balthazar. Of more immediate importance is that the Awakened and the Mordant Crescent are heavily embroiled in a war again Balthazar; a war they might be losing. I suppose I should see some joy in the idea of our two enemies killing each other with abandon. If anything, it might allow us to toe the line and pick our fights with more care.  
Regardless, the First Crusader's been returned to us. Unfortunately, she hear anything of where the other captives are being kept. At least we've heard some word from Claridge; the locals found a note signed by her hand, apologizing for the theft of several supplies. That seems to suggest Claridge escaped captivity like Neya, and is in the wild. Hopefully Sawyer is with her. With some luck, word of our attack on the pergola will spread, and they can return to us soon.  
  
Oh, and we used one of the petards to blow up one of Palawa Joko's statues. Well, 'blow up', we sent it flying off. I also had a vast, painted portrait of Palawa Joko torn down and taken away as a trophy. I suppose it'll do nicely, somewhere.  
  
The road ahead lies open. Ever onward we go.

# 48th of Zephyr

Village of Purity.  
  
Order is returning, though what shape it'll take is not clear yet. We're here for a few more days to see if things settle down, and to beat back any counter-attack the Awakened might still stage, though I doubt it will be a likely occasion. There is tension here, though. The belief in Palawa Joko is deeply rooted, and difficult to dislodge. There is also the difficulty of pressing forwards into the Desolation, and leaving behind our supply lines. We can still send people back around the Bone Wall, but as soon as we press in, we'll be in our own. It's a calculated gamble. Supply attrition will start to weigh, and we'll have to make sure we don't get bogged down. If we do, well... I don't know what then. It's do or die. I hate those orders, and I hate the enormous risk we're taking by ordering the advance at all, but... we have to. Balthazar is a threat to all of Tyria, if what the Pact found beneath Draconis Mons is true. It is times like these that we understand that we will not stop. When we attacked Mordremoth, the fleet crashed and burnt, so we walked. These days, we set in pursuit of a rogue god, into a territory that will likely kill us if we cannot find the way through.  
Of course, voicing such things is lunacy. We must remain stoic. I'll write Kristen a letter. I already sent off the giant painting of Palawa Joko to the Priory. I found some locals who were going to make the run to Amnoon, and they were willing to take along the roll in exchange for a promise of payment on the other side. Enough, at least, to buy them passage to Tyria, I think. I'm sure Freyja'll be surprised to find something like that rendered into her care. I'm not sure what I'll do with it yet. Perhaps I'll make a gift worthy of legend out of it.  
  
Either case, we remain at rest for today, somewhat oddly in the middle of what used to be Palawa Joko's domain. I suppose it still is, in a sense, with all the 'pretend' games being played by the new Clanmarshal. Bear, sometimes I miss Orr. That was simple: go here, kill every Risen you find until you find whatever's commanding them, and then kill that. Rinse and repeat. Out here, a town we've liberated, for all intents and purposes, swear loyalty to their tyrant mere minutes after we've put one of their lackeys to rest. The people still parade around with flags, praising Joko for all the good we've bought them with our blood, sweat and tears. I don't expect them to bow before us, but this? This is jarring. It doesn't help that our prospects in the days ahead are the bleakest we've ever had. Spirits, I've invaded dragon territories with less trepidation than the idea of finally marching into the sulfur dunes. I think it's because I worry about the lack of provisions. Starving to death is not very heroic.  
  
Anyway, shouldn't stray on dark thoughts like that.  
Inkblot, who I've decided is better named Wolfsmaiden after her continued commitment to the pack, decided to take an interest in shields. Apparently she's been considering getting up a little closer, put her superior strength and reach to use against the Awakened and Forged. A good idea, though she did pretty poorly hefting my tower shield. Bit too big, I think. She'll perform better with buckler or a kite shield, and wearing some armour. She's been doing well, actually, even after the idiocy from a few days ago. Apparently she's decided to take more to Astrid and I, rather than to Maeva. Not hard to figure why, if you ask me, she was constantly overshadowing the lass. Much as Wolfsmaiden still has a ways to go, I don't treat her like a child, and Astrid seems to be shaping up to be a good friend of hers. Yes, Drakecarver made a friend, once and for all proving that nothing is truly impossible. Who knows, maybe it's an omen that we're not all about to die horrifically to acid fumes, legions of undead Elonians, and floating war-constructs.

# 49th of Zephyr

Village of Purity.  
  
The reign of the loaded quiet continues. It's as if we're waiting for something, anything, to go wrong. Such is this place that I seems strange that any form of peace and quiet should be allowed to exist here at all. It is oppressive. It seems perverse to think people have lived here all their lives. Like an animal grown in captivity that has only ever known the bars that keep it from seeing the wide expanse of freedom that lies right outside his doorstep. It bothers me so deeply that we cannot set these people free. Theirs is a prison of the mind, as much as it is of body, and therein lies the truest evil of Palawa Joko. What can we do, except but resign ourselves to the choices made by others, and fight evil where we find it, regardless of it all. It is the same weary resignation I have learned to have for the Svanir. There are many on the Dragon's path who would've made worthwhile friends, heroes and Companions. It is why Knut still welcomes them in Hoelbrak. And yet, because of the oaths I've sworn, and the choices they have made, most of them will be my enemy. Is this the same here, in Elona? Will we make deluded people our enemy, and strike through them to get at the evil that lurks behind them? I can't tel if that is the right thing to do, even if we had been sworn to destroy Palawa Joko. We're not. I fear we will see his evil pass by, and do nothing. Not because we do not wish to do so, but because we can't. To fight all of Elona would be the end of us, I think.  
  
Made a wager with Athelstan that the Desolation will be worse than Orr; we'll ask Alleshia to make the judgement once we're through it all. Galadon seems optimistic. He's got a rogue spirit. I remember when I resented that, these days, it's a welcome drop of sanguine humour that keeps me on the right side of phlegmatic and melancholy.  
  
I need to write Kristen before we depart.  
It is always funny how much I loathe it. Not because I cannot write, nor because I don't love her, but because I never feel that my words express the admiration and love I hold for her. I heard folks tell that time erodes passion, but Bear knows I love her as much now as I have always done.  
I suppose I'll set to writing, then.

# 50th of Zephyr

Village of Purity.  
  
This place hangs like a sword over my head. Every second, I expect something to go wrong, and for it all to come crashing down on us. I think part of it is the loathing to finally press forwards into the Desolation.  
Alas, the plans have been made. Soon, we'll be going forwards, into the unknown.  
  
Force was giving the troops some training, putting them through a theory-practical exercise on holding a bridge. He knocked out all the senior Crusaders with 'injuries', and then taught them a valuable lesson about the importance of the chain of command. Force does well as a First Crusader, you know. I'm glad to have him around as a friend and a back-up. One of those Chapter cornerstones that goes unsung too often, I think. Either case, training went well enough. It's busywork in the end, but it does the trick. Shit, even I forgot where we were for a bit.  
  
I'm tired, though. I don't sleep very soundly here. I keep thinking every sound I heard is something sinister. It's damn bloody well worse than Orr. The only good thing about that is that I'll win that bet with Athelstan.

# 51st of Zephyr

Village of Purity.  
  
So, day of revelations. One of the local resistance leaders managed to talk the Warmaster into a meeting of some sort today, against the better judgement following the utter fiasco that followed our last 'covert meeting'. Fortunately, it seemed that this time it wasn't so bad. The woman, one Nebefer, professed to be a part of the Order of Shadows. We met one of them up north in the Highlands, and frankly I'd forgotten about them until now. The only time they've been mentioned was by Vatorn, which... does make a mite suspicious as to how he knew anything about them at all. If he's keeping secrets again, it'll cost him his hide. Anyway, this Nebefer convinced Alleshia to meet up in a secret place in order to come to some sort of concord, though the details were kept deliberately vague. We put up a detachment to escort her, including myself. Still not great odds in case it was another trap, but I figured that I'd at least have stood a better chance against whatever evil bastards the Mordant Crescent could throw at us.  
We pushed a decent distance uphill into the higher terrain where the Desolation begins, following the road south past the Pergola. The Awakened have a road there, but it is mostly empty these days, asides from a few stray Awakened that were very easily dispatched as we came across them. Then our contact took us off-road through a series of canyons and ruins, until she pulled us up at the gates of a fortress built into a sheltered rock. Sure enough, the gates swung open, and inside was a whole army of these Order of Shadows people. Their little bolthole is apparently their Chantry of Shadows, the Elonian counterpart of our own Tyrian Order of Whispers, and their Chantry of Whispers. It seems my previous dismissal of them as nothing but a splinter was hasty. They seem well-armed, and possess technologically advanced equipment on par with the Iron Legion. They had a pump with a bellows circulating air around their keep, and advanced rifles with complex machined parts, all made in their own workshops.  
The Warmaster conferred with the Master of Shadows, their leader, and came to an agreement of sorts. It seems the Order of Shadows needs our assistance. We went looking through the southern gate of their base, and it became pretty clear why.  
  
The Mouth of Torment itself, a huge cluster of razor-sharp jagged rocks, lies directly south of the Chantry. It was apparently founded here with the sole intention of ensuring it would not open again, and bring forth Nightfall once more. I know the Order of Whispers, in the past, hunted down and killed the Daemons of Torment that spilled forth from Abaddon's rising, but I didn't figure they would still be here. Either case, it seems they have failed. The Forged have take the Mouth of Torment, and built fortifications and battlements along flanks, harnessing whatever power still lingers within for their own purposes. Considering what it is, and what we know of Balthazar's attempts to harness magic for himself, there are strong odds that our rogue god is locked within the Mouth of Torment. This means that the goals of the Order of Shadows and our own are aligned. Tomorrow, we'll advance up to the Chantry, and then we'll commit to battle.  
  
It'll be difficult. Out there, it's the Desolation proper. There are great furrows filled with sulfur acid, and it stinks beyond anything you've ever smelled. The gas-hoods help, but not much. Here's hoping that we can end this entire tour in a few days, by striking hard at the core of Balthazar's armies, together with our newly-found allies. If all goes well, we'll just pull back north the way we came, and leave Palawa Joko to rot in his own filth, until we can get a proper liberation fleet going. It is almost ideal; through the Chantry, we bypass the forts that are likely built along the long Elonian road that is still in the hands of the Mordant Crescent, while it delivers us within striking distance of what we, with some certainty, can say is our primary target! Spirits, but despite the brutally hard battle ahead of us, I feel relieved to know where we stand. The forage situation wasn't too bad either. There are devourers abound, and some strange species of rock-deer that are apparently native to these parts of Elona. At least we won't starve, even if we suffer setbacks.  
  
Maybe we'll be home before the season's out.

# 52nd of Zephyr

Chantry of Shadows.  
  
As expected, we've moved forwards into the Chantry. It is not so bad out here, though it smells vaguely of rotten eggs at all times. That's just the downside of being this close to the Desolation. Everyone's settling in decently, though lack of tenting space means we need to share tents. I'm resting in with Aed, though I've resolved to be a good guest. I doubt it'll become a serious concern if everyone plays nicely. I will have to do an inspection of the tents before night's bell, just to make sure people are behaving. Much as I'd like to say we could just let folks mingle, there are literal regulations against such things. I'd prevent infractions, than to punish them.  
  
The way here wasn't as uneventful as yesterday. It seems that overnight, some Forged managed to encircle the Chantry, and we had to break through a siege line on the way. It was hectic, and a small miracle no-one got seriously injured. Thank the Spirits most of their cannons were facing the wrong way, and once we got past the initial group to the Chantry's gate, we rolled them up quickly enough. The big issue is how they managed to get here. We'll need to secure the Chantry's own backyard, in order to make sure there's not more Forged looking to sweep in and seal us in. Being besieged wouldn't do us very well, however sturdy the Chantry's walls seem to be built.  
  
Anyway, we witnessed a brief incursion during the engineer's survey of the Mouth of Torment, though the Shadow people here are firmly entrenched, and the anti-materiel guns they've set up along the perimeter put a serious hole in any Forged that strayed too close. They were seen off soon enough after some concentrated fire from the locals and the engineers, though I doubt it'll be this easy in the future. The engineers are working on setting up explosive charges for use in the assault, but there's a thick layer of Forged fortifications right outside our doorstep. We'll need to push those back a little before we can commit to the main assault.  
  
Anyway, I'm sure the Warmaster has seen my assault notes. No doubt we'll start making preparatory strikes tomorrow. Then, it's time to see if we can all go home after all.

# 53rd of Zephyr

Chantry of Shadows.  
  
Deployment today. Astrid took Lance and mauled their outlying fortification, while Blade and I went through a long patrol into the roughs to the west of here. We found something rather unexpected: an ancient Sunspear burial ground, complete with ghostly guardians, and grave-mounds. It was strange, the ground covered in white ash, while trees had taken root, even here, shining lanterns hanging from their branches. It was... comforting, to know they had some peace after death. If I had more time, I would've stayed, and learned their tales. No doubt Elona's erstwhile defenders have tales of heroism and glory to share that would do well for the Skaald that went to retell them. Lessons, perhaps, to be learned. Alleshia has been gathering old books of Elonian heroes, I hear, in her quest as the Truthseeker. I feel like she'll wish she was with us when she reads the report.  
There was also a large sulfur quarry, further north. Somehow, we missed it completely before. It just shows you how difficult navigating the Desolation is. Somehow, on our way to this Chantry, we walked straight past a city-sized quarry. It was long abandoned, however, left over to rot and be overrun with harpies and their roosts.  
In the end, we found the small road by which the Forged likely came around, hidden on the edge of the burial grounds, and difficult to reach. But once up, it lead straight to the Chantry. We found more of the Forged there, trying to repair the guns. I leaped down wearing Bear's hide, and distracted them while the rest of Blade made their way down. Spirits, but it felt good to feel them crumple under the might of my paws, smashing them aside, and splitting steel with my claws. Bear's fury, her voice in my throat the mighty bellow of ancient heroes. Spirits, but perhaps all that was needed to dispel my disquiet was to come face to face with Balthazar's armies again. Splitting them apart, and seeing the magic that animates them slip free and dissolve back into the Mists gives me a grim pleasure.  
  
Anyway, we'll have plenty more of that come the morrow, I imagine. The Warmaster's drawing up a battle plan for us.  
In the meantime, Wolfsmaiden picked up a shield and armour, so I spent some time teaching her some basics. She's got a long way to go, but I've not met many norn that didn't take naturally to sword, axe or shield with a little practice. Hopefully we'll make a proper shieldmaiden out of her soon enough. Besides, having another brawler in Blade's shieldwall is always good. You know, thinking about earlier, I wonder if Saana's adherence to Wolf's teachings has allowed her to invoke his totem in battle. It might be worth asking, when we have a chance. I rarely see the other norn in the Chapter take on the mantles of their patrons, while I can feel Bear's growl in every breath, and feel her strength in every blow of the sword. Moments like these make me wish we had a shaman. We have stubborn Elders a plenty in Kefir and Ranek, but their wisdom is unfortunately limited to the skull-cracking kind.  
Spirits, thinking about it, am I really the wisest norn of those who accompany us here? Spirits, looking at the present company, it'd have to be a contest between Embersong and I. Raven have mercy on us all! Would Kristen be here, eh?

# 54th of Zephyr

Chantry of Shadows.  
  
The assault was a failure. Four separate attack prongs: Lance and Blade to the north. The Warmaster took the camp reserves south, along with a fourth group composed of Order of Shadow troops. Our task was relatively simple: we had to press home into the base of the Mouth of Torment, and blow anchoring gates with some specialist magical explosive designed for the purpose by the Creators here in the Chantry. If we blew all four seals, the magical energy keeping the gates leading to the center of it all locked would dissipate, and we could storm the center, and seal the rift.  
Sure enough, we pushed in hard, against almost impossible odds. Spirits, but they battered us, swamping us in Forged constructs. There was fire everywhere. It is only because we fought like lions that we did not succumb to the enemy. We managed to destroy the seal, though we were inches away from being washed away in a tide of death. I'm battered and bruised beyond belief myself, though I've done my best not to show my weariness to the others. Bear's strength fought with me, but is Ox' endurance that I call upon in the end.  
Lance did well as well, I hear, but it is the other two assaults that faltered. We saw the flares go up, yellow, marking the retreat. We fell back, though it was messy. Tinker, who had been injured in the ferocious melee before, was injured, and we almost forgot to drag her clear. It didn't matter. She died in the hands of the medics. Lance lost Octavia Skylark, too. I'm not sure what happened, but they didn't manage to recover a body. I hate to think they left it for the Forged... Spirits...  
  
And that's only those we know about, on our side. The Order of Shadows suffered their own losses, but part of their group managed to return. The same local who led us here was with them. Their advance was met with overpowering resistance, and simply crushed as they were trying to capture the gate seals. Not surprising, considering the ferocity of the combat we saw on our side. From the Warmaster and her team, we have not received any word yet. Our orders were to fall-back to the Chantry, and regroup in case the attack failed. We can't send out rescue teams, not unless we spot a distress flare. With the amount of Forged still swarming the area, it would be suicide to send anyone in after them. We just have to hope they survived. Spirits, if they're all dead...  
  
Can't think about that. We need to rethink our plan. Spirits, if Balthazar is still in there... what can we do? I'm not sure we'll survive another attack, but it might be the only option we have left. But first, we need to recover. The losses we took will weigh on everyone.  
  
Spirits, and here I thought that finding Claridge in the Chantry, and a possible final thrust at the enemy might have brought us some good luck. Bah, I realize I've not mentioned Claridge at all. Different things on my mind, I suppose. The Order of Shadows found her, and brought her here. She had apparently been roaming around on her own, brought to near starvation and death in captivity. She's recovering, for what it's worth. It'll be good to have back in the shield line, to take some strain off of Alexina. A small pinprick of light, I suppose, on a dark day.  
We'll need to soldier on. Oddly, Claridge is an inspiring figure for that sort of thing. She has many failings, true enough, but her determination and sheer will to keep going might be the one thing in which I will freely admit she is my better. In days like these, it an example to follow.  
  
Even so... the deaths will weigh on us. I think they were good days, battle-worthy. It is only marred by the stains of defeat. Spirits, but I wish we celebrated our dead more. Tomorrow, when we burn them, and mourn them, I will honour their deaths.  
  
92. Octavia Skylark, fell in battle.  
93. Ebony Tinker, succumbed to her wounds.

# 55th of Zephyr

Chantry of Shadows.  
  
Warmaster and her team returned overnight, which dispelled a lot of the tension hanging over the camp. The reason for their delay was... odd. In truth, we'd expected Balthazar to muster his army of Forged, reinforced by whatever forces he gathered from the Mouth of Torment, and then swing a single, crushing blow at the Chantry. Except that never happened. Balthazar's army of Forged seems more than content to linger there; what's more, they are apparently drawn south, away from us. The Warmaster and her team were forced to remain in hiding after the assault, as the war god's tin men passed them by. Not searching for them, exactly, but moving decidedly south. Either case, it is good news that our folks made it out alive. I wouldn't gave done to hold more than two remembrances today.  
  
Spent the morning with some practice, teaching Saana her sword-and-shield technique. Good. Had to cut short for archery practice, but that's not too problematic. Proper instruction and training will make her a proper shieldmaiden soon enough. She already knows enough about her swordwork, so the hard part's over. Now it's all about learning how to bear a shield. I'll call her up again come the morrow, I think. While we have a place to practice.  
  
We committed Tinker's body to the pyre earlier today along with an symbolic wreath for Octavia. It was just the same as we always hold these ceremonies. The words did them more justice today, though. Their deaths were good, and we should not mourn them in gloom too much. Wolfsmaiden came to ask me about it after; it weighed on her that the first moment she took in the battle-line as a shieldbearer, we lost someone. Funnily, she then told me Wolf had also spoken to her in her meditations, and had given her much the same advice as I had; to persevere. Yesterday was... ferocious. There is no other word for it. Rather than worry about the idea that Tinker might have died because she was in the frontline, she should consider how many didn't die because she was in the shieldline. Wolf doesn't doubt her, so she shouldn't either.  
Rather, we should honour the memory of our fallen friends by accepting that it was a battle well-fought, even in failure. We will miss Tinker's outlandish style, and I'll never see her and Seleea waddle about on defense assessment again. Octavia will never again tell me about her people, and the difficulties in seeing the wreckage of what once was your own home. But, their absence only makes us poorer because they lived lives that enriched ours before their deaths. That is a mark of greatness; to touch others in your wake.  
  
After the pyres, I was required to speak with Alexina and Vatorn over a matter of them behaving irregularly in the library yesterday. Considering the aftermath of the battle, it wasn't exactly unpredictable that people would seek some comfort in each others. They admitted as much when I asked them about it. Frankly, it'd have been enough to write them up with labour duties, but I'm not entirely unsympathetic towards their plight. It irked me a little to find Vatorn skirting the rules, after he decided to piously tell me about the virtues of not pushing the boundaries after Maeva handed down her absurd punishment, back in Blind Faith. But then, I am not so petty to lash out with the full weight of my annoyance simply because I'm given an chance. I've told them to keep a more respectable distance, and let them off with a warning. For a moment, it seemed they'd ask me for a relationship approval there and then, but that would've been stupid. I would've been forced to deny it, after all. What sort of signal would it send if I simply approved it, right after I caught them out in what essentially amounted to a breach of regulation? That it's okay to flaunt the regulations, because we'd just allow the request the moment you got caught? Folly...  
Of course, Alleshia decided to pull a grand stunt directly afterward, but I'll get to that.  
  
The noticeably glum mood weighed on everyone, so I decided to reintroduce some cheer. It started out as a lark, when Alevyne and Aed pressed me to ask Embersong for a dance. She declined, but Wolfsmaiden obliged well enough, so we did that odd formal dance the humans keep trotting out. Not soon after, half the Chapter was up and about, dancing along the Chantry's main hall, I imagine much to the amusement of the local Order of Shadows agents. It was good, alleviated a lot of the tension, and brightened our moods. It took me back all the way to Orr, when Celdric danced with Boom Moon. Spirits, but that seems like a lifetime ago.  
  
Alleshia joined in too, with Athelstan, after which she, uh... apparently kissed him, and then realized that doing so was a poor idea. She had me write her up for a disciplinary breach, and it looked like someone had clubbed her along the side of the head. Not entirely sure how I feel about the Warmaster losing her bearing in the middle of an operation like this, but then I suspect that this wasn't exactly planned. Athelstan similarly requested punitive duties, though Alleshia asked me to absolve him. I found a happy compromise in putting Athel in for work duty with the Beastmasters. Given Wolfsmaiden had all the beasts returned to Amnoon prior to us entering the Desolation, I'm sure he'll find his work duties in the department will be a breeze. Figures that right after I have to separate Vatorn and Raider Junior, Alleshia decides it's a great idea to go smooching a Crusader. I can't blame her for finding some comfort of her own, but Spirits, talk about a sense of deplorable timing.  
  
Anyway, I suppose that's just the sort of happenstance that shows us we're all in need of a long, lengthy leave, just to decompress. Maeva and her crooked sense of justice be damned.  
Either case, we're not done yet. I suspect we'll hold a tactical meeting tomorrow, to figure out... well, everything.

# 56th of Zephyr

Chantry of Shadows.  
  
Less Forged on the horizon, and planning, planning, planning. We're trying to predict an enemy whose motive we don't understand. Spirits, we can't even *guess* as to Balthazar's thought processes, let alone try and predict what he's going to do. So far, our war god seems adamant about avoiding battles he doesn't need to fight, bluntly ignoring every attempt we've made to bring him to battle. The one time we were so close... and now we're back to start. It seems now that Balthazar's eyes are set firmly south, towards the Bone Palace, or even the northern regions of Elona. Why a god of war is going off in an angry rampage towards Palawa Joko... I can only guess. Maybe we've misjudged him? Spirits, imagine if Balthazar is simply looking to end Palawa Joko's tyranny. Is slaughtering innocents along the way just a brash side effect of the deity's murderous nature?  
Either case, we will be following into the depths of it all, for better or for ill.  
  
I ache to see Hejja, these days. There is a palpable sense of finality hanging over everything we do, and it bothers me that I might die without a glimpse of how much she's grown since I was sent there. Spirits, but she's more than two seasons old now! Has it really been that long already? Another season and the Jotunling'll be two years old.  
Spirits, but if I die out here, the only thing I'll regret is not having seen them grow up.

# 57th of Zephyr

Chantry of Shadows.  
  
Well, we're all still alive. Today was odd, it all started quietly enough. I had a talk with Iluoana and Carbine, since Astrid recently approved their relationship. Not entirely sure if I would have allowed it, but they seemed happy enough, and I suppose that's the important part. I'm a little worried about the flip-flopping we got from the both of them; I hope this isn't yet another fling-of-the-moment that will run out of steam before the season's out. It's much the same issue I take with Alexina and Vatorn, truth be told. I could do the same I did before and content the approval, but... honestly, at this juncture, I don't feel like it matters that much. If we get through the Desolation alive, I don't think I care that much about who ends up getting in who-ever's breeches by the end of it.  
Had a good chat with Astrid and Saana, too. Wolfsmaiden is taking well in general, I think. Her friendship with Astrid's pulling her more into my orbit by virtue that Astrid and I end up casually throwing insults at each other when we grow bored. It's good to have a third target; here's hoping Raven's blessed Saana with enough wit to make her tongue as sharp as her arrows. I can't help but notice things are getting a little campy now and then, and it's hard not to *look* at Astrid and Saana and ignore that they're good looking women, with good looking womanly-bits. Thankfully I'm not so easily swayed to that sort of temptation, but Spirits... Can't lie to say I feel a little guilty thinking about it at all. I sure hope Kristen doesn't have 'a headache' whenever I'm finally allowed to go home, unlikely as that is. I'll turn into a can of frustration, otherwise.  
But I digress.  
  
There was some training about acid wounds I was supposed to attend, but Claridge called me away about that note she left behind in the Village of Purity. She stole some subsistence supplies from then, and left a note to apologize, which is... well, yes. Now Claridge was asking me if there was any chance of us going back to settle the debt. Considering that we slaughtered a garrison, killed an Awakened Vizier, and replaced one Clanmarshal with one more willing to consider the needs of his people... I'd say the scales are evened, to a degree. Claridge didn't agree entirely, and insisted we try something, which is, of course, impractical. I could... Well, I suppose I could pass it back to that Nebefer, the Order of Shadows lady that was our contact in the village to begin with. Eh. I'll tell the Quartermasters to sort it out tomorrow.  
  
After training, Lorma and the scouts returned from their efforts in scouting the road ahead. We'll be looking to drive ever onward south, in the pursuit of Balthazar. More and more, this seems like folly, but our orders are clear, and we're still well at fighting capacity. Either case, the way forwards is... difficult. Lorma's report notes several bridges, heavily guarded by Palawa Joko's Awakened armies. They cross a network of sulfur ravines, leading to many chokepoints that we'll need to punch through. It seems the shortcut through the Chantry helped us get far, but if we have any hope of getting to Vabbi, it'll be a slog, knee-deep in Awakened. Spirits, that just brings me back to the Cursed Shore advances in 1325-1326. It was hard fighting to get to the gates of Arah then, and we had airships. How we will manage now, I don't know. We just will.  
More worrying is also the notion that the Awakened can apparently move around the sulfur-pits with impunity. Is their flesh so desiccated the acid doesn't eat away at them, or is this Palawa Joko's protection upon them? It's bad news either way. It gives the Awakened room to maneuver, while we get bogged down in the terrain. Bah. We'll pour over the map tomorrow, before we draw up our marching orders. I don't expect it'll be good either, way.  
  
After that lovely news, I returned to having the usual camp banter. We had a good idea to maybe try and hunt one of those rock-deer for a change of diet tomorrow morning, so we have that to look forward to. Not soon after deciding that, Bjorn and Calder has a magical accident of some magnitude. It knocked out both of them, and sent Calder flying out of Occult. I don't know what happened exactly, except that Bjorn had been feeling faint before, and Calder had been talking about draining some superfluous magic. I don't know anything about the finer points of magic, but it seemed a lot like the, uh... outburst Maeva suffered in Ascalon. I remember having to sandbag her tent, exactly because we thought she might, somehow, detonate. And now Bjorn did exactly that. I suspect Klixxa will have a look, or Calder will tell us what happened when he regains consciousness. Thankfully, it doesn't seem anything serious was damaged, except for some frayed nerves about the Chantry exploding.  
  
Talking about that, Aed apparently had a box of charged Zephyrite crystals sitting in a box, right in this very tent. Octavia Skylark had them charged with the 'aspect of the sun' before she died, and that has apparently rendered them volatile to a certain degree. Aed informed me; he saw folks in Amnoon employing the crystals as a power source for some energy device, and is interested on exploring the idea. I dug up the sketches and notes for the mini-laser project I drew up many years ago when I was still working under Vethrir Blackmoor. When he was still sane. Either case, I told Aed he should probably talk to Tahleela, Octavia's sister, about a way to safely render the crystals inert. Until then, I'll have them locked away in a lockbox, since they apparently have some risk of causing damage when they are overcharged or broken. By his own admission, Aed was bewildered by Octavia's death, and didn't think to mention it to me before for those reasons. That's understandable, but I find the notion that I've been literally sleeping atop a box of volatile power crystals a little unnerving.

# 58th of Zephyr

Chantry of Shadows.  
  
Well, we have our line of advance. It's not pretty, but we'll have to push onward and hope we're able to smash through the Awakened forces in our way. We have hand-drawn maps made by the Order of Shadows, and the scouting notes from Cinderkeeper. The direct route south to Vabbi is short enough for us to punch through if we commit, but the issue lies in fortifications the Awakened have erected along the path. We'll have to press through, before we'll divert off the main road, and make our encamp within striking distance of the major bastions. Apparently, the Warmaster's settled on a site that's... well, inhabited by ghosts. The Order of Shadows tells us they're not hostile, but... well, it'll make for an interesting camping ground, certainly.  
  
The day itself passed quietly. We did some 'hunting' after practice today, but that mostly involved shooting a few arrows at a small herd of rock-deer that are clustered out nearby the camp's borders. The Forged attacks have steadily decreased, and soon enough the Order of Shadows will be able to resume their watch over the Mouth of Torment. Anyway, it's safe enough to hunt without worrying about getting attacked by a patrol of Forged, and we picked off a few of the critters. There was a debate of some length whether or not they were edible, even though Claridge ate one during her absence, and Astra apparently cooked one up before. I decided not to pay too much attention to people being overly paranoid, and simply made some venison and sausage from the meat. Fried some of the sausages in a pan, and shared them with some of the troops as a snack. The rest will probably do best by letting it rest for a while, so it becomes tender. It'll do good for the extra rations. If I get a chance, I should make a smokehouse. Imagine that, sulfur-smoked venison in the Desolation! Probably taste as awful as it smells.  
  
In less good news, Octavia's sister, Tahleela, has decided to retire. No doubt her sister's death has hit her hard. It'll be a dangerous trip back to Amnoon for her, but I can only hope she is able to return home safely.  
It's a pity; I had hoped she would have taken up her sister's burden, and continued the fight. But it is understandable. We'll leave, tomorrow, committing even deeper to the fight that has already cost her so dearly. Perhaps it is good that she return home.

# 59th of Zephyr

Beyond the Zayan Gate, along the edge of the region called 'Shattered Ravines'.  
  
We advanced today, pushing hard along the road into the Desolation. Oddly, the road was mostly uncontested by Awakened, asides from stragglers and a few sparse patrols. The most pressing danger were thick tar mines that we had to slowly clear. Spirits, but being on the march made me realize how strung out we are. Carrying the wounded, and all our supplies being carried by hand, we've got precious little fighting hands left. Enough to fight off a patrol, but not enough to defend the column from a dedicated attack. We were lucky not to be attacked in force; with the Mordant Crescent fort south along the road, I suspect things will become harder for us.  
Bah, lucky... We weren't today anyway. Chloe Alevyne slipped and fell off one of the bridges during the march. I didn't see much, but... it was a high fall, and it ended in a sulfur furrow. As I rushed over to see what became of her, all I could see was the corrosive haze, and the half-distinct forms of several Awakened lumbering about far below. Spirits, but I hope the fall killed her. I think the Awakened snatched her body away before the rest of the column was damn well aware of what was happening. I called for archers, but it was much, much too late to do anything. Spirits, we tried to find a way down there, but the sulfur is... we can't walk through it. The acid fumes will kill us as surely as a Forged sword through the heart, except it'll be a slower, more agonizing death. Damn it... Alevyne wasn't one of our best warriors, but she was too good to die like that. She spoke so often of her family, sounding as if she would have been better off being at home, to enjoy the years of youth before... Well, this. What an ignoble end for someone who did not deserve it. What's worse, since we did not see the body, we need to mark her down as missing, and live with that delusion of hope. Spirits, but she cannot have lived...  
  
It struck all of us. I can feel the Alleshia seething with anger, while the rest keeps their heads bowed, and gazes turned away. Wolfsmaiden too, suffered under it, though I hope a few words of encouragement have done something to settle her. She was already straining under the loss of Octavia and Tinker, this is just... Is this how it'll end for all of us, before this is over? Slowly withered away in this wasteland? We cannot give up hope.  
  
I spoke to Cheery too. Her skies are darkened further by the fact that Sawyer has still not be found, and with every day that passes, the chance of his safe return to us grows slimmer and slimmer. Soon, we will have to assume that he will not return to us. I hold slim hope that he is somewhere nearby, waiting for us to rescue him form a decrepit dungeon before he finally wastes away. Cheery is only so strong... I can't imagine how I would feel if Kristen was captured. Enraged. Beyond words. I don't think I would sleep a day, or sheath my sword until she was back in my arms. I would tear the world itself asunder. We all have to remain strong in the days ahead.  
  
We're sheltering in a cleft past the Zayan Gate, in a hidden nook where we are sheltered from the acid wind, and hidden from view. There is a sulfur furrow to the north, home to a pair of massive worms that I would consider a challenge to hunt, was the day less bleak. The approach to it is a natural chokepoint, and not a passage we are likely to exploit. I had Aed and Astra put down a minefield around it, just in case one of the worms tries to dig out of its acid pit, or if any of the Awakened try and catch us unawares.  
The other exit leads out to a plateau of forts, dominated by the Awakened fort. We're hidden from view, but Awakened patrol the area, and we could be discovered if we are not careful. We're only resting here for a day, before we move on deeper, in an attempt to circumvent Fort Huduh. For the evening, I had our mesmers weave an illusion in place across the entry, so that any passing Awakened will simply see a solid wall of rock as they pass. That should save us from cursory inspection, at least, and perhaps allow us all some much-needed rest after a day like today.  
  
Tomorrow evening, we'll be sharing our camp with ghosts, so I hear. Bleak. So utterly bleak.  
  
94. Chloe Alevyne, missing

# 60th of Zephyr

The Lair of the Forgotten.  
  
Or at least, what's left of it. It's just a tangle old, broken walls and pillars, barely enough to call a ruin. It lies along a web of canyons and cliffs, close to a yawning pit of sulfur. Asides from an old gatehouse that still straddles the passage, it would be utterly unremarkable, if not for the dozens of wayward ghosts and spirits wandering the site. They are Elonian, humans, their souls bound to this side of the Mists for reasons beyond me. Most of them are peaceful, and wander on their accord, mumbling. They are eerie and disturbing, mostly because they seem aimless, lost, and helpless. They ask if we knew who they were, if we saw where they died... Answers we cannot possibly know. Eventually, they find out we cannot help them, and continue their aimless wandering. One was enraged and attacked me, though when I slashed at him with my sword, he melted away like mist. Tragically, it seems the best way to live with them is to ignore them as they wander about, and keep to your own. It bothers me to treat the memories of the fallen as if they are no better than vermin to be ignored, but I have nothing to offer these restless spirits, and they have nothing to offer me. It is a depressing thought to think our own dead might be consigned to such an ignoble fate. I hope that Raven flew true with them, and brought them to the Hall of Spirits, and a measure of rest.  
  
Aside from its tragic inhabitants, the location is as good as any other to make camp. We are well sheltered from Fort Huduh, the Awakened citadel, and the old gatehouse, ruined as it may be, renders the place defensible. Interestingly, as we crossed the open ground between this place and the cleft of yesterday's encampment, we saw Forged out ahead on the plains, along with what looked like fortifications. If the Forged have invested Fort Huduh, we might be in a uniquely advantageous position for once. It'll allow us more freedom to move around vicinity, and perhaps open up the road down into Vabbi proper. If that's the case, we could be out of the Desolation in a matter of days. Bear give me strength for what we'll bloody well do once we're in Vabbi, but at least the end of this horrid place is in sight.  
If we're unlucky, Balthazar is with his army, and we'll be fighting both the Forged and the Awakened in a pitched battle we cannot possibly win. We'll have to set out recon patrols and scouts around the region again to get a feel for our exact tactical situation, before we can think about acting.  
  
We also urgently need to consider our options for extraction back to Tyria. The airship is, supposedly, still anchored near Amnoon. The Warmaster has a single-band communicator to maintain contact, but we haven't been able to raise them for a while now, ever since we've pushed further south. Sooner or later, we'll need to find some high ground, and hope that we're still able to get a signal out. If not, we may well end up stranded, or worse, find that we'll need to pull off the entire blasted journey backwards.  
  
We just have to keep going, taking it one day at a day. We've come so far, and we've paid the cost in lives. We can't let those deaths be in vain. We need to find and stop a god. But... how?

# 61st of Zephyr

The Lair of the Forgotten.  
  
Let's just start from the beginning, and work our way through. It's been a long, decrepit, day.  
  
Sparring in the morning with Saana. Good start of the day, really. She's learning. Pity that was overshadowed. Maybe again tomorrow, if she feels up to it.  
  
Then recon patrols. I thought that, maybe, that would be the worst of the day. Fort Huduh, the Awakened citadel that dominates the passage south into Vabbi, or the Vabbian Corridor, as it is named on the map. The good news is the fact that the Forged have apparently besieged it in no small extent, rendering their area of control about the area pointless. The bad news is that the Forged have done their work too well, and sealed off the Vabbian Corridor itself with a powerful magical seal that I'm not sure we can break. Calder and Vatorn both tried to punch through the magic, and failed. I don't have much more hope for conventional explosives. Magical shields are rare, and usually explicitly designed to withstand the sort of directed firepower of a breaching charge.  
So, we're left in a corner, with no way south, and the way west dominated by two siege camps, both of them blazing with powerful magical shields that you can see shimmer from a distance. Even if we bring the limited mortars and shells we still have with us up, we won't even dent either position position before our munitions runs out. We're like ants, scuttling between the feet of giants. We'll survive, until one of the two armies decides to crush us. We can't fight pitched battles against either; we need to find a single target we can strike hard and fast, and then we can get out of here. Spirits. Now we need to find a way through to Vabbi before our supplies run out. Tactical planning and strategic choices are everything, and the days we have left before we cut to half and then quarter rations is limited.  
  
And that's exactly what we were all robbed off today. The Mordant Crescent... How do I even begin to explain this.  
They appeared outside out gate. I suspect the sentries in Huduh saw us on our patrol, and relayed our position. It doesn't matter. They had Chloe with them. She was still alive, though barely. I suspect she was within an inch of death, but they used her as a weapon against us, in a far more insidious way than just Awakening her, and throwing her at us. No, they drew us all out, near the old gatehouse, and demanded the Warmaster surrender the Chapter to them, unconditionally. They held Chloe up as a hostage, keeping us back as Alleshia tried to bargain for Alevyne's life, even offering herself up in exchange. It didn't matter. They drew a blade across Chloe's throat and spilled the joy of her life from her veins, staining the sands red. Then they summoned a sandstorm, and escaped. I ordered a desperate charge, even though I know it was too late, and that it might have been a trap... It didn't matter. They were gone, Chloe's body along with it.  
We could've tried to save her before, but... There's no way of knowing if we could've gotten to her before they had slain her. We are left with the regret of not having tried. She begged us to save her. Alleshia, Sinclair, and I, by name. Begged us not to let them kill her; not to let her die. And we could do nothing but watch.  
  
Conceptually, I know what the Mordant Crescent has done. Alevyne was... well, I think the fall killed her, if not outright, as I had hoped it might have. She was still alive, though barely, and they used her life to cut us deeply, by making us witness it as an execution, forcing us to watch, unable to act for fear of Chloe's life. That was our mistake. We failed to give her a better death, to be butchered like some animal. It is not a death we will celebrate.  
And it is a victory for the Mordant Crescent. They have demoralized us, at no expense of their own. Alleshia was incoherent with rage, and bled her anger brightly, like I do, in waves of fire, before she exhausted herself. It will weigh on the Warmasters mind, on these days that we need to think clearly, and find our way out of this wretched place.  
  
Spirits, it crushed Astrid, too, and so many others. Saana was restless with anger, collecting some small tokens of remembrance, and trying to work through the loss. I saw her, collecting some of the blood-stained sand left behind, and I had her swear on her sword to bring honour to her memory when we can. A little resolve will help her in the days ahead. Others are dealing with it poorly. Aed's lost and unfocused. Surely clutched at her own bone golem until the bone ridge cut her palms open. Carbine, spirits... decided to climb up on a high rock. I saw Iluoana and her tussling up there, and I have a sinking feeling that we might have found more dead by the morning if Iluoana hadn't spotted her. I lost my temper, and barked at them both, but Carbine... she lost her mind. Started talking about she doesn't care about existing anymore. I had to have her arrested, and placed under guard. If I didn't understand how she felt, the words she flung at me would be enough to see her out of the Vigil with a dishonourable mark on her record. I'm left the choice on the matter tomorrow, which is another headache I can ill-afford to deal with.  
I briefly lost my own mind when I spotted Vatorn and Alexina up on a ridge directly afterwards, though I... I apologised for that later. I think it all got to me. Oddly, of all people, it was Maeva who was the one who supported me. I am left with mixed feelings. I resent that I won't be able to join Saana in honouring Chloe, Octavia and Tinker, should we survive all of this. I resent that I won't get to go home after... well, all of this insanity. We're shattering. And yet, I have to be thankful for that one moment of support. I'm not sure if that deepens my resentment of her or not, or if I am merely being petty about such a thing in the face of the blow we were dealt today.  
  
I don't know. We can't despair, but I'm afraid we'll all die here if this continues like it is.  
Command sent us here, but I don't think they understood what they were asking of us. We are caught up in a war, chasing down a rogue god across an empty wasteland, while we leave the bodies of our friends and allies behind in the dirt, or in the clutches or our enemies. Perhaps we will still succeed, somehow, through impossible perseverance, and fortitude, but how many much will it cost us in the end?  
  
I miss home. I miss home so much. I miss the snowflakes on the cold wind. I miss the smell of malt ale, roast meat, and baked bread. I miss waking up with a hangover next to Kristen, and trying to convince her that Valharantha will not miss her for another hour. I miss the little Jotunling splashing through the shallow waters near the Grawlenfjord, while da and I watch nearby, sharing old stories. I thank Bear that I have these memories with me, now, today of all days, to remind me why I cannot give up. Why I need to keep fighting.

# 62nd of Zephyr

The Lair of the Forgotten.  
  
Camp's in complete distress. We're not functional. Not even close. We're trying to salvage morale, after the devastation of yesterday, and it is costing us time. Time we need to put to good use. I can't blame anyone for it, but it frustrates me. We are allowing the Mordant Crescent to win. We are allowing them to use Chloe Alevyne's death as a weapon, which is far worse than anything else they have done. They reduce all the good in her to this one, vile dead, and mar her memory by making it a defeat. The others are connecting her tale with loss, self-pity, defeat, failure, and weakness. Damn them, but Chloe was none of these things. What's worse of all is that they don't listen, and they drag me down with them.  
Even these very words of anger and frustration are unworthy of her memory.  
  
Mirka and Alexina held a... sitting circle of sorts, for people to speak, and share, and grieve. I said what I wanted to say. I can't say if it helped for others, but it was... Interesting, I suppose, to hear some people speak openly. Maeva spoke, about regret, and glanced at Astrid and I. Again, I am struck with a... curious sort of resentful sympathy? Spirits, but I just want my leave back. If she resents doing what she did, then she must understand her error, surely. Bear, but I just wish to be done with this war, and go home.  
I'm so tired, I lost focus halfway through the talks, and just sat there, my mind going blank inside my helmet.  
  
The entire thing didn't help for Saana at least. In the morning, she flailed herself numb in the sparring. It wasn't training, but it was venting. Good, I think, but I'm sure. She spoke passionately enough during the sitting circle, but I found her afterwards, sitting about and brooding. She doubts herself too much, and looks back at her own deeds with too much harsh judgement. I suspect Wolf is testing her in this. It is not the first time she has lost a pack member, and it is still something she has difficulty coping with. In her eyes, her entire life is reduced to seeking vengeance for fallen friends; a bleak enough prospect. She makes it seem like she has nothing to live for, except death. Of course, she ignores the friendships she has been forging, and people she has saved through her actions here. These things are not so visible, yet so easily discarded in a moment of thoughtless anger. She is angry, and mingled with the curse of her self-doubt, it breeds terrible, horrible monsters.  
  
The self-blame is the worst. None of them seem to understand that what happened yesterday was never about saving Chloe Alevyne. It was about giving her a better, more graceful death, and perhaps vindicate some of our own failures. I doubt she would have lived for very long, even if we had freed her from the clutches of the Awakened. She fell... so high. She was burnt, dragged along on feet that couldn't carry her. Her bones split her skin, and she was... It doesn't matter. Those memories are unkind.  
Chloe reminded me of Freyja when she tried to dance with me in the Chantry of Shadows, not so long ago. We danced then, to drive the shadow of Tinker and Octavia's death from our minds, and give us a little reprieve of the gloom. Alevyne was so small, it was like Freyja when she was Aska's age. I could lift her up, then, and spin her around. In that small moment, taking the smallest steps to follow along with Alevyne's human paces, I was home again. A different place, a different time. It is always the smallest of us that are the strongest. Chloe failed no-one in the end, and she fought with us as brave as any norn warrior, or grizzled veteran, and yet she was never jaded by war.  
  
We are here because we can win these battles. We fight the strongest enemies, because no-one else will meet them in battle, and for that privilege and that duty, we pay the highest toll.  
  
I set Carbine free as well. By all rights, the *correct* thing would be heap her in disciplinary notes and punishments, but I honestly don't give a shit about regulations right now. What we need is to restore morale back to a fighting force, and I don't think resorting to harsh measures will help us with that. We need to inspire, and lead by example.  
Besides, I think Carbine understand well enough that if this happen again, I'll skin her alive, morale or no morale.  
  
Meanwhile, the Vabbian Corridor remains sealed, and we remain locked in the Desolation.  
Time is running out.

# 63rd of Zephyr

Lair of the Forgotten.  
  
Things are still slowly getting better, but they're getting better at the very least. Scouts set out, and we have some things to work with. Vatorn got injured in the process, but he'll live through it. Better than another bloody death, in this forsaken place. Our next moves will depend on the Warmaster and the Tactician; there's some hope that there's another way out, but it may be too deep for us to get to without exposing ourselves. Besides, there's the question of the weregeld to be paid for our losses. I think it's time for us to think blood the blade again, and strike back at our enemies. We'll see.  
  
It will be good to be out of this place. The ghosts around us are a near-constant presence, and I have gotten somewhat used to ignoring most of them throughout the day, but... It almost feels as if we are part of them, these recent days. Imagine if we were all already dead, simply too dumbstruck to register the act of our own deaths, and we have already become spirits. Is that how is starts? I know the thought is a bleak one, but somehow I find it amusing, despite the tragedy of it all. The fact that we are here at all is absurd, in a way. We've crossed halfway across the Desolation, and while we have suffered defeats along the way... well. Here we are, soldiers among the ghosts of the past.

# 64th of Zephyr

Lair of the Forgotten.  
  
So, at least the Warmaster is back up and about, and plans are being forged. Right now, our main priority is, and remains, to break through the Vabbian Corridor, which means shattering the magical seal in place over the gateway. We're not sure how to break it, but Alleshia seems to think that maybe whatever Forged is keeping up the spell might be locked inside their firebase outside of Huduh. She'll talk to some of the Order of Shadows agent that still keep contact with us about what we do next, but frankly we'll have to get creative for this one.  
I suppose at least it's good that we're thinking about moving forwards again.  
  
The rest of the day went... alright. First Crusaders kicked in, they're keeping the troop's minds occupied with exercise, which is good. We had a ceremonial remembrance for Alevyne, after which people spoke, and I hope the matter's now been put to rest. We need to fight now, and mourn later. The situation is getting dire; Quartermasters are cutting our rations, which means that we're finally running out of food. There's no forage to be had around these parts, so I bloody hope the Order of Shadows knows about a way to breach either the firebase, or the door seal keeping us locked in the Desolation. They had those special explosives for the Mouth of Torment, when we tried to breach the warding seals around the rift. Here's hoping they didn't gamble their entire supply on that fight, and they kept spares.  
Until then, well, I'm just trying not to feel helpless. We just need to figure out where and when we do battle, and we need to start winning. Get into Vabbi. Then we can figure out if we're even able to continue the fight, but we need to try our very best not to get bogged down in this sulferous wasteland. Bear, but we're so close. We just need to find a way to overcome the magic of a god.  
  
You know, people are really starting to suffer under the strain. Force asked if I could make a shower. I mean, the engineers, make a closed-circuit thing with a water filter. An... interesting idea, but I honestly don't think we have the time or effort for it out here. Seems a bit of an odd thing to devote time to. On the other hand, it might be the perfect distraction to keep the engineers busy while we're trying our best to fight for our survival out here. I gave Aed the project, because he can use the practice. Who knows, a little responsibility might be good for him.  
  
Sleep's a little irregular, but that is to be expected. The ghosts fray my nerves. They are just there, and sometimes they still ask pleading, desperate question that I have no way of answering. I find it difficult not to lash out at them at times, while I also pity them greatly at others. One spirit asked me if I had seen her children, and I tried to... I don't know. Help her? I was trying to make her stop looking, but while I tried, I understood no parent would ever give up. She is doomed to eternally look for something she will never find. It cuts me to the core to think that I might somehow be reduced to the same. I hope Bear grants me the strength to ensure that never happens.  
  
There is a small, cowardly part of my brain that screams at me that we're trapped, and we should flee. It is there, like a rat in trap, scrambling and tugging at the edge of my mind. I can feel the panic that lies within accepting that thought. I keep it there, never going close to it, never letting it dig its claws in. I can see others letting it overtake them though, in moments. They crawl into their own minds, and let their thoughts drift to dark places.  
But we're the Vigil. We are the candle in the dark. The flame might flicker and waver in the wind, but it won't be extinguished. Not while I can still fight.

# 65th of Zephyr

Lair of the Forgotten.  
  
I think the Warmaster's gone mad.  
I, uh... well, I'm not going to write much more. If it works, I'll explain the insanity of at all tomorrow.

# 66th of Zephyr

Lair of the Forgotten.  
  
Spirits help me.  
I'll just start from the beginning.  
  
We committed assaults on Fort Huduh and the Forged firebase, in an attempt to break them open, and hopefully disrupt the magical seal keeping the Vabbian Corridor sealed. We didn't possess any ordnance that could even dent those two fortresses, however, shielded by magical wards as they were. It was simply beyond us as far as heavy weaponry goes. But Alleshia talked the Order of Shadows into coming through with something entirely unexpected, that will make for one impressive tale once we get back home. They gave us spoor lures, which we buried in the sand outside as we made ready for the attack. Then, suddenly, massive Junundu wurms burst out from below. They immediately attracted fire from both of the forts, and we saw several of them, each as massive as one of the great northern wurms in the Shiverpeaks, smash themselves into the forts. Soon, both were broken open.  
We followed behind them, careful not to attract their ire, and then rushed in once the way was clear. Astrid cleaned out Huduh, while I took Blade to cleanse the Forged from their firebase. It was hard, ferocious fighting, but once we were inside, it was over. The Forged and Awakened may have the numbers, but without their walls and artillery, they fell before the concentrated force of our attack. It was... something, alright, to advance under the screeching roars of the frenzied sulfur wurms, and watch them batter god-forged steel and magically animated bone apart before our very eyes. In mere seconds, they reduced a fortress that would have taken us a season to besiege to rubble. Then we put them to the sword. It was like being reborn in fire and steel for a moment, though I suspect the phrasing there might be a little odd considering what we know of the Forged. But yes, we've proven we're still a fighting force.  
Unfortunately, it seemed to be all for naught, as our assaults, however heroic and glorious it was, seemed not have broken the seal. Klixxa, bluntly honest as she can be, said that punching through it was much akin to asking them to freeze over a volcano. A victory then, but rendered hollow by having achieved little beyond reminding our enemies we have sharp claws too.  
  
Our choices now are limited. Our food supplies are running out, and so are our medical supplies. In fact, the only thing we seem to have somewhat enough of are our conventional explosives, which have been completely sidelined by the amount of magical shields and arcane barriers in use this deep into the battlefield.  
  
The tension is starting to show. We won a battle, but people decided to cause a ruckus in the encampment. I tried to put in some levity by making everyone play a little game, and work together, but that just made things so much worse, for some reason. Instead of putting asides their differences to overcome the task I put them to, they decided to all act resentful, and failed to work together on virtually anything. This, of an exercise that include two First Crusaders! It speaks volumes that the one who seemed most willing to do anything useful in it at all was Wolfsmaiden. The others disappointed me so deeply, and utterly failed to see the humour in their situations. Especially Sinclair let me down, acting like a colossal, enormous idiot, exactly when he was being presented with an opportunity to smooth over some wrinkles he was causing with asanine behaviour. Bah, and it all backfired spectacularly. Perhaps I should just have laid into them with disciplinary charges, rather than attempt to defuse the situation... Oh, and Spirits, Embersong's about as sour as a eighty-year old pickled lemon. I didn't even know norn could be that humourless and still breath... I'm fairly certain the collective Arcane Council of Rata Sum is better company at this juncture. She'd somehow even manage to suck the joy out of Jolly Jorrik's Joy-Filled Jig for Jubilant Journeymen, which I can only imagine is a moot for gay Bear followers with a love for alliteration.  
  
Either case, what really broke the day was that Cheery finally lost her mind, and attempted to set off on her own to find Sawyer, on some desperation-fueled delusion. Iluoana caught her, and both Alleshia and I tried to talk Prydwen out of it to no avail. It was clear she'd lost her sense, and we were forced to detain her before she got herself killed. And of course, she tried to go for her weapons when Iluoana came closer, so I had to smash her to the ground. Good too, because I felt, rather than saw, the flesh of wrathfire she was summoning for us just as I knocked her aside. Unfortunately, I hit her badly, and she punctured a long. Medical is working hard to keep her stable, though mercifully, she'll be unconscious for much of the next few days. I don't hold it against her, really, I can see why it all happened. If this goes on, we'll all start breaking down. We won't be defeated on the field of battle, but rather be forced to capitulate as our morale is comprehensively eroded and destroyed. The Mordant Crescent dealt us a bigger defeat by executing Chloe than virtually any other foe we've encountered since the fleet set off into the Maguuma. I can only hope we will overcome that as well.  
  
Which leaves us with only one option, really. We have only one target, and no way out. If we retreat along our line of advance, we'll give up everything we've fought for here, and we'd be abandoning any hope of functioning as a fighting force. No food, no morale, while we run all the risk of being encircled and entrapped would mean the end of us in the most ignoble of ways. Never mind the crushing blow to morale that admitting defeat will cause...  
We're close to admitting defeat because of logistical and morale reasons, but we still have almost the entire Chapter as a fighting force. We can still make that count, something we've proven today. A big win, against the only target we have left, might rally us enough to allow us to either push forwards, or conduct a well-ordered withdrawal where we won't fracture apart in our attempts to survive. It's a gamble. If we can win one more battle, we might get everyone else out of here alive. If we fail, well...  
I'd rather die in battle than see us be ground down like this.  
  
It'll be soon. Time's running out, and we can't afford to wait more than a handful of days.

# 67th of Zephyr

Lair of the Forgotten.  
  
The word has been given. On the morrow, we strike for the Bone Palace. One last attempt to seize victory, before it is all over. We briefed the troops, and then gave them some final respite. A chance to rest, to talk, and to share stories. Perhaps it was enough. We all know that if we fail on the morrow, the odds of ever escaping the Desolation fall sharply. I will not waste too much words on it.  
  
I will leave this book behind before we go. Should I fall, my last words are for my family.  
  
Kristen, my sweet. I vowed to you that when my last strike has shattered my sword, I would still stand besides you. And I do. Perhaps not physically, but I am at your side. I have never left, no matter how far away you and I have been from each other ever since we met. We are still on that beach in Southsun.  
You are the strength of my shield, and the edge of my sword; the smile on my lips, and the song in my heart.  
  
Freyja! You have gone far and wide since you were but a babe in my arms. Everything you have done, the scholar, warrior and mother you have become, fills me with pride. It is always our hope that our children will eventually eclipse our own legends, and soar ever higher, until they stand shoulder to shoulder with giants. If you are not yet a giant, my daughter, then at least know that the ground you walk on quakes as you pass. You will make your own fate now. Raise Aska well.  
  
Reuzen. My son. You will be too young to understand, like your sister Hejja, what has come to pass. Jotunling you may be, but you are still only a young child. Perhaps later, in a few years, you will read this again. Grow up strong and wise, and fight for things worth fighting. War has kept me from you, even in these sparse few first years, but I saw you walk your first steps, and I heard you speak your first words. I will not be there to teach you have to swing a sword, nor see you notch your first arrow, finish your first hunt or kiss your first lass (or lad, for that matter). I don't doubt you would have made me proud with every deed done, had I but been there to see them. Take good care of your sisters and mothers.  
  
Hejja, my little Hejja. When I last saw you, were but a small pink creature wrapped in blankets, before I was sent off this a faraway land. Today, as I write this, it seems probable that I might not come back. I have been thinking of you and your mother every day I have been here. I wonder what you look like. Spirits willing, you have taken to Kristen, eh? These wars I fight are my gift to you and your brother and sister. Grow up to become bold, beautiful and relentless, like your mother. My last wish, of all things I have written today, would be to see have seen you, one last time.  
  
To Usha. Kin. Celebrate my death well. More does not need to be said, eh?  
  
My father; I went to the Desolation, da. No Canthan seas of jade and forests of stone, it is true, but it was worth it.  
I would not recommend you come and see for yourself, however. 'Tis been a rather gnarly place.  
Thank you for coming back. Tell your grandchildren all the tales, hm?

# 69th of Zephyr

Seborhin.  
  
Don't know where that is. Vabbi, somewhere. Big.  
I was carried in. Attack on Bone Palace failed, was a trap. Fought our way out, but there were so many. Had to hold a rearguard. Fought well, but... overwhelmed. Four dead, the rest wounded. I'm still alive. I need to write about what happened, but I can't. Cuts in my back and chest hurt, infected. Thought I was prisoner, not sure if I am.  
Chapter was surrounded and forced to surrender. Should have fought to the last, but wasn't there. Don't know what happened. What the terms were.  
What are now? Servants to those who killed our friends? I am too weak and tired to be angry. I don't know what this is.  
  
95. Nikolay Middleton, fell in battle.  
96. Kane Rein Black, fell in battle.  
97. Kefir Ironwolf, fell in battle.  
98. Shikoba Willawa, succumbed to his wounds.

# 70th of Zephyr

Seborhin.  
  
They threw their chaff at us fist. To wear us down, I imagine. Just a horde of shambling undead, scratching at our armour and shields with their misshapen bone talons, roaring and gurgling. Tar dribbled from their open mouths, their ancient corpses mangled and disfigured so they barely resembled the humans they once were. Them, we slew easy. They fell on our swords, dragging our arms down, and littering the ground before us with their heaped bodies. Soon, they were leaping over mounds of their own to get to us. But they didn't break our line. We held firm, giving ground where prudent, before reforming and holding them at bay a little longer. I let them press upon my shield, fire leaping off of my sword as I cut them down upon it. Astra, Shikoba and Kefir crushed them as they approached, but it was like a torrent. Aed and Nikolay were behind us, firing down between us. The sound was immense. I could only hear the scrape of bone on steel, and the thunderclap of weapons being fired over my shoulder into the rushing horde.  
  
It didn't last. They must have realized I stood tall on the great promenade before Arah, and wouldn't be dragged down by such a contemptuous attack. We fought like the heroes of old. We would not be crushed by something as pitiful as those things they sent at us. The enemy must have known this as well as we did, because they sent in their big constructs. Wicked wolf-things with long claws and the large lumbering beasts that wear swords upon their spine like bristlebacks. One of the latter crashed into the line. It threw some of us aside, and mauled Aed badly. We surged around it, trying to reform the line. Astra and Shikoba, with Nikolay's help, managed to kill the fell thing, but the damage was done. Kane and I dragged Aed clear, while Kefir Ironwolf covered our backs. We gave too much ground, though, and the others had to catch up desperately. Astra and Shikoba managed to disengage, but Nikolay was dragged down. We were going to come back for him, to fight our way down to him and save him, but...  
Well, he wouldn't let them capture him alive. Spirits alone what sort of things he had managed to keep hidden from us, but he lit himself up like a firebomb, taking several of the enemy with him. The tar must've caught fire; at least he died quickly. I don't think I heard him scream very long.  
  
They hounded us. We were surrounded at that point. Shikoba was the next to fall. They speared him through the chest, and dragged him clear of the battle line. I didn't see it happen, but I felt it. The sudden absence behind me. I called to Bear, and she heard me. I saw them coming for us, and I destroyed them. They rent my flesh with their claws, but my hide was thick, and my claws were stronger. They became undone under Bear's blessed strength, even as they sought to strike me down. I can still feel their claws in me now. The cold metal, and the thick seeping sensation of tar fouling the blood. Bear's hide is stronger than Dwarven steel, but even so the enemy marked me. Scars, I hope, to carry along my entire life as a promise for a battle as-of-yet unfinished.  
  
I was bleeding, by then. Badly, I think. I saw Kane die. We had become separated in the melee. Astra and Kane were fighting back to back, keeping them at bay, somehow. Kane then wrenched around and jumped aside, not more than a heartbeat before a fell storm of blades rained down on them. Kane was ripped apart. He must have seen it coming, and protected Astra from the blow. She was smashed asides by it regardless, but Kane took the brunt of it. Astra lives. I hope she will honour the life debt she accrued that day. I thought she was dead, then, truthfully. She disappeared under the claws of the enemy.  
  
Then, it was just the Ironwolf and I. He had not budged, standing sentinel over Aed's body, atop a mound of dead, felled by his own hand. I tried to get back to him, to fight to the last. I can't remember if I made it. I called out with Bear's voice, and I killed, and killed, and killed, until everything faded away into a fog of fury and vengeance. They tell me now that Kefir Ironwolf is dead also.  
  
Seven of us stood bravely against the enemy, for as long as we could, to buy some small time to escape. Four of us died. Aed and Astra will live, but I am told they are badly injured. I lie here, my body covered in deep wounds that would have slain me if Bear had not been with me.  
They tell me we surrendered anyway. I am filled with shame. At having survived a battle where I should have died, and at knowing we failed. We bought precious minutes, but they were wasted. Or given away. And now we are... where-ever this is.  
  
They broke. We fought to the end, we held the line as long as we could, but the Chapter still broke. I don't know why I'm angry, but I am. I live to fight another day, to see Kristen and my children again. I did not die in vain. I am not Awakened by the enemy, to be twisted to their fell purpose. And yet I am angry. Angry that I lie here, wounded but unbroken. Angry that those four lives so valorously spent seem wasted. Angry, because I feel betrayed by the Chapter.

# 71st of Zephyr

Seborhin.  
  
Prydwen lost her memory. Probably after I had to body her to the ground, right before everything went to Torment.  
I had to listen to them trying to tell her what happened, and failing. It was difficult. Carbine came first to tell I couldn't talk about anything, but I don't think that'll matter much. Mithra was here too. She didn't want to go outside. I think it might have been better if she had. She shouldn't have had to see it all.  
  
The pain is bad. Not so much now, with painkillers, and soothing balms, but still. I feel ill. Like it's eating up my body. I can see the cuts on my chest when they clean them. The flesh is swollen and red. If the pain wasn't so bad, I would have worried at it endless, trying to squeeze out the puss and the corruption. I can't though. Just moving hurts me, so I just try and lie down. I sit up a little now and then, but I can feel the gashes on my back throw and pull tight. I sneezed, and I think I almost blacked out when I pulled at the stitches.  
  
Only Astrid's been to see me. I think the rest's not allowed in medical.

# 72nd of Zephyr

Seborhin.  
  
Alleshia came to see me. I had hoped she would've put a better spin on it all, but it looks bleak. We sold away our lives to King Joko, and now we are nothing but slaves to his damned will. We are sworn to obey and to fight. Apparently Maeva did not even negotiate terms, she just accepted it all when it was offered. The worst thing, I think, is that I'm not even sure if it was the wrong choice. My instincts tell me that we should choose death before dishonour, but that choice simply did not exist. If we died, we would have been Awakened into Joko's service, and served much more sinister ends. Now, we traded away our honour instead, so we may still choose to spend the last moments of our lives how we see fit. Which of the two is the lesser of two evils? To die honourably, but let our deaths be turned meaningless by our enemy? Or to sell away our honour in the moment, so that we may redeem it at a later date? It is a difficult choice that was spared. I fought, honourably. I fell, honourably. I survived, and by the time I was awake again, the choice had been made for me. Now I can do nothing but resent the hard choices I didn't need to make, though I know that if I had been in Maeva's place, perhaps I would have done the same. There was no winning this.  
Spirits, if anything, if the we had fought longer and better, then the Chapter might have gotten away. Yes, we would have died, and we might have been Awakened by the enemy, but the Chapter would've been spared the humiliation of defeat and surrender. That prize would have been worth paying. But we didn't. We fought bravely, but not bravely enough. I wonder how much it would have changed if we had fought on for mere minutes longer. Would it really have made the difference? We'll never know now. Perhaps we could have held the line for hours, and it sill wouldn't have mattered.  
  
The worst is that I'm left here, trying to figure out if what we did is right, while being able to do nothing about whatever is happening to us right now. Carbine would keep me locked up in medical while the world perishes. Not that I hold it against her, really, but Spirits, I feel useless. I want to get out here, and do... I don't know what. Something. Anything.

# 73rd of Zephyr

Seborhin.  
  
Still locked up in medical. Nothing much to say beyond that. I'm thinking about a lot of things, but none about which I want to write. The rest went out to do something. I don't know what or why.

# 74th of Zephyr

Seborhin.  
  
Another day locked inside. It itches, but I think the swelling has gone down a little. Sitting still pulls on the stitches a little, but they'll head. A series of scars to prove my worth. I am not yet sure if I will show them to Kristen with pride or shame.  
  
I keep thinking back of the old stories. When the Dwarves called for aid in their fight against the Great Destroyer, a great alliance was formed. Golems from the Asura. Ebon Vanguard, who had come from the Eye of the North itself. And Jora, who brought only four other heroes with her to stand next to the Dwarves. It is said that Ogden Stonehealer asked them why they were so few; upon which Jora replied that she had thought four would have been enough, yet Olaf Olafson's daughter Olrun has also insisted on coming. It was the beginning of our war against the Elder Dragons. Legends were forged that day, and where others brought armies, five of our greatest warrior stood and held back the Destroyers as they surged up from the depths. Ah, what it must have been to stand shoulder to shoulder with Sif Shadowhunter and Egil Fireteller...  
  
They didn't break, but we did. I did. I once hoped to measure myself equal to such legendary warriors, but the reality is less pleasing. Was our battle truly so much harder than theirs? Or did we fail because, for all their might and prowess, of the seven of us that went out, only two were norn? If it had been five of us, would we have stood longer? Long enough for the Chapter to retreat, and give our sacrifice meaning beyond the hollowness I feel now?  
We fought valiantly, I will not allow anyone to contest such, but we failed, in the end. A pointless sacrifice is what it is, and does not do well to be told in the heroic epics. Seven of us went out, and only three returned, yet we might as well not have done anything at all. What would it have mattered?  
  
The answer is yes. It matters, because it was our act of defiance in the face of the enemy. It matters because it was the last effort we expended that might have prevented the enemy from succeeding. It means that Maeva did not surrender the Chapter without a fight. We were that fight. We were the last sprint, the final shot fired to deny the enemy. Even if we failed, all of us can now say that the Ashen Chapter did not give up without a fight. We lost, true, and that is my burden to bear, but we fought, bled and died on those sulfur dunes, in sight of King Palawa Joko's own palace, as proof that we are ferocious foes. We were not destined to live forever, and when we finally fell, the Ashen Chapter was defeated. I understand why Maeva capitulated the Chapter afterwards. The battle had been fought, we had been defeated, and further defiance would have been a pointless waste, with no honour or chance of victory left in it. It does not make our surrender to Palawa Joko's forces any less... disturbing, but I suppose we had no other choice. We might as well keep our lives, and live to fight another day. I for one, have no intention of letting myself be ordered around by Joko's lackeys, and I suspect Alleshia doesn't either. She will have a plan. She must have.

# 75th of Zephyr

Seborhin.  
  
So, the rest have apparently been enjoying... swimming, a banquet, and now a play. I can't help but wonder what kind of prisoners we are supposed to be. I didn't expect Palawa Joko's armies to host us in a palace, and treat us like honoured guests. It is difficult to see why they would bother. Spirits, Astrid walked in wearing Vabbian silk that was entirely too spicy on the mind, and entirely too good on her legs. I've yelled at her to get me a set of those for Kristen. Whenever I get home, that might be the one part of this entire damn desert that I wouldn't mind getting rubbed in my face; literally.  
Shouldn't write like that, truth be told, I'll get too excited, and that's a bad thing while I'm lying here, trying to get my flesh to knit back together. Makes me miss home, though. Will we really go home after all this? It is starting to become hard to understand what is happening.  
  
I'll need to work on getting back on my feet. I've repeatedly tried to convince Carbine to let me escape, but she's a merciless gaoler. I can only lie here, play I-spy with the other wounded, who have thankfully recovering, and ask Bear inane questions. She hasn't responded for a while now, but she's there. I don't know if I made her proud, or if I have disappointed her. There are a lot of things I don't know really, and it is an annoyance beyond compare. I suppose I'll need to trust in everyone else to... well. Make the choices, like they've been doing since we tried to attack the Bone Palace.  
You know, we made it to the throne room, it was just empty. A ruse, to draw us in, and then crush us. Imagine that, though. I can tell da I set foot inside Palawa Joko's own throne room. Wish I could tell I slew the fiend too, but alas. Maybe we'll get another chance, wherever this road we've been set on is leading us.

# 76th of Zephyr

Seborhin.  
  
A lot of visitors today, and quite some things of interest.  
It appears that a good portion of Vabbi has succumbed to the Brand, which explains the ominous clouds in the sky when we arrived. I had others things in my mind, but not good airman past or present forgets the weather easily, and I recognize a storm when I see it. Kralkatorrik has taken wing, it seems the Brand is right around the corner, having engulfed the Kodash Bazaar south of us. The scouts ventured out, and spoke of Awakened holding off the Branded, but the general population being mostly unconcerned because they are not aware of the dangers. Meanwhile, Balthazar's armies march on Vabbi. Suddenly, things make a lot more sense. It seems Joko's realm isn't as unassailable as one imagines, but rather it is in a hard place between the Branded and Balthazar's Forged. This would be an idea time for us to let our enemies destroy themselves, and sweep in to clean up the remains, if not for the thousands of Elonians that will be caught in the confrontation. Even if we were not pledged to war by our agreement with the Mordant Crescent, honour would have demanded we intervened. Defending the Elonian people is a just cause, even if it means we support Palawa Joko's absurd kingdom by doing so. Lich king he may be, but he is still a lesser evil than either Kralkatorrik or Balthazar, both of whom would destroy anything in their path. From what we know after Draconis Mons, I suspect Balthazar and Kralkatorrik are looking for a reckoning, and the Domain of Vabbi will be the battlefield. While we live, we remain true to our oaths; to protect the innocent, and fight the dragons where they can be found. Perhaps, in this case, fighting alongside our erstwhile enemies is not a shame, but rather an alliance of necessity. Is that why they offered us our lives? Perhaps Palawa Joko's armies are truly so depleted by keeping both the Forged and Mordant Crescent in check that they could simply not afford to waste their soldiers on grinding us into the dust. I hate to say it, but it might have been the right choice, by virtually any standard. Did we damn ourselves for the most righteous cause? It's hard to say.  
The real danger is that this means we are only valuable while the Mordant Crescent need us. As soon as we cease being valuable to them, they will have little reason to keep us alive. We'll need to be careful how we expend our forces, and be ready for a betrayal. Unfortunately, there is little we can do if the Mordant Crescent decides to force us to bear the brunt of the fighting, or if they force our hand. They know we will intervene to protect the innocent, and that we will uphold our pledge to fight Balthazar. If they leave us to fight until we are spent, I worry how we will survive if or when our hosts turn on us.  
  
Astrid mentioned that Alleshia had seemingly become awfully friendly with the Mordant Crescent officer hosting us here. I found that strange at first, but it makes more sense now. I can only hope she managed to leverage some goodwill from the man, which might in turn allow her the room she needs to get us out of here alive. I've never been so keenly aware about how much my life depends on the political games between two human nobles.  
Things are made worse by the apparently disregard for the volatility of the situation show by our own. Apparently Iluoana attempted to assault the very same Mordant Crescent, and sent Alleshia in a fury. I have no idea how much that might cost us, but this General Nundho Bahyet has apparently had the good grace not to hold it against her.  
Even so, it puts us in a difficult situation. We can't allow people to think going about and assaulting our hosts is acceptable, let alone tolerated, and we run the risk of insulting his hospitality if we don't take appropriate measures of our own accord. I had her written up for incarceration, based on the Warmaster's note that was passed to me this morning, but that isn't an option out here. So, I had her privileges suspended instead, until we can get back to the mainland, at which point I'll reconsider the entire thing without having to worry about the Mordant Crescent taking issue with the entire situation. The other option was to demote her, but Spirits... With myself in medical, I don't want to kick out one of the other three table-legs keeping Blade on its feet.  
Unfortunately, Carbine will suffer the fallout of the relationship privileges being suspended, but... well, if we get out of here alive, they'll have plenty of time to make up for all this.  
  
At least I think I have a grasp of what's going on now, which is more than I had before. Now I can come up with a plan.  
  
Step 1: get out of medical.  
Step 2: kill Balthazar, save the Kingdom of Elona.  
Step 3: survive by prostituting Alleshia to the enemy.  
Step 4: swim back to Tyria.  
Step 5: alcohol-fueled sex rampage with wife until I forget that Elona exists.  
  
It's a work in progress.

# 77th of Zephyr

Seborhin.  
  
I'm free from my medical prison, and reducing to awkwardly staggering about the place. There's a certain tightness in my back from the wounds there that makes it a little uncomfortable to walk, though I'll get used to it. I can't wear armour yet, mind, so I'm still not much use in a fight should it come down to it, but at least I can explore this Seborhin place. And Spirits, it's something alright.  
It is shaped like an oblong. The exterior walls are high, like bastions, though not fortified in any respect. It is not a fortress or a citadel. Rather, everything is turned inwards, and tiered terraces run along the inside down to the center of the oblong, where gardens and a beautiful lake crown the gardens. The terraces are vast, each housing palaces, galleries and colonnades of beautiful artifice ornament. Pillars hang in the sky with unseen magic, water sprouting from their crowns and raiding down in graceful waterfalls into large open basins that keep the air cool. Djinn wander around, bound to tend to the gardens of the Vabbian People. It is a maze of opulence, one place leading to the next. Much of it is impressive beyond measure, mostly because of the scale of it all. It is so vast a place that you could wander it for many hours, and not even see half of it. Unfortunately, it seems the Vabbian forgot that beauty if often found in simplicity, and while the size of it all impresses, I am slightly put off by density and ornament of it all. The large statues of Palawa Joko further mar it. I have resolved not to like it very much, I think. It is... too much. I prefer the Lodges of Hoelbrak to this city of excess. This place is an expression of crudeness: wealth designed to impress those who are easily overwhelmed. It is like a smith presenting a thousand swords in order to overwhelm you with the scale of his labours; yes, forging such a number of weapons is impressive, but the best smiths need only forge one.  
It is exactly the kind of place you would bring your defeated foes in order to impress upon them the splendour of your realm. If this is the best Vabbi has to offer, then I am not very impressed.  
More so because the Branded prowl the lower levels, and I can see the Awakened guards holding barricades along the east. I think Vabbi is straining under the weight of the Elder Dragon and Balthazar, and they are desperately trying to hide it. Our temporary 'allies' are weaker than they would let on.  
I'll go and look around some more come morning, perhaps see if I can't find my way down into some of the market stalls.  
  
In other news, I spoke a bit with Astrid. And I mean not in the way we normally just take the piss. Sometimes it's easy to forget to credit those friends of yours that have been besides us for a long time. Astrid's certainly been part of the people I'd call my friends, even though we rarely talk seriously. I suppose it's a soldier's bond. I like Astrid, because we make fun of each other, which keeps us both grounded, and our moods high. Anyway, was odd to be reminded of it. Felt very final, though we all keep our hopes up about getting out of here. Spirits, we even talked about leave, though I still have no idea if I will actually get to go home or not. After all of this, I think it would be madness if they asked me to stay in the Vigil Keep.  
I'd like to go to the cities and honor the fallen as they should be. Perhaps travel to Garenhoff to visit Alevyne's parents. We need to release Shikoba's spider, too. Perhaps I can convince Maeva and Alleshia that this is a more worthwhile endeavour that some pointless punishment duty for something that doesn't matter in the slightest after all this. And then home. I will need to hold a Companion's Moot, to catch everyone up on what has been happening out here, and whatever we've missed in the Shiverpeaks. Spirits, soon they'll have Jormag slain without me! Though honestly, if Jormag was dead, I imagine the locals would already be giving Palawa Joko credit for the act.

# 78th of Zephyr

Seborhin.  
  
This place is a mess. I like it event less than I did before. I tried to find the merchant stalls, but the lower levels are all empty, surrendered to stray creatures from the Brand scuttling about. I couldn't find anything else of interest, asides from a bridge that connects the north and south side of the gardens... but isn't accessible from any of the floors, meaning you have to walk along the outside to get anywhere. So, no Vabbian silks for me. Not today anyway. Apparently the merchant is supposed to be somewhere in the western part.  
  
Asides from that, everything has been quiet. Klixxa had the troops do some mild training to keep them busy, and it starts feeling like we're turning back into a fighting force. Morale restored, though most people remain cautious at the best of times about our predicament. There's a lot uncertainty. No doubt our recovery stay in Seborhin will come to an end, and we'll get to see what Vabbi really is like outside of this small slice of slightly shabby slice of paradise.  
  
Had a long talk with Saana, about a number of things. Apparently she was infatuated with Maeva up to a point, until the latter asked her something that Wolfsmaiden refused to do. And then, like that, apparently the training and friendship between the two was over. Strange if you ask me, but: learn from giants, but never walk in their shadow. I suspect that Maeva didn't see Wolfsmaiden as much as a friend as a pupil of sorts. A pity, because Wolfsmaiden is a norn. She would've followed if she respected Maeva. She actually put it quite succinctly to me: even the pack alpha is part of the pack. Wisdom from Saana, eh? Give it twenty years, and she'll be Saana Wolfsmother. She just needs to make sure she doesn't get killed on the way there.  
  
And me, well... I'm thinking of home, and about picking up my sword and shield again, so I can help fight our way out of this mess. Too early, though. I can still feel the tightness of the wounds here and there, and I need to sit or the cuts in my back and shoulder start aching. I think I might carry those scars for a long time after all of this. Kristen'll want to know the story behind them, and I honestly can't wait to see her face light up the way it always does when she realizes it is me that has just walked through the lodge's door. It is always worth fighting for.

# 79th of Zephyr

Seborhin.  
  
Same shit, different day.  
I don't really have much more to add, I'm afraid. I'm injured, and mostly reduced to loafing around, as useful as all these nobles. I missed all of the entertainment, and now things are simply getting a little boring.  
  
Cheery is up and about again, though her memory's still blank. She seems happy now, though oblivious. I erased two years of her life from her head by smashing her to the floor. I did that. For all the right reasons, but... She was broken, and I just smashed it all even further, into the smallest, brittle pieces. All of this just crawls into your head, and eats away at you.  
  
There are small wooden soldiers I've carved, for my son to play with, as well as dragons and beasts with eyes of chipped crystal, and scalloped scales of painted wood. There are words I've written, and words I've spoken, promises and pledges I've sworn to uphold until the end of my days. There are the things I've taught others, words of ancient poetic metre, the angle of the sword, and the brittle hardness of old weatherworn sandstone. There are the friendships I've forged by fighting alongside others when there was no-one else. There is the blood I've shed on claws, swords, and across the cast iron of stray cannonballs. The times luck was with me, and the times it wasn't. The words of Bear in my head, and the fire in my heart. The people I've loved, in body and mind, under the rustle of the snow cherry trees. There are the foes I've slain, often dutifully, occasionally gladly. Rarely gleefully. The tremor of my tread, and the rustle of leather and chain that I have ceased to hear. The breath of the wind on my skin, and the dirt of half the world, smelling like foreign spice. The drops of rain that mingle with sweat. The engravings in my armour, and my shoddy stickfigures next to them. There is the scratch of my pencil on paper. I keep them about in dozens so I never run out.  
There is the music I hear when I'm asleep, and don't dream of the scary things I know that are real. The dead I mourn because I knew them, and the ones I mourn because I didn't. The mug of ale I've been craving for an eternity. There are the sons and daughters I have, and the ones I still wish to have. There is the lodge I have never built, and the dragon I need to slay to build it. There is the smiles I live for, and the voice I miss most. The songs I've never sang, and the ones I wish to write. There is the kite I want to see a blue wolf fly. The vase I'll use for a mug. The pain in my back that reminds me I'm mortal after all.  
  
There are so many reasons left to fight.

# 80th of Zephyr

Seborhin.  
  
Finally something to break the monotony, though not for me specifically. The Chapter deployed out into the eastern side of Seborhin to cull some of the Branded the scouts have spotted down there. We apparently have the agency to act, and fighting Branded to keep them from encroaching deeper into the populated levels is... well, I'd say a good thing, but realistically speaking, no-one should be here in the first place. We are so close to the very edge of the Brand here, and yet we barely even realize. Either case, we swore oaths to protect the innocent, and destroy the dragons were we found them, so here we are. Besides, I think it is good for us to get back to something we know how to cope with. I imagine the politicking is driving everyone here quite insane.  
One thing that does boil my blood is that the Warmaster apparently found some sort of menagerie, and there was a norn locked up in there. They tried to free him, but didn't succeed, and had to leave the kinsman behind. She told me was stuck in his bear form, and the locals had mistaken him for some sort of bear... How demeaning! We shouldn't be treated like animals, even though some of us might be hard to tell apart from Dolyak. Nevermind that the place is apparently all-but overrun with Branded... I hope we can secure his release. I'll have to "ask" this Mordant Crescent bastard that keeps prancing around if he can't do something.  
Bah, if I wasn't wounded, I'd have gone down there myself to do it. Bloody Vabbians...

# 81st of Zephyr

Vehtendi Academy.  
  
So, we're out in Vabbi now, down south from Seborhin. We got to see the world outside, and well, it's mostly sand dunes and some sparse vegetation. I guess that stands to reason with the Elon river being diverted, but still. It is a bleak countryside, and I didn't see much in the form of houses or buildings along the way. We saw glimpses of the Brand hanging over the east like a shroud of evil.  
  
We're camped in a the shadow of an enormous statue of Palawa Joko to the west of us, and the impressively domineering statue of the Vehtendi Academy to the east. The shallow oasis we camp on might as well be swampland. The good news is that there is plenty of wildlife flocking to the water, so I suspect the foragers will have a whale of a time. The surrounding area is impressive enough, which I didn't really expect. I had thought the Gardens of Seborhin were a one-trick pony used to deceive us with false glamour. Now it turns out that it was more the norm for Vabbian architecture, though these other buildings aren't as vast. Rather, there is a large collection of structures to the north, which seems to have been some sort of town or plaza. Unfortunately, we could see the Brandstorm loom from behind the skyline, having swallowed much of it.  
The Academy was also suitably impressive, though I'm not sure if it is a place of learning, or a citadel. The Awakened garrison we saw is vast, which is no surprise as we actively saw them fighting off Branded along the passages east. I'm not sure how much help we can be, but I have to say, odd as it may seem, that I am compelled to help the Awakened armies in fighting back the creeping corruption. Weird, isn't it?  
  
I understand why this academy is worth defending to Palawa Joko, though. We saw the dozens of students in the lecture halls, being fed lies about Palawa Joko. Out in the west, Seleea and I saw students train with Junundu wurms, which was very strange to see. They get swallowed, and control the animal from within. No doubt this academy is building the future of Elona; jut not the future I wish they had. Still, would I rather sit by and let hundreds of striplings die because their future might see them rise to greater evil? I don't know. They have done nothing yet to deserve their deaths, and how certain is it that they will aspire to do ill to their own people in the end? I can't believe Palawa Joko has truly corrupted the minds of all Vabbian people. If I did, then why would we still be trying to save them from Balthazar and Kralkatorrik?  
  
Oh, and the Priory is here, along with... Rel Grimstone. A surprise, if any, but then he did muster out. Apparently a mercenary now, who was hired by the Priory to escort their scholars throughout their efforts to explore Elona. It seems that Grimstone and his group were given free passage through the Desolation, while the scholars busied themselves with taking notes. The scholar, a Sylvari, came down to camp later, and offered the service of his mercenaries up to the Chapter, which means we've gotten some surprise reinforcements. Good, considering my primary concern was about getting weakened. I don't know what the scholar is going to do out here on his own, but that's the Priory's problem, I suppose.  
  
Well, stitches are healing. Soon, I think I'll be good to don the armour again.

# 82nd of Zephyr

Vehtendi Academy.  
  
Patrols set out today. The Warmaster took Blade out and apparently ran into a monster of a druid that almost knocked the entire squadron out before it fled. Iluoana's injuredn though I'm not sure how bad it is, and Lance had to send extraction for them to be pulled out. Or at least, that's what I understand from it. I suppose I'll read up on the proper reports sooner or later. For me, it's mostly about feeling useless. I'll bother a medic sooner or later about getting back on the duty roster. Most of my cuts and gashes seem to have closed up decently enough.  
  
Asides from that, well, I get to sit down here in King Joko's magnificent shadow, long may he rot.  
The sexual tension between the norn is getting untenable, meanwhile, as Astrid and Saana continue to get ever more and more energetic in the rampant discussions about their bizarre lack of a healthy a sex life. Kristen, sweetheart, I want you to know if you ever read this, that if I wasn't as deeply in love with you as I am, *numerous regulations would have been broken by now.*  
At least the idea is entertaining and diverting while I'm recovering. When I get home though, I might need to seize Leopard Lodge for my own and ensure I get some Spirits-damned alone time with my wife.

# 83rd of Zephyr

Vehtendi Academy.  
  
Interesting day. My stitches have come out, so now I'm once more allowed to put my armour on. I've never felt better, though I can feel the weight press down a bit on some of the sore spots I have left from the fighting. It's still a few days before I'll be picking up my sword again, though. Spirits, but I wish the body healed as fast as my spirit does. I'd be back in the thick of it by now, rather than sit in this dustbowl and watch everyone else go about doing their duty to keep these deluded Elonians safe from the sword most of them don't even realise is hanging over their heads. Eh, at least I'm better off than Aed or Astra, poor bastards. Spirits alone know how long they'll be in medical for.  
  
In other news, I had a very long and openhearted discussion with Maeva, which was actually very pleasant. We spoke about a large number of things, though mostly about leave, and our past, and the things we did and regretted. Somehow, despite my previous irritations with her, she does keep managing to get back into my good graces. I think that's her issue, and I told her as much. She makes mistakes, and is too stubborn to admit it in the moment, and then later comes to regret them. They annoy me, but she's just trying to pick out her own path. She differs in that from me, in that she is stricter, and therefore slightly heavier-handed than I am. Truth be told, I am fairly lenient about the little things, as long as no-one really fucks up. I'd rather enact the spirit, if not the letter of the law, I think.  
  
Anyway, Maeva's not a friend yet, but I suspect she is also not really an enemy. I told her the best way to settle a grudge is to reconcile, so I've invited her down to Hoelbrak, whenever we find a chance to get out of Elona. She's got no family or kin, and asides from Bjorn probably not very much to look forwards to over leave. Perhaps a little contact with my family will do her good; besides, she mentioned she'd be happy to look out for Hejja, in case Kristen and I want to spend some time away from Hoelbrak together. It's a good idea, and I hope that Kristen and she might also have a chance to talk over whatever happened in Frostgorge Sound. Here's just hoping Maeva's reconciling mood lasts. I'd rather find respect and friendship for her than keep sitting on this canker of discontent that I've been carrying along with me since we entered the Desolation. How pointless that all seems now. Are things settled between us? No, not really. Not yet, anyway. But a few mugs of ale will help with that, I wager. I suppose I am as quick to forgive, as I am quick to anger. Bear doesn't hold grudges that last longer than her winter sleep.

# 84th of Zephyr

Vehtendi Academy.  
  
Nothing new today, asides that it is hot.  
Spoke with Mirka for a while, about what she did before she joined the Vigil. Mercenary work, though not with a company that seemed to know what they were doing, truth be told. It's easy to forget how long some of us have been fighting. These last six years sometimes seem as if they might as well have been six centuries. To think that some people have been fighting for longer than that is... strange.  
  
Scouts will be going out soon. Apparently they've seen Forged due west.  
Guess we'll be in the thick of it all soon.

# 85th of Zephyr

The Necropolis.  
  
Middle of the night, as I have watch duty.  
Been a bit of a hectic day. Things were going fine, the troops were sparring, when a blue flare was sent up by one of the scouting teams due west. The First Crusaders gathered up the unit and set off at speed.  
Eventually, they sent Wolfsmaiden back as a runner, who informed me that Embersong got badly shot during her scouting operation, and was critical. The troops had moved her away to a nearby settlement of sorts for treatment, as Embersong couldn't be moved. I decided to set off myself with Wolfsmaiden, to keep an eye on the location, and figure out what was happening.  
  
Of course, that ended up being a good distance further west than anticipated, and the settlement turned out to be a vast complex of temples and palaces here dedicated to the dead. The Necropolis, as it is called, is where the recently deceased come to be judged, and then Awakened. Oddly morbid, but at least it provided some cover from the encroaching Forged that are roaming around due north. Vatorn, who was on the scouting team with Embersong, informed me there was a suitably large Forged base nearby, and that they came under fire when they were trying to scout it out. He was able to get Embersong out of peril, before firing a flare.  
  
I arrived somewhat later, when the Chapter had taken shelter in the upper levels of the main Necropolis complex. I was quickly informed Embersong wouldn't be able to move, and would require monitoring. I had a quick detachment formed and put myself in command of it. Carbine and Khil are here for medical attention, while Crepsilly and a newer recruit called Nathan Ward remained here on guard duty. There's also a Vabbian with us who works for the General; I don't like him sticking around, but he has helped smoothing over creases with the locals. They seem to think this is a holy place of sorts, and our presence here is probably somewhat questionable. Well, though shit. With the Forged being so close, they'll be happy they've got a few extra swords out here.  
Anyway, Carbine tells me Embersong's still critical, and unlikely to be able to be moved anytime soon. I sent the rest of the Chapter back to camp; they'll send us a runner if they need us appraised of the situation. Until then, we sit tight, and rotate the guard watch between ourselves.  
  
Here's hoping Embersong pulls through it all, rather than allow herself to be killed by a Forged sharpshooter of all things. She's norn, she's only allowed to die heroically. Until then, she'll have to fight through the pain! May the Spirits give her the strength she needs.  
  
For the remainder, this place itself is oddly scenic, even at night. They keep lanterns burning throughout the entire site. It is built onto the side of a hillside, a single vast dome crowning the main building. We're currently in a side room on the dome's exterior, about halfway up the incline. We have a single open room for us all, though it is clean. There is a window peering down into the main hall of judgement, which is lined with skulls and statues of their dread ruler. It seems like a place of grand ceremony, and if the purpose was not so fell, I might even have been impressed!  
Below us, there are pavilions and lesser palaces, each adorned with long banners and glinting lanterns. Further in the hills, I can see the tar-fires of Awakened posts, while north, there is the unmistakable glow of Forged entrenchments lighting up the night's sky. The Vabbians have a knack for not letting on how dire their situation is. Near Vehtendi and Seborhin it was almost possible to ignore the Brand almost entirely, while out here, you wouldn't think that there was an army of a god's minions camping right over the next mountain ridge.  
These lands are about to be ground into dust, caught between the charge of two braying minotaur bulls.  
  
Spirits, I'm not even supposed to fight yet, and here I am facing down the Forged on a literal mound of Elonian dead.  
Well, I suppose Godsmote was never intended to be an idle boast.

# 86th of Zephyr

Necropolis.  
  
Renn's still alive, though apparently she's taken a fever. From what Carbine told me, this is normal, and we shouldn't worry more than before. Embersong's still critical, but every night she lives is good, and will make her survival more likely. Yesterday night was rough, to be fair. I was dog-tired this morning, and siting watch on a three-man rota is mind-numbing. Thankfully, Alleshia marched the entire Chapter over this afternoon, and we're now back at full garrison. Whatever the locals think about us camping up on top of their reliquary... well, I frankly don't think it will matter much short term. The scout reports paint a grim picture of the enemy's presence, and I have a feeling the Brand has become a distinct second priority compared to the immediacy of the Forged threat. Until then, I suppose we're better off here in the Necropolis than in either Seborhin, or at the edge of a brandstorm so violent we can't even enter it.  
  
The rituals they hold in the Hall of Judgement below are both disturbing and impressive. Caskets are brought into the hall, and people may speak for or against the Awakening of the recently deceased. It is not a punishment, but rather some kind of perverse reward for servitude and loyalty. It is strange to see people clamour for something so repulsive as if it was the dearest thing to them in the world. It also makes me feel like we have not understood the enemy we're fighting at all. Either the people of Vabbi have completely lost touch with the reality of this world, or we are simply completely wrong with what we think of Palawa Joko. I understand now what some of the troops have been telling me, that it is becoming difficult to keep our resolve. Are we really just being shown all the good parts of Joko's reign? What about the things we saw north of the Desolation? People being attacked, and mistreated by the Awakened? What of our history books, saying Palawa Joko diverted the entire Elon, and starved thousands of people into submission?  
And now we find the people of Vabbi to be not only fiercely loyal, but also surprisingly content. The richly dressed humans who attend these macabre courts below are not oppressed. Quite the opposite...  
I don't know what to think, but it is slowly becoming harder and harder to keep thinking we're being deceived. Maybe this is simply the way Palawa Joko's kingdom *is*, and not all of it is evil?  
I suppose at least it makes it easier for me to live with fighting alongside Palawa Joko's armies.  
  
I'm tired, really. Once the Chapter got here, I didn't do much asides from talk to Nishkaa. I've been having conversation with people about their past twice now. First Mirka with her strange mercenary past in the Eagle Guard, and now Knee-Scar's adventures in the Priory. She apparently robbed a Dwarven tomb once, but ran foul of Svanir before she got out. Of course, she made it sounds like it was a heroic scouting action, but you know how Asura are. Still, not a bad story, even if you don't take her 'heroic' escapade at face value. Svanir are usually idiots, but fighting off several of them at once through guile or strength is still not too bad. Asura, eh?  
Anyway, I'm knackered after yesterday's watch rota, so I'm going to sleep, and rest. Maybe I can convince a medic to clear me for full duty tomorrow.

# 87th of Zephyr

Necropolis.  
  
Embersong's still alive, which is good. If she can tough it out for as long as she is, she'll live. Too stubborn to die, I wager. After all that, maybe she might need to loosen up and share a mug of ale with us back in Hoelbrak. And make no mistake, I do intend to get out of here if I can help it.  
  
We had the rest of the troops pass inspection and medical, just to keep sure everyone's still at fighting fitness. I'm back to battle readiness too, which is good with the Forged on the horizon. Sooner or later it'll come down to a clash of arms between us and them again, and I don't envy the Forged this time around. Most of us have plenty of grievances to air, and I myself am spoiling for a fight. First though, Alleshia plans to bring down the great Hydra that ambushed Blade a few days back, since such a dangerous creature is a serious threat to the people here. I'll be there for that this time around, and here's hoping that ends with me taking another Hydra head home for the trophy rack! It's apparently a real monster of critter, so I've got that to look forward to.  
  
I actually spent a good time talking to the Warmaster today, also about Maeva, and our plans for the future. I think it was needed for Alleshia to clear her head a little. One thing's certain however, and that's we need to ensure we're getting out of here sooner or later. The scouts have been searching for passage to Kourna, and down to the sea. It's a slim chance, but if we find a ship that's big enough, we could sail back to Tyria along the Unending Ocea. It wouldn't be too hard either; just sail north along the coastline to Dwayna's Heart until you reach Orr. From there, we can be in Caer Shadowfain in a few days, and then on to Trinity. We joked about becoming corsairs, but as we talked on, I don't know how much of a joke it really was anymore. Imagine that. Sailing to Amnoon was a failure, but sailing all the way back from the shores of Kourna? Spirits, here's hoping Zhaitan's old magic hasn't kept the seas teeming with undead monsters, if it comes down to it.  
For now, though, we need to preserve our strength, and pick our battles. As long as we're too strong for the Mordant Crescent to destroy off-hand, we stand a chance. A slim one, but a chance nonetheless.  
  
Less amusing was the stunt Carbine pulled today. She apparently decided to break off the relationship she had with Iluoana, which... well, this is exactly why we sometimes shouldn't issue these permissions to people. Now Carbine's morale's sunk, and Iluoana's in Raven only knows what kind of a mindstate. A medic and a First Crusader, disjointed at a point where we all need to be stalwart... Well, there's nothing to be done about now. The troops are all starting to bend slightly under the pressure, and I can't blame them. Spirits, at this rate, committing them to combat might actually be preferable. With the Forged so close, that'll be any day now.  
Time to do some god-smiting.

# 88th of Zephyr

Necropolis.  
  
Well, today went well, I think. Set out to hunt down that pesky hydra, and found it out in the sand dunes easily enough. It was an impressive critter sure enough, but not as massive as I had expected it to be. We probably were a fair number too many to hunt it down properly, but rather we pelted it to death slowly. I wonder how sporting hunting large Hydra like this is for a small hunting pack of norn? Either case, we managed to wear it down, and it died by a thousand cuts in the end. I was going to take a trophy, but Occult decided that the critter was suffused with arcane magic, which probably explains why it was notably larger than the other Hydra we've encountered. Either case, they gave the order to burn the body, at which point the elementalists glassed the area comprehensively. I managed to get a few glass beads from where the sand melted over and captured some of the released magic. Caeranis told me they're relatively safe to keep, and might do nicely with a small magical charge. I might see if I can't turn them into a toy, or a trinket. Magical toys are rare, and usually expensive, after all. I'll see.  
At the very least, it was liberating to be back in the thick of things, and battering a Hydra into the sand was a good way to celebrate my recovery. I felt a little sore here and there at the end, but I suspect that's just normal.  
  
Renn's still in medical, still fighting on. The Spirits are watching over her, I hope. It would be bad to lose a Companion even before we have departed north. Besides, I think I owe Embersong a few ales for all the jokes I've made at her expense; she better believe I insist she'll make me pay my dues! When the Forged decided to stray down into the valley, I'll make sure they pay their weregeld.

# 89th of Zephyr

Necropolis.  
  
The Forged decided to make their move on the Necropolis, and failed miserably when they smashed into us. Spirits, but it was good to fight back and win again. Yesterday's Hydra was a good start, but today... today was magnificent. They kept trying to push through and overwhelm us, massive godforged metal constructs that would have crushed anything but us. There were Awakened fighting alongside us too, but in fairness, the garrison kept here would not have stopped them for very long. We were the keystone. At the end, we routed them, and ended up pursuing the enemy along the hinterlands. Asides from a few stray sentries and foes, however, there was little for us to capitulate on. We lost momentum quickly enough when people decided not to call out their injuries. Still, a good battle for us, and a solid victory. It seems the battle of Vabbi has finally begun then, eh? And we're on the side of the defenders.  
  
Less amusing was the tirade we got to hear when we returned. Apparently Carbine had a fit of magical exhaustion just as the column went to pursue, and Maeva decided to check up on her - without calling out that someone was injured, apparently. I even moved Blade past them as we set off, though I figured they had orders to hang back while we pushed on, so I didn't think to question. Of course, then Maeva decided to accuse Astrid, myself and bloody Alleshia, her superior officer, of leaving them behind because apparently no rearguard was called. To me, that seems like the rearguard forgot to give a medic call-out as Lance set off, and then decided to shift to blame to everyone else. It's strange how you'd think that the rearguard is supposed to, you know... guard the rear from such things occurring, by informing the head of the column. To boot, Carbine then apparently complained about not feeling cared for by her Knight, which is Astrid - Astrid, who was at the head of column, leading from the front. And then I got to endure the most amazing lecture from Tactician Maeva Arnsdottir how we're supposed to be more inspiring to the troops.  
The irony of it would've been laughable, if it hadn't irritated me so bloody much. I understand well enough that it was directed at Astrid, but by Raven's wings, then just tell her that to her face.  
Of course, Astrid went on to talk to Carbine, but that apparently went poorly, because Astrid's about as sociable as a the dead drakes in her featname, and because Carbine is apparently adamant about causing as much issue in as few days as she possibly can. At this point, she'll soon have done about as much to disjoint our command cadre as Palawa Joko has. And no, I do not find that funny *in the slightest*.  
  
One good thing to come out of it is that is put Astrid in a fighting mood, and I got to see her beat the shite out of Wolfsmaiden. Well, that's probably an exaggeration, as they were pretty evenly matched, and the quality of the brawling was mediocre at best. Still, better entertainment than I've had in a while, and that includes a stint in Vabbi's most renowned pleasure garden! Figures I'd take two harpies brawling over a literal city of excess.  
  
Also spoke to Crepsilly at some length afterwards, about being here, and dealing with the entire chaos of it all. She settled in good with Blade today, after we transferred her away from Lance in order to separate her from Bhrom. We spoke about a number of small things, about the importance of decompression, and why we always run around making camp jokes. We've been here for almost three seasons, we need to keep the mood light or we'll crack. We spoke about Cheery too, and the things she doesn't remember anymore. Prydwen once told Neya how many people had died in her arms, and Neya's hoping that maybe the significance of the number will help to bring back Cheery's memory. I'm not even sure that'd be a good thing anymore. We haven't found Sawyer yet, after all. Spirits, I don't want to go through seeing Cheery break anew. Maybe this is a small mercy? I don't know. I hate myself for doing the right thing, and robbing her of two years of her life. We'll see what becomes of her.  
  
Embersong's still breathing. With the amount of Forged we slew for her today, the Spirits better take those offerings into account. I've considered visiting her, but I don't think she's even stable yet. I'll go by medical tomorrow to ask, if I have time.  
  
Missing home, as I do everyday.  
At least the Warmaster left me little liquid gift in the tent, for reasons I'm not entirely sure, but entirely thankful of.  
I hope Kristen doesn't think I'm dead. She has every reason to, but... I hope she doesn't. Not yet. I am angry at the very thought that she might have to live with the uncertainty at all. What will she tell Hejja, or the Jotunling? That I might never come back? That I died in a faraway land, after the Vigil decided to send me away somewhere, with orders they didn't understood the meaning of? It breaks my heart to think about it. We'll kill Balthazar, as we were asked to do, and then we'll make our way home, one way or another.

# 90th of Zephyr

Necropolis.  
  
Another day in the realm of the dead. You know, for the amount of corpses and Awakened shambling around here, it honestly doesn't smell as bad as you'd expect from a literal charnel house. Instead, we get to enjoy the arguing judges below, and the clamouring Elonians who bring their dead out for judgement, along with the shambling grunting of the newly Awakened as they re-learn how to walk and fight. Their tactics are rudimentary, and it seems the newly Awakened are treated as little better than chaff. They swarm their targets under the bellow of ornamented commanders, swollen, twisted and corrupted by Palawa Joko's magic. Some of them are as tall and heavy as I am, their desiccated flesh and leathery skin taunt with unnatural bulk and dead muscle. There is little left of their faces, asides from maws of yellowed teeth. These once-men are adorned with gilt and beaten bronze, set with precious sapphires and rubies that would make any Tyrian noble blind with envy. The lesser Awakened hang on their every word as if they were commands from the mouth of their king, and even they wear jewelry and ornaments that do not seem to fit them well for war. Certainly, armour seems wasted on many of King Joko's soldiers, which I noticed even as I was killing them in the Desolation. Rather, they wear their ornaments as badges of rank or status. I wonder if who they were in life relates to what they become in death? I wonder sometimes, because some of the Awakened enemies we have fought are a far cry from any human form I have seen. Surely, not all of Palawa Joko's armies are his own willing subjects, how else did he ever challenge the Sunspears to begin with?  
  
What is even stranger is to consider that these arcane and bizarre constructs are now on our side of the war. We defended the Necropolis yesterday; because of the people who frequent it. But the Awakened held onto it because it is also spawning ground for their armies. It is, by any term, a strategic objective for both sides, and we intervened to help Palawa Joko retain control of it. As long as the Awakened are our allies, this will be our advantage, but that alliance is fickle. I wonder how many of the dead that will Awaken in the Necropolis thanks to our efforts will be turned against us in the end? I suppose it is a moot point. There were people here who, for all intents and purposes, are just innocents caught up in the gears of war. We would never have stood aside to let them be slain. Besides, how many of those selfsame Awakened will protect their living family, and stand besides us against Balthazar in the end?  
A difficult question to answer. We're playing dangerous games here.  
  
The good news is that Alleshia seems to have made up her mind. We'll be striking against that Forged foundry that Vatorn spotted. We're assuming that it's the main Forged base out south. Destroying it should then force Balthazar's armies to make a push south, or be themselves pushed back into the Desolation. If successful, we might have an opportunity to draw Balthazar into an open battle on our terms. With the Awakened, the odds might even be even. The big question is whether or not we will manage to strike at this foundry and destroy it. They fight hard enough, and the battles around the Mouth of Torment are fresh in my memory. We could be attacking an entire legion of Forged, and we wouldn't know until we were already committed. Still, I'll take a daring plan over no plan, if it comes down to it. Besides, I'm Tzahr Godsmote. Smiting gods is what I do.  
  
Anyway, today was quiet enough in camp. Some people even went out flower picking, and returned with garlands. We put them on our heads, and I suddenly became the Knight of Flowers. You wouldn't guess a place that looks as arid as the surroundings of Vabbi to grow flowers, but there are plenty of flowerbeds and grassland between the hills surrounding the Necropolis. Besides, I think with all the corpses around, the ground is probably well-fertilized. We even made a pie, though Iluoana seemed decided to make as much of a problem out of it as she could. Carbine and her are starting to string up a nice habit of irritating me by letting their emotions run amok. If the First Crusader wants to start pissing vinegar, she'll have to do it when I'm not around. We're on the verge of fighting a god, after which we might well be stabbed in the back by an undead lich who fancies himself a god, now is not the time for those two to project their discontent and self-pity.  
Way to ruin what could've been a pleasant evening, damn it.  
At least Cheery was cheery. It was nice, but... well. Can't help but feel a pang of guilt.  
  
Embersong, meanwhile, still fighting. I've asked Mirka to let me know how she is tomorrow. She'll have to sit out the grand battles though, it seems. A pity, she'll have to miss out on all the boasting even more than she did before. We could use her knack for scouting these days, if I'm honest. The fog of war out here is fairly thick. Spirits, the Warmaster took two wrong turns after yesterday's counter-charge, and rather than drive the Forged up north, we curved all the way around next to Seborhin...  
  
Jormag's fang, I hope that Alleshia's right, and we can lure Balthazar out in order to destroy him. I hope she's also right in thinking that the Mordant Crescent will honour their word and let us go afterwards, unlikely as it seems. I miss home. Wolfsmaiden put some of my worrying to rest though; about Kristen thinking I was dead. She told me that Kristen'll have faith in me. She won't give up hope over a season. Maybe if I'm not back in a year, but... well. I hope it won't be that long.

# 1st of Phoenix

Necropolis.  
  
Asides from season's passing, nothing of interest to report to day.  
Weird how that sometimes just happens.

# 2nd of Phoenix

Necropolis.  
  
Another quiet day. Rayder and Force gave training to the troops which seems to have gone over quite well. Certainly had them very animated for the duration of it all. Good, I think, to keep them somewhat occupied and on their feet. Keeps us distracted for the shambling Awakened that are so commonplace here. In truth, this Necropolis is as surreal as anything we've seen in Vabbi. The vast winding staircase that clings along the outside, and the empty echoing hall below us. We ware camped quite literally at the very top of it, along the massive ornamental chandelier that hangs above it. The floor itself, aside from the balconies along the outside where we sleep, is a giant metaled ring. It means we are quite separated from the ongoings below us. During the day, listening to the clamour of the locals and the judges is mildly entertaining, if bizarre in the extreme. Outside, the hills are barren and dry, though there is greenery down in the lower reaches of the valley. It gives a bleak, dusty impression, not unlike the Dustbowl in the Maguuma, except this is more arid. During the height of noon, it becomes too hot to stay outside for long, though the Awakened seem not to pay that much mind.  
  
The scouts set out to pave the way for the next steps of the Warmaster's plans, while yesterday, apparently our Mordant Crescent handler came calling. He rattled Crepsilly a fair bit, and apparently told her that "we'd make King Joko proud, or we'd make him tremble". And odd enough saying. I wonder what he meant by it, if anything at all. Might just be Crepsilly mishearing something, you never know. Either case, I expect the Mordant Crescent will take an interest in our plan to draw Bamthazar out to field. Let's just hope they don't see it as an opportunity to sacrifice the Chapter like a peon in a chess game. That's exactly the kind of thing we'd want to avoid, after all...  
  
On a more positive note, Embersong's still alive and fighting to stay that way. She's not fit to see anyone yet, so I suppose we'll just wait day by day to see if she'll pull through.  
  
In the meantime, I had to deal with Wolfsmaiden being sent my way for counsel. She's apparently suffering nightmares about her hunting back, and it is costing her sleep. When she explained it to me, it seemed like she keeps reliving their final battles, and keeps trying, in vain, to stop them from dying. I don't need to be a shaman to understand what it means. Saana's still carrying the deaths of her former pack as a burden, and she struggles to come to terms with their deaths. She joined the Vigil to fulfill an oath of vengeance against Jormag, and I think she, like many of the Companions, feel like they are found wanting. Now, out here in Elona, it is even more difficult to know what Braham is doing north. Wolfsmaiden struggles with her purpose; the truth is that the wolf in the pack doesn't need a reason to stay in the rout. The wolf hunts, because it is in his nature to do so - it is survival. For Wolfsmaiden, I think it is much the same. She is a young wolf, which is why I call her Wolfsmaiden. Her path will become visible to her in due time. Until then, she hunts. Simple as that, once she comes to that understanding. As for he fallen friends, I counseled her to commune with Raven. True, she is a discipline of Wolf, but all the Spirits hold lessons for us, and who better to ask about the echoes of the dead than the wings that bear them to their final resting place?  
I admit, dreams and nightmares are a Vigil soldier's companion. We see too much, and fight things too terrible to sleep soundly every night. But it is something to get used to, with the course of time.  
  
I have a good idea for the hydra glass. I'll make a wand for the children, and set it with the beads. A magic wand, to ward away evil, eh? Made from the magic ash of a giant hydra. I doubt many other young heroes in Hoelbrak will be able to boast of such a legendary weapon! Ah, Kristen, sweetheart, I miss you and the little ones terribly. Have faith, I'll fight my way free of this mess.

# 3rd of Phoenix

Necropolis.  
  
Well, seems it's our last day in the halls of the dead, for better or for worse, as we'll be moving north in preparation for a strike against the Forged on the morrow. I've been instructed to prepare demolition packages to deploy against the Forged Foundry. Unfortunately, it seems we will not be supported by the Awakened in our attack. The Mordant Crescent General came by himself earlier today to discuss such with the Warmaster. Seems that they do indeed intend for us to weaken ourselves against the enemy, while they retain their positions of strength. Well, I have no intention of leaving more dead behind, so let us hope the Forged aren't expecting a shock assault. We've made it work in the past, though the defeat at the Mouth of Torment lies fresh in my mind. I've had many hard fights in Elona so far; even one I've lost. Still. Are we finally going to bring Balthazar out to battle? To think we've been chasing after the same rogue god for what, three seasons now? It is time to end this, I think.  
And then to figure out how we'll make the long trek home.  
  
We'll need to hear from a medic tomorrow whether or not we can move Embersong. Worst case, we'll need to leave behind some volunteers. I'd rather we didn't, and kept ourselves reinforced for when we commit to the assault, but we're not going to leave her behind either. With how she's survived, I expect they'll risk moving her about to our staging point, which is apparently supposed to be some sort of palace that's escaped the Forged attacks. Maybe it'll do to keep here close at hand there.  
  
I'll need to set out a demolitions review tomorrow. One of the main issues is that I have no idea about the size of the target, and the Warmaster's instructions of 'collapse everything' aren't exactly specific. I'll be counting on stocks of spare Forged munition or any mining explosives used in a nearby quarry to compose a demolitions package. But, for what it's worth, I have no intention to leave a brick standing in that place if I get a choice in the matter. Tzahr Godsmote has a score to settle, and a name to honour.

# 4th of Phoenix

Vehjin Palace.  
  
We're now north of the Foundry, in what is supposed to be a palace of some sort. It is a suitably impressive place, true enough. A series of floating structures, suspended over a quarry dug into the side of the mountain. The promenades are lined with trees and would be considered graceful, if they were not also marred by terrible squalor. It seems that all the servants have either fled south, or were killed trying to defend their masters from Forged patrols, and that means that there is virtually no housekeeping happening in this entire bloody place. It's littered with dirty rags, champers bots and discarded dishes which just makes everything smell like an open latrine. Thankfully, we found an empty nook to garrison in, that seems to be just far enough out of the way for us to be mostly ignored. The local nobility, or whatever is still left of it, seems to doing their best to keep pretending nothing is wrong. I suspect they simply don't know any better, or Palawa Joko has made a point that all of his citizens are as ignorant as possible about the imminent threats hanging over his kingdom. A part of me wants to stand back and let it all crash and burn, but I know that would mean consigning these people to death. They are still innocent in all of this, even if they are also ignorant beyond belief.  
  
The mines and quarries below the Palace are of course of real interest to us. There are caverns leading below it that supposedly interconnect the Foundry with the mines. Unfortunately, the mines are in Forged hands. Seleea and I went down through a side passage to see them mining the area for metals, while Forged patrols went around the lower levels of the quarry. Most of the scaffolding's been collapsed, and isn't navigable though. We'll have to circle around. The palace itself remains secure, if only by the virtue that whatever magic is keeping it afloat has also rendered it naturally defensible from attack. I also suspect that the Forged bypassed it because it lacked strategic value. There are no Awakened troops left here, just some scared nobles. Until we decided to use it as a base of operations, it would've been entirely pointless for them to bother attacking it, after all. Now, though, it is a vulnerability we might be able to exploit. Seleea and I found a large amount of old mining supplies stashed away near the cave passage we found, though unfortunately, it seems the Vabbians have not yet invented mining with conventional blasting explosives. The good part is that I found a entire stash of refined metals and minerals, probably mined up and smelted, and then promptly forgotten about when the Forged attacks started happening. Nothing of note usually, except there was an entire sack of magnesium pellets. I suspect that salt was mined here, and that the magnesium is a byproduct? I'm not a geologist, so I can only guess. Either case, magnesium is an excellent oxidizer, and we can very easily use it with gunpowder and cordite to create several seriously powerful pressure bombs. Together with our dynamite, that might mean we get to blow a hole in that Foundry after all. I've set Seleea to prepare the explosives.  
I'll talk to the Warmaster once I've inspected our new bombs. I'm sure she'll be thrilled about the prospect of us using pressure bombs on a buried target. We'll turn every Forged inside into slag.  
  
On a different note, Embersong was awake today, and she seemed to be doing reasonably well, considering she was shot. It seems she escaped Raven's clutches once again, and Vatorn played no small part in it. Seems Embersong's got a life debt to repay, eh? I'll see what I can do on my end to ensure he receives some recognition. Who knew, maybe he has it in him after all to be a hero? After all his talk about subterfuge that made me think him a coward, he did well enough to get Embersong out of a death trap alive.  
  
I hope this plan work, you know? I keep thinking about da, and how he spent many, many years abroad, away from home, exploring the frontier. I admire him for that more now that I know how it feels to be away from home for so long. Not just the Shiverpeaks, but to be truly away from the world as you know. Spirits, we weren't even in Orr as long as we've been out in the Crystal Desert and Elona. I'd like to think I have the strength of will and character to be out here for as long as it takes; years if I need to. Spirits, even if we defeat Balthazar, we will have to make our way back to Tyria somehow. A journey that may lasts as long as it took us to get here.  
Eventually, one day, I'll be back home, though.

# 5th of Phoenix

Vehjin Palace.  
  
Preparations today. Went out in the field to track down some errant Priory fool the scouts reported fawning over some sort of vault. We we arrived, we found the vault open, leading to a series of caverns with a truly impressive hoard of riches at one end. Unfortunately, it seems our Priory explorer had allowed his curiosity to overcome his caution. We had to go inside and rescue him from a group of very irritated Djinn. When they finally released him, the explorer ran off and was hounded by an ornery fire Djinn, all the way back out of the cavern. We went after them both, but it turned out to be a ruse of sorts, as when we were out of the vault, the door locked closed behind us, sealing us all out. It was all over in a few minutes, and it seems no-one got seriously hurt. Good, I think. The Priory explorer refused to come with us, however, and insisted on staying behind to finish his notes on the vault. Apparently it is a lair of some especially powerful Djinn entity called Zommoros. A historic find, he told me, though I don't see him getting through that vault door again anytime soon. Klixxa pretty much told me there was very little we could do to get it open, and I'm inclined to believe her. Thankfully, it did not close with us inside. I imagine that would not have been a pleasant experience, especially if we didn't get the door open.  
Bah, Djinn. They're a proper nuisance out here. But, I can at least say I've been inside a Djinn's hoard before, and come out alive! Maybe I should get one of those old brass Elonian lamps for the little ones, and claim there's a Djinn trapped inside. They'll have fun with that. Hm, maybe I can find one somewhere in the palace?  
  
Anyway, when we got back, Force has us all inspected for contraband, just in case someone saw an opportunity to snatch something they shouldn't from the hoard. Last thing we need is someone running around with a cursed item in their pocket. It did end up with Maeva, Saana and I in our briefs, so we decided to stay like that until Astrid came back, and then pretend we were fully clothed. I think Astrid briefly ended up questioning her own sanity as a result. Spirits, what I wouldn't give for a good lake, though. A swim would wash away the sand and the grit that somehow keeps finding its way into anything I wear out here. If I didn't take care to brush and wash as often as I can, I'd probably have been turned into a hive for dust mites! Bah.  
  
Anyway, tomorrow is the day of the assault. Seleea prepared her explosives with the usual dedicated care I've come to expect of her. We have several large pressure charges ready to slag anything inside that Foundry. If Balthazar is inside, they'll have to scoops his ashes into a matchbox. The only real danger is that we can't afford to be cut off once we commit to our attack. The Warmaster hopes the Awakened forces stationed around Seborhin and the Necropolis might move up to hold our rearguard while we start the assault. There'll be a fair bit of fighting to be had tomorrow. Down into the lion's den, words bared. I hope we'll come out alive at the other end. I would so like to see my little Hejja again before I die. But, if not, I hope you will eventually learn that I died well, in battle against a god.

# 6th of Phoenix

Vehjin Palace.  
  
The Forged fight well. Let that never be doubted by anyone in Tyria and beyond. They are ruthless, fearless, very hard to kill, and they will strike at you with all the power and magic granted to them by a disgraced god of war. They have overrun the Desolation, and brought Vabbi to its very knees, decimating the Awakened armies of the pretender god-king Palawa Joko.  
But the Vigil fights harder. We invaded Orr, and slew Zhaitain above the city of Arah. We flew into the Maguuma, and when Mordremoth destroyed our fleet, we walked. We keep safe the borders of our homes with the tenacity of ancient heroes who never in their lifetime would see the foes we see every single day. We carry freedom aloft on the tips of a thousand swords. By our oaths and deeds will we be remembered.  
  
Just so today. We assaulted the Foundry and laid waste to it, even though the battle was ferocious. Some say that the Forged constructs we fought were the Hounds of Balthazar himself, Temar and Tegon. Well, we bested them, and we are still standing. We have injured, yes, but it seems we all will survive to fight another day. I am thankful for the foresight of having magical wards carved into my armour, or I might have suffered much worse amidst the torrents of magical fire that raged around us, threatening to incinerate us all. It was like fighting inside a furnace. But aye, once we fought the Hounds, the commander fled away, and I used Seleea's pressure charges to demolish the place. The support pillars were thick, so I only blew half of them, which resulted in at least a partial cave-in. Whatever they used the Foundry for, they'll have to dig it out first. No Balthazar inside, but I wager if those things really were Temar and Tegon, their master will be brought forth soon.  
Now we wait for the real battle to begin.  
  
I'm dead tired from the fighting too. A pity we didn't get a good trophy off of the hounds. If I tell this to Kristen, I have a hard time thinking she'd believe me! Spirits, a foe to remember. Tzahr Godsmote, more and more a name well-earned. Come, Balthazar! I'll give you a good death.

# 7th of Phoenix

Vehjin Palace.  
  
Nothing of note today, I think, and that suits me just fine. Spoke to Cheery a bit, about losing her memory. Realized that if I lost my memory today, I wouldn't remember Kristen. Makes me glad I keep this fieldbook eh?  
Little scraps of Tzahr, to make sure I stay sane out here.

# 8th of Phoenix

Vehjin Palace.  
  
Well, the Warmaster circulated a note with the officers that we've gotten word from the Mordant Crescent that Balthazar is on the move. It seems like her attack plan worked out, and we'll be marching up to join the line of battle soon enough. We might finally put an end to this epic hunt we've undertaken, across half a continent. A journey to remember, I can only wonder how or when it will end for us.  
  
In the end, every war we fight, every we battle we win, or lose, is another verse in the song of our lives. The passages they will sing of these last years will be the finest ever wrought in my saga. We are all wolves in the great pack, caught up in the endless hunt; the Vigil that watches over the fate of the world, and hunts down the beasts that would destroy our fair Tyria. I could never be more proud of having fought alongside all of these men and women, who I have come, in part, to command into battle, and when I die, I would have everyone know that I went and fought in Alleshia's retinue, west, east, north and south. And that I was glad to call those who have been at my side for all this time 'friend'.  
  
I think Almorra Soulkeeper might have accidentally founded the greatest hunting pack the world has ever seen. The great heroes of ancient times fought their enemies single-handed, aye, it's true, but their world was smaller, safer. The beasts and monsters I slay everyday are tenfold of the foes our venerable ancestors hunted in the far mountains. The foes we fight can no longer be defeated by any single warrior. We must fight together to overcome the greatest threats this world has ever seen, in this age of heroes. It is why I am so proud of fighting in the Vigil. It is why I formed the Companions to oppose Jormag. It is why Kristen and I fought against those dragons side-by-side with the Chapter.  
  
It makes me realize what I have accomplished. When I die, I will stand proud, shoulder-to-shoulder with my people's greatest heroes. And when I look down, I will see I am being held upright by a hundred hands clad in black and white.

# 9th of Phoenix

Vehjin Palace.  
  
Well, it seems that the Quartermasters sent out a convoy to Seborhin to resupply us on food, and came back with excess. It's been a while, but it seems they did a good enough job with frying this all up. Steak and sausages, though only a single bottle of mead to slacken the thirst, and that only for the officer. I felt guilty for just accepting it, but sharing it would have been just a pointless. We'd have enjoyed a thimble each. As it stands, it did well enough to distract us from the final battle ahead. It was almost like a moot; we even ended with the usual back and forth between the norn, with Seleea joining us.  
  
I devised a new scale of measurement to quantify my appreciation for well-formed female rears, all based off what I've called the Kristen constant (1.00 Kristen). She is, after all, endowed with bodily perfection when it comes shapely behinds. But I digress. As Kristen is the constant, all others are measured as decimals of Kristen, taken into account with both their size, and relative ampleness.  
  
1.00 - Kristen. Delightfully ample, and perfectly shaped.  
0.99 - Calder. We're all thinking it, I'm just the only one brave enough to say it.  
0.94 - Maeva. Luscious, if somewhat bombastic.  
0.88 - Astrid. Inviting and shapely. Unfortunately doesn't come with instructions.  
0.82 - Saana. Youthfully compact, could use some extra bacon.  
0.73 - Bjorn. Credit where credit is due.  
0.62 - Alleshia. Petite by norn standards, but not to be discarded or disregarded.  
And so on.  
  
I have also finally realized I might be going a bit loopy with being out here for so long. Astrid and Saana are both going full tilt with the camp banter, and with joining in with them I'm starting to feel the frustration build up a little. I know they're joking, but perhaps simply taking Kristen and disappearing into the mountains for a few days just to work through three seasons worth of pent-up passion might be more of a necessity than a good idea. Well, at least Kristen'll be assured the Awakened didn't damage me too badly, eh? Spirits, but I'm looking forwards to getting back home. Those other two, meanwhile, need to urgently put some work in about finding a husband, or they'll end up in each other's bed, the way they keep inciting each other.  
I also ended up giving relationship advice to Seleea, of all people. Apparently she has a sweet eye for that Vaxun that served with us a bit back. I didn't even know Asura flirted. To be honest, I just told to go do things they would both like, or try something new. It's what I did with Kristen, though we went hunting dragons. I suppose Seleea'll go inventing golems or something suitably Asura-like. Solving equations?  
  
For the rest, it was good to eat my fill, and just take the piss for an evening. We'll be moving north to our position in the battle line, and then we'll let Balthazar's armies crash into us. Whether or not we'll live or die, I suspect we'll find out soon enough. And after that, well... time to start thinking about going home.

# 10th of Phoenix

Vehjin Palace.  
  
Quiet today. The quiet before the storm, I imagine.  
Just sat around and spoke to people. Thinking of home, as if it is any nearer than it was a few days ago. It's a strange reality of war that sometimes the only way forwards is to sit and wait. That'll end soon enough. We all expect this to be over, just like we did at the Mouth of Torment. I hope we will not be cheated our victory this time, and that we can finish this. We've all grown tired of Elona's ill-won hospitality.  
  
The good news is that I at least finished the wand for the children. I've stuck the beads into the wood with some of the natural resin, and then wrapped them in place with thin straps of leather. The glass shines through them and catches the light well enough. I've been able to find scraps of fabric around the palace too; discarded piece of clothing, tattered banners and such that seemed to have been left unattended. A scrub along with my laundry saw them cleaned well enough, and I tied them down in long colourful spirals along the branch after I made sure there were no splinters. It is just a silly branch, about as magical the tree I cut it from, but I don't think I could've poured any more love into it if I tried. I promise I'll try and bring it home.  
  
I'm getting tired.  
We'll see what tomorrow brings.

# 11th of Phoenix

The Sandbox.  
  
Which is north of Seborhin, on the very edge of Vabbi. To the north lies the desert. There's some ruins here that are resonating with magic that mark the passage south past the mountains that would normally mark the northern border. The wind howls loudly over the deserted flagstones, making old banners hang in the constant breeze like pennants. There are more of those strange floating columns and palace domes, adorned with enormous bronze snakes rearing along the side. Inside the open pavilions, they are all furnished as if to accept kings. It's a beautiful place, next to an open oasis. Birds fly between the glittering colours of the stonework, and the water is never so blue as when it contrasts with the Elonian sand. Half of it lies cast aside and toppled, merged into vast slopes of shifted sand where time has dragged everything underneath the hide of the mountain.  
  
There is no-one here, except us and a Priory Scholar. We're expecting the Forged to march through here deeper into Vabbi, and threaten Seborhin. The Priory Scholar here has created some magical devices of sort that seem intent to protect us from the Forged's assault. I'm not sure about the details, but it makes the place marginally more defensible than before. The good news is that we're in a valley, and there's only really access from the north and east. The bad news is that these palaces are absolutely not designed with defense in mind. They are all wide open pathways, with not fortifications what-so-ever. Fighting in here might be a difficult proposition indeed. I'll do another sweep tomorrow, try and figure out what is and isn't useful to us.  
  
I guess this is it, then. Not a bad place for a last stand, I suppose. Nor is it a bad place to finally slay a god, if it comes down to it. If anything, it is more beautiful than Seborhin and the rest of Vabbi combined. I wonder who built this place, and what kind of people they were. In a different time, perhaps they would have welcomed us as guests with coffee, and the pleasant smile that comes so easily to the Elonians. I wonder what they would think if they ever set foot in the Great Lodge. I suppose it is no less impressive, just a world apart.

# 12th of Phoenix

The Sandbox.  
  
Well, tomorrow is the day. It was all preparations today, laying out mine fields, and entrenching our position as best as we can. The sun's hot, and it is easy to forget we're about to be knee-deep in Forged out here. Truth be told, this ruin is slightly too large for us to defend, so we'll have to be very reactive to the enemy. The Priory's odd devices will do a good job of keeping out of harm's ways when it comes to the Forged cannons, but who knows what will happen if Balthazar himself takes the field? It will be an epic battle either case. The Forged have proven to be worthy enough opponents, and tomorrow I hope to battle them such that no-one will contest the name 'Godsmote' is well-earned.  
The field is laid out, and the pieces are in motion.  
  
I'm oddly serene in the face of it all. Some of us are clearly feeling the anticipation. I'm sanguine, if anything. This place is beautiful, and it is certainly a fitting backdrop for us to finish this hunt. It will cost us, no doubt, but that is always the way of these things. I hope that this time tomorrow, I will write about victory, and the deaths I record will be well-earned and worthy of much praise. If I die, well, it might be the most content with my fate I have been since we arrived in Amnoon. Raven may find me here, if he wishes. I will be lain out under the fluttering red pennants, amidst a palace of the past, surrounded by my friends and allies. The only things I would regret is not seeing my little Hejja once more, and not having Kristen by my side at the very end.  
But that is bleak talk. My sword is sharp, my shield is broad, and my armour thick. I've never felt stronger in my entire life, and I can almost hear Bear's breath on my own. She is with me, and I will make sure Balthazar will hear her roar through my voice.  
  
I even got to wash. There is a bathing house with a well that is filled with clean water. We moved medical to it, but we were allowed to bathe nearby. I opened up an empty vat, and used it as a bathing tub. After an entire day of pottering about in the sand, that was delightful. Makes me miss the hotsprings at home. I might take Kristen there for a few days. Spirits, I might take Kristen anywhere, for any amount of time. I miss her terribly sometimes. I want to go home, surprise her, and simply spend an entire time hearing her talk about Hejja, and the shamans. Spirits, she needs to remind me she's not as perfect as I always make her out to be too, hah. I see her so little, my love and melancholy make me blind. I don't mind though. I love my Kristen, even when she's mad at me, is grumpy, lazy, or steals the last meatball from the plate when I'm not looking.  
  
I think I'll sleep now. I'll need the rest for the day to come.  
I might get up early and roll out a welcome message for our Forged friends.

# 13th of Phoenix

The Sandbox.  
  
The Forged lie defeated. We met them in open battle, crossed swords with them, and came out badly battered, but ultimately victorious. We had the Priory's generators spread out along the ruins, laid out between the buildings as defensive strongpoints. They proved of ample worth early on, when the Forged artillery tried to smash into us, but was repelled by the magical shield they kept up around us. We were north, holding the wide passage into the desert. The Forged funneled down into a narrow valley, where we enfiladed them. They charged up the slope, but we inflicted horrendous losses on them as they did, while we held the ground. I had to send Iluoana and Sabre down the line when the Forged tried to push true to the second generator we were tasked to defend.  
Not soon after that, we were forced to abandon the northernmost device, when a cannonade blew up the ridge, and forced us back. We ran back to reinforce Sabre, giving up the ground. Not sure if that was a good idea. The Forged entrenched themselves on the location, and erected some sort of magical pylon after they smashed the generator aside. It seemed to set the entire world awash with fire, though the fires were kept outside of the shield covering us. Without those devices, we would've been washed away to cinders. I ordered Sabre to abandon the second generator, and regroup with us before we counter-charged. Sure enough, we carried the position. Aava and I wore Bear's hide, and we smashed into the Forged. I shattered the pylon with a single strike, while Claridge and Irongrip wore down the cannonade. I had to help them finish the job in the end, but the firestorm died down around us, only to be replaced with another one.  
  
With the second generator on our side gone, the shield had collapsed sharply, and they targeted us with artillery. We were bracketed, and only due to the efforts of Claridge, Aava and the Warmaster did we manage to weather the firestorm. Apparently Lance knocked out the battery, or so I'm told, but we were under fire for several long minutes. In the end, we rushed through the bombardment when we saw Forged press up towards the third generator, next to medical. Running through the falling shells was sheer insanity, but we managed somehow, through no small miracle. We smashed straight into the rest of the enemy's army, and got bogged down into a lengthy melee outside. In the end, Wolfsmaiden and I both wore the blessing of the Spirits, and tore the enemy commander limb from limb. No Balthazar, but one of his lieutenant, surely. It left almost all of us badly injured and bruised. We were in the process of triage when an earth-splitting roar thundered overhead. I would've sworn it was a dragon about to swoop in, so I ordered everyone inside of medical, but... nothing happened. The Forged either fled, or were killed, I didn't see, but the attack was broken.  
  
Lance was in a similar bad state, but further out, amidst the wreckage of the Forged artillery. I had to drag back several of their wounded, and medical is filled to the brim. I've got cuts on my face, arms and legs, and some bastard burned his fist into my stomach. But there's worse in here. It seems we took the full weight of a tremendous blow, coming close to shattering us completely. If the Awakened sought to weaken us before they crushed us, well, they succeeded. We need to make sure we're all back on our feet as soon as we can, dragon or no dragon, Awakened or no Awakened. Spirits, we don't even know if Balthazar has been slain. This might only have been the first wave. We'll hear soon enough, I suppose. I'm wounded, but I can still fight if it comes down to it.  
  
For now, though, we enjoy a well-earned victory. Maeva asked Bjorn to marry him not a few hours ago, and Astrid looks like she's finally deserved a featname other than "Drakecarver". The War God did certainly leave her mark on her, burnt into her skin. Hm! Astrid Godsbrand. Maybe Bjorn and Maeva will settle on a shared name too, now that they'll bond together. I can't blame them, this was a worthy feat! Spirits, but it was well fought, a battle truly worthy of legend. Kristen'll be laughing in amazement when I tell her about, how I used Bear's own claws to tear out the Forged's core, and turned it into a slagged mess.  
  
So many wounded. No dead though, thank Raven for his patience. A heroic victory; one that I hope will not be diminished. One can only hope that the Awakened in the south held their ground, and intend to honour their promises to us. We can only hope they met Balthazar in the field, and he is not coming north to finish the job his lieutenant failed to accomplish. We're all spent. We'll fight to the very last if we have to, but we won't survive another attack like that.  
That thought should keep me awake and vigilant, but Spirits, I am exhausted beyond reason. Time to lay the head down. We'll see what the morrow brings.

# 14th of Phoenix

The Sandbox.  
  
Spirits, I slept like shit. I kept walking up when I tried to turn around, and nudged the burn on my stomach. I'm not the only one either, half the Chapter's strewn around medic. The water from the fountain keeps it nice and cool though, so at least we're not all slowly being roasted to death.  
  
In a surprising turn of events, we had a visit from the Mordant Crescent General, Nundho Bahyet. The man informed us, quite bluntly, that Balthazar had been destroyed by the Awakened armies yesterday, when the war god lead an army into the Kodash Bazaar. He wasn't exactly sure who or what destroyed him in the end, but the act itself seemed done. It woke Kralkatorrik up, which was the massive roar we heard yesterday. The Elder Dragon swept south, according to the General, cutting a swathe through Vabbi. It seems we may have won the war against the Forged, but at a tremendous cost for the Elonians. It also suggests that Balthazar and Kralkatorrik were indeed connected. It seems out deployment orders were correct, though we have no idea what happened. But, we defeated a part of the war god's army, though we missed his demise.  
It doesn't matter that much anyway.  
Palawa Joko's forces are outside, waiting to destroy us. The General came to tell us that his king had ordered him to force us to submit once more. When we refused, he did the surprising thing and defected to us, so as not to be forced and break his promise. He told us that saving the people Elona was always his calling, and he would rather help us Tyrians free his homeland, than serve under a tyrant who cares little for his people. If it isn't a ruse, then it seems that we have misjudged him severely. He also informed us that the airship is on the way to recover us; he had a messenger sent to Amoon. It'll be a matter of hours, maybe days, before it arrives. Meanwhile, we hope that the Awakened armies in Seborhin don't realize their commander has defected to us. If we survive the night and the next few hours, we'll be away, and on our way home.  
  
I guess I didn't sleep well anyway, eh? We live or die, based on the speed of the *Willhem's Vengeance's* motors, and the sluggishness of the Awakened just south of us. If they attack us now, we'll be crushed. Too many of us are out of the fight.  
  
Well, Spirits, if you've ever considered learning how to fly an airship, now is the time. There's a few good norn here who would like to see the Shiverpeaks again before it is all over.

# 15th of Phoenix

In transit. Too tired and wounded for wind readings.  
  
The ship got here. It flew in low and aggressively, apparently forewarned that things were going badly for us. A signal flare brought them down to us soon enough, though the Awakened were quick on our tail. The crew of the *Wilhem's Vengeance* didn't waste much time, however, and they promptly opened fire across the valley onto the Awakened formations as they approached. For once, the firepower was on our side. Then they lowered their loading winches, and several minutes later, everyone was onboard, and we were hurtling away from Vabbi as fast as our engines can carry us.  
  
We're finally on our way home. It seems we have much to thank our friend, General Nundho Bahyet, as he was the one that had our people in Amnoon alerted as to our status, and provided the helmsman of the ship with the heading he needed to come and find us. I am surprised to find out that all of his attempts to treat us as guests were genuine, as was his pledge to uphold the terms of our surrender. In more than one way, it seems, we owe them our lives, and the fact that, in some strange way, we managed to accomplish our mission, albeit indirectly.  
  
Now, we leave Vabbi behind as we speed to Amnoon again, leaving behind a mess that we've only caught word of second hand. Balthazar is dead, but Elona is in the grip of both Palawa Joko and Kralkatorrik. I have no idea how or why Balthazar was destroyed, but I have a bad feeling that the Elder Dragon only stirred because of it. The old human stories say that when Abaddon was slain, Kormir absorbed his power, and became a deity. I wonder if that magic was released when Balthazar was destroyed, and that this is what caused our old enemy Kralkatorrik to stir.  
We might have only seen one fight end, only to leave Elona in the claws of an enraged Elder Dragon. Insane as it sounds, it makes me feel like we are flying in the wrong direction.  
But, we can't take on an Elder Dragon and Palawa Joko just with the Chapter and an airship, no matter how insanely lucky we get, or how hard we fight. It's time to go home, regroup, and decide what to do next.  
  
I can't actually believe I'm going home, though. The thrum of the ship, and the beat of the propeller is almost surreal. Being so close to home, I become more impatient with every breath. Every second, I know I am coming closer to seeing my beautiful daughter again, and holding Kristen in my arms once more. It is unbearable to count down the seconds and just wait, while my entry body aches with strain of these last few days. I think I've finally pushed myself a little too far. I don't know how we would've fought our way out of Elona.  
It doesn't matter anymore, though. Not for today, at least.

# 16th of Phoenix

Free City of Amnoon.  
  
It is strange to be here again, though not exceptionally surprising. Amnoon was our staging point into the Crystal Desert and Elona, and now it seems it will also be the leaving through here. We arrived some hours before, before we disembarked and got given a day of soft leave. I'm not supposed to have any leave, but the Warmaster literally ordered me into the bar, so that's what I did. It's a pity that they don't make better ales, or have discovered the joys of mead, but then you can't have it all.  
  
There's been a good brace of recruits waiting for us, sent here by command to reinforce us piecemeal, but unable to find us as we moved on south. One specific recruit seems to have picked up a performance act as a jester, which might have driven him slightly mad. He reported to us dressed in the most riotous outfit, and I at first I mistook him for a performer or a jester. He did have the paperwork though. Imagine that, being sent to reinforce a Chapter, having to sit on your thumbs for Raven knows how long, only to find that the soldiers you're reinforcing are about to head home.  
  
At least, that's what I'm expecting tomorrow. The aircrew hasn't bothered to unload the cargo, and while we've been allowed to run rampant for a day, I think we'll continue on back to Tyria shortly. I know there is so much unfinished business in the south, with Palawa Joko and Kralkatorrik, but we're spent after our battles against the Forged, and all of us are in dire need of leave, and some decompression. They may send us back after that, but Spirits, I'm sick of seeing sand for the foreseeable future. This tour has been an epic experience that I will carry with me for a long time, and that I can't wait to sit down and tell Kristen about in as much detail as I can remember, and how I earned myself the name Godsmote twice over.  
  
The day can't come soon enough.

# 17th of Phoenix

Transit. Steady south-eastern gal, which means we'll make good time.  
  
We're being ordered back home, so after a day of rest, we were back aboard the *Willhem's Vengeance*, and are now finally on our way back to Tyria. As I write, we should be flying up past the Steamspur Bay, and in a few hours, we'll be over the Steamspur mountains themselves, and on the final stretch to Lion's Arch.  
The feeling of going home is... well, I've never been more impatient, or conscious of how slow time is going by. I keep listening for the hum of the engines to change, to signal our arrival, though I know that it is much too early. Even with a good wind like this, it will take several hours more for us to reach Tyria, and the sun will be high in the sky before we're all the way in Lion's Arch.  
  
I know I'm not supposed to have leave, but Spirits, I can't imagine they won't let us off the hook after the battles we pulled through for them. I know Alleshia and Maeva told me they had plans to sort out that debacle, but now I am left sitting here with a sudden fear in my heart that I won't be allowed to go home. After all of this, I'm not sure what I'll do in response to that.  
  
I should stop worrying. I'll find a way to convince them to let me go home. Even for a little bit.  
It'll all be worth it.

# 18th of Phoenix

Lion's Arch.  
  
We've arrived. I'm drunk. A bit.  
Disembarked outside of Fort Marriner! Spirits, but the smell of the bay has never been sweeter, and the ground under my boots has never been firmer than when we returned from our long stay under King Joko's dubious hospitality. I've been left in command of the Chapter while Maeva and Alleshia headed on to the Vigil Keep for a command-level debriefing. I imagine they'll be properly grilled about what happened in the Desolation, and the circumstances of this last moon's few days. We sent our Mordant Crescent defector up along with them, as well as our injured which means that now, all we can do is wait. I imagine they'll be back soon enough to tell us we can go home. Or that we're going back, along with the warfleet, to stop Kralkatorrik dead in his tracks. I don't know. We'll see.  
  
No news from north, which I suppose is good. I was half-worried that Kralkatorrik's stirring might have meant Jormag and Primordius awoke too, but there's a distinct lack of panic and chaos throughout Lion's Arch. If Jormag had arisen, no doubt we would have heard from the norn present in Lion's Arch by now. But no, nothing. The ice sleeps, while the storm roars above it. We wait and sharpen swords and axes, until the day comes that the storm breaks.  
  
Hah, I was about to say we waited two-hundred years for the Fang of the Serpent to be cracked, we can wait some more! Ironic, because I am impatient beyond belief to step through that Asuran gate, and feel the cold of Hoelbrak upon my skin. I can see the path before me, the short way down the hill, beneath the snow cherries, and unto Snow Leopard's Lodge. I can all-but hear the sound of the snow under my feet. Smell the fires of the braziers, the smoke, and the roast meat from inside the lodges. I wonder where I'll find her. Holding Hejja in her arms, around a fire, laughing with da and Skaadi about some joke? Alongside Valharantha, speaking about the venerable will of the Spirits? Or will I have to hear she has gone hunting, to prove that Snow Leopard's grace has not yet with every arrow she fires? I could lie on this empty beach forever, writing by the moonlight, and get lost in it all.  
It is the hardest thing not to stand up, cross the bridge, and step through the portal. Of all the things, it is the hardest.  
They must give us leave soon. I might drive myself mad otherwise.

# 19th of Phoenix

Lion's Arch.  
  
Well, high command came down today to tell us we're under inquiry, following everything that happened in the Crystal Desert and Elona. They've encouraged us all to issue statements, while they take apart the situation and try to make sure there's no foul play at work. I imagine this is just a formality. I imagine there are some questions as to our purity of purposes in the Desolation; I can only hope that they will see things the same way we did. The Warmaster and the Tactician did as they must. I don't think any of us could have asked for a fairer outcome to all of this. We left a lot of unfinished business behind us all, that is true, but we went beyond what could be expected of any single unit in the pursuit of our objectives. Objectives that were put down by the higher echelons to begin with, mind.  
So, yes, that'll be going on. I'll have to prepare a statement soon, though I think much of what they're looking for will be evident from my reports alone. I'd like to see them try and play any angle on this, truth be told. I fought a last stand with only seven soldiers, against an entire army, just to buy us a little time. If they'll try and dispute that as anything other than a heroic sacrifice cost with the blood of those that fought besides me, then I'll tell them exactly where to shove that inquiry of theirs.  
We fought with honour.  
  
Tomorrow there'll be a memorial service for Sawyer, who is now officially presumed dead. Truth be told, I had a feeling this was the case long since. I know it is easy to hang onto a memory, in the hope that eventually you'll find them, but... Elona is very far away indeed, and it doesn't look like they're in a hurry to send us back. Whatever became a Sawyer, I only hope he found some peace in the end, and was spared the horrors inflicted on King Joko's less-honoured guests. We'll get to avenge him eventually, I hope.  
  
A tiny pinprick of good news is that with the inquiry, most of the disciplinary notices have been suspended, and replaced with service fines. I'll be out a good amount of silver, but I never was in this for the pay. Besides, it is a small price to pay for leave. I suspect they will grant us some leave soon, likely when this inquiry of theirs is finally over. They gave us soft leave for the day, so most of us went off to get hilariously drunk. Especially Wolfsmaiden managed to drink herself into a different world. It was good, though. Embersong gave a keg of whiskey, and it all just went downhill from there. Ended up going over to the tide-pools in the eastern ward, until people decided to slink off. I'm drunk again, but it's not so bad right now. Everything's spinning around a bit, but if I focus it isn't that hard too write.  
  
I think I'll go lie down a bit, though. All the alcohol, and I have a memorial service to attend to tomorrow.

# 20th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak - home.  
  
Snow on Hrothbeir's Rest.  
Write later.

# 21st of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
First of all: ah, but it is good to be home.  
  
Now, yesterday. There was a memorial service for Sawyer and the dead, which was nice enough, it a little hollow by virtue it was led by the investigating officers. I can sympathize with them merely doing their duties, but it is difficult to feel the sincerity in words they speak about people they never knew. I normally speak for the dead, but not that day. Wolfsmaiden did a good enough job though, speaking of the Pack, and what we mean to each other. Wolf's favour is doing her well.  
I have mixed feelings about Sawyer being declared dead. He's been missing for a while now, and with our withdrawal from Elona has effectively killed off any hope that we will find him, dead or alive, if he has somehow managed to cling on this entire time. I think he's long dead, and that our failure to recover his remains, along with Octavia's and Chloe's, constitutes one of our greater failures as their fellow soldiers. But, I am also pragmatic enough to understand that it is simply the way war sometimes. I worry what it means for them in Palawa Joko's claws, but it is entirely out of our hands now I fear. It will simply be one of those few shameful things we carry with us throughout our lives.  
  
On a brighter note, we were allowed home after the ceremony. Apparently the inquiry will take some time to finish, and they will let us rest up for the while. Paying a minor fine to cover for my disciplinary notice, I was allowed to finally go home. Spirits, I think I actually ran all the way from the memorial to the barracks to get my kit packed. Then through the gate, and into the snows and cold wind of Hoelbrak.  
Then down the hallowed slope, where the snow mixes in with the blossoms from the cherries. The light of the Might and Main burned brightly, throwing up the gazes of the Spirits into the mottled sky, watching over us all. I thanked all the Spirits with every breath for making me strong enough to have returned to see my home once more. I laugh, drink and joke, but I can feel the claws that rend me in my flesh and bones still. The odd tightness in my back where they came within an inch of making me a cripple, or worse, will be with me the rest of my life. The burn across my chest is still raw and healing, while the Hydra's fangs have left their own traces there. They're all dents in the shield, proof that I have weathered the worst of what Elona had to offer, and only came back stronger for it.  
  
And yet, for all that, I am humbled and brought to my knees every time I see Kristen again. It is like I see her for the first time. She changes, sometimes a lot, sometimes a little, each time I see her, and I try and commit every detail to memory as soon as I see it, but I never succeed. I love her entirely too much.  
I tried to sneak up on her, but being the huntress she is, she hear me as soon as I entered the lodge, hah. It was good to be back home. To hold Kristen in my arms, and to kiss her.  
  
And Hejja, too. She was asleep when I arrived yesterday, but I held her in arms today, like the little bundle of joy she is. She's a small lass compared to the Jotunling, but I bet she'll be as beautiful as her mother someday. Fearless, too. I was worried she'd be afraid of the strange big bear, but when I picked her up, she just seized my whiskers and pulled on them with all her might. Strength of a the lassie's grip, there's no doubt whose daughter she is, hah!  
  
Anyway, Kristen and I decided to let the little one sleep yesterday, and instead we went to Hrothbeir's Rest with a bottle of mead. I missed the snow, but Kristen apparently missed me as much as I had her, so we were down in it soon enough. "Get some snow on your back," she said.  
  
Today's been good too. I went to see da and the Jotunling as soon as I could be convinced to leave Kristen alone. The boy's growing up! He'll be two years old soon. We built a fort out of stone and firewood, and then arrayed his army of wooden soldiers around it. He is too fond of the large wooden dragon I made him in Ascalon. He keeps calling me and it by the same, "babur", though, so I won't complain. He's a happy child, which makes it easier for myself to forgive my length absences. Da says he tries to speak about me every day to him, and I can't be more thankful to the old man for it. I've found that da and I get along best in our shared moments of comfortable silence, or watching Reuzen play and laugh. We're both weary travelers of the world, and sometimes much more doesn't need to be said. I did, of course tell him of the great battles we fought, the strange things we saw, and the friends we lost in Elona. He was quietly impressed by it all.  
  
I did much the same storytelling for Kristen, though it was much more intimate. I like telling her the stories while we're in bed, as she finds the scars and bruises for herself. Besides, there's nothing like pretending to be the Great Hydra-Bear of Legend midway through an exaggerated story telling to realize you're standing entirely naked on top of one of the bedposts, entirely naked, with half the lodge looking up at you to figure out where the unearthly racket is coming from. But, nothing makes the hard beat faster than Kristen laughing and giggling like she was twenty years younger, while I try and do to her what the Amnoon Hydra did to my belly.  
  
We actually ran into Embersong, both yesterday and today, while the lass is about roaming Hoelbrak. Apparently her gut-wound means she can't drink for the entire leave! Talk about some cruelty. Thankfully, Renn's a fairly new drinker, so she'll survive. She mentioned to Kristen and I that she's looking to even the score with the Svanir bastard that's been taunting her for a while now, and she might need help from the Companions with bringing his dragon-worshiping head back home on a silver platter. We should Companion's Moot during leave sure enough, and send out a hunting party if Embersong can track down his whereabouts.  
  
That reminds me, Elder Ranek wrote me a letter. He was injured during the battle with the Forged, and lost an arm, which means he's being invalidated out of the Vigil. It doesn't seem to have deterred his fighting spirit though, as he remains a staunch Companion. Kristen suggested the Elder might continue life as Old Ranek One-Arm, which is not a bad name to take upon oneself. Old Ranek One-Arm, the Skullcrusher! Just make sure folks don't mistake hom for a Jotun or an Ettin, hah!  
  
But aye, with Embersong's hunt, I think a Companion's Moot would be good. Kristen's been spoiling for a hunt, which I can understand well enough. She's a Snow Leopard at heart, and even though she is learning the shaman's wisdom, and raising our beautiful daughter, in the end she must run free. I think da will take the children, and we'll venture out into the mountains for a few days.  
Sweet also mentioned that she would love to see the Maguuma, or Elona, sometimes, so she doesn't have to keep hearing me just tell stories about them. A good idea, if we can find the time. There's few things I'd look forwards to more than sharing all those things I've seen with her. I'll have to keep an eye out, there might be something I can arrange, maybe for whenever next leave passes.  
  
Spirits, I hope the rest is all finding the joy in their leave too. I'll stay in Hoelbrak for a day or two more, take proper care of Kristen, and take the time to see Hejja and Reuzen, before I'll set off to the cities. I still have the fallen dead to honour, and there'll be plenty more time afterwards for me to stop being a warrior, or a legendary hero, and work on being a father.

# 22nd of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
I'd forgotten how cold it can be in Hoelbrak, but after the desert and the glaring sun, the snow and the mountain air are surprisingly frosty. Kristen laughs when I tell her, because she knows the coldest seasons have passed, and it will only get warmer. The snows never melt, however. Not in Hoelbrak, at least. The forests of the low foothills remain evergreen. Kristen and I took the children out to the Heart of Snow Leopard in the Borealis forest, as part of Kristen's observance. Hejja was quiet during much of the communing, but the Jotunling got restless from being told to sit still, so I eventually let Kristen do her duties, while I took the children down to Bear's Heart nearby. The Jotunling's is very fond of the shrine, which makes me think Bear speaks to him even now. Hejja was mostly sitting on my arm, looking at everything with wide-eyed wonder. The world must still be so very big for her. If she's taken anything after her sister, she'll outgrow it quickly, until she's the size of a mountain herself.  
Kristen returned to us not long after with a deer over her shoulder, and about as big of a smirk on her face as she's ever managed. Apparently Snow Leopard's wisdom called for her to honour her in deed, rather than merely in word and thought. I can't complain though. We got it over to Horncall, and hung it up there for ripening. It'll be good to eat in a few days, though I think we should offer a part of it to Snow Leopard. Kristen was in a good mood. Being able to loose an arrow, even on something as small as a deer, made her glow as the sun does. It'll be good when we go out proper hunting a few days. I feel a little bad for caging her up like this. It makes me worry if she's really happy in Hoelbrak, walking the path of the shaman with our daughter on her knee, rather than out under the great open sky. I would've asked her, but with the way she was beaming, I didn't want to bring down her mood.  
  
Anyway, it was a good day. We had stewed fishcakes in the evening, and after the children went to bed, Kristen and I had a casket of mead we emptied between us before we fell asleep.  
It's now early morning of the 23rd, as I'm preparing to go out back the cities in a few hours. I promised I'd let the world know about our fallen soldiers, so I will. Kristen'll stay home, and prepare for our hunting trip when I return.

# 23rd of Phoenix

Lion's Arch.  
  
Long day today, but a good one. A hallowed one. Departed from Hoelbrak early enough, as soon as I found Saana for travelling. We went to Lion's Arch first, to the kennels to collect Minco, Shikoba's pet spider. The critter's been locked up in the kennels there since we departed for Elona, and unfortunately, he won't be coming to collect her. Instead, Wolfsmaiden and I decided to find a good place in Caledon to release it. After Saana took some time to get Minco to follow her along, we ran into Renn along the way, who accompanied us for lack of anything better to do. Good that she did, as Embersong eventually has some experiencing with tracking along the region, and was able to lead us surefooted to a cleft that seemed to be the ideal place for a jungle spider to thrive. We released Minco, and with that motion, said a final farewell to Shikoba. It seemed fitting.  
  
We returned to the Grove thereafter, and spent some time retelling the stories of the fallen to the sapling and wardens there. We ran into a Pale Reaver called Caera, who apparently knew Celdric from many, many years ago. She seemed rather animated, and decided to accompany us on our remembrance. Unfortunately, the Grove is not exceptionally well suited to norn remembrance, so we decided to continue on to Rata Sum before the night was entirely over. We had some more ears there, but they got distracted and started bickering about gods halfway through the tale. Some of them paid better attention though, and I hope they will remember the deeds of the fallen. Octavia Skylark and Ebony Tinker, who fought on the very lips of the Mouth of Torment, against the armies of the great god of war, Balthazar. Shikoba Wilama, Kane Black, Kefir Ironwolf and Nikolay Middleton, who stood at my side in the rearguard, and fought on until the very end, leaving a mound of foes at every foot! Chloe Alevyne, who made us all dance in dark, the brightest memory we have of the Desolation.  
And now also Sawyer Serie, whose fate is yet unknown to us.  
  
We returned to Lion's Arch for the night, and said goodbye to Caera and Renn, whom each went on their own way. Tomorrow, Wolfsmaiden and I will continue on Almuten first, to see Chloe's family, before we hope to take the ship out to Garenhoff. Saana wants to scatter the blood-stained sand we have of her to the waves there. Apparently Chloe was fond of the place. It seems fitting for us to undertake this burden, while we are giving them a proper norn remembrance.  
  
Then, the Citadel and the Reach, before it is time to finally let my brave soldiers rest in the Hall of Spirits.  
  
99. Sawyer Serie, missing.

# 24th of Phoenix

Lion's Arch, Fort Marriner.  
  
We went to see Chloe's father, near Almuten. It seems he had only recently received the news, and he was having trouble processing it all. We offered him to come with us to Garenhoff, and he did, though it gave the entire thing a slightly more strained aspect. I understand, though. I have no idea how I would live with the news of Freyja or Hejja dying. Badly, I imagine. But, the man remained somewhat composed throughout the entire trip out to Garenhoff, where we scattered those few grains of sand Wolfsmaiden had kept with her. It was late in the evening when we returned by boat, and neither Astrid nor Saana were in much of a mood for much drinking. I can't blame them.  
Still, we've said our goodbyes, and we spoke only about the good things that are worthy of remembering.  
  
Tomorrow, on to the Citadel, and then the Reach the day after. Hail to the fallen! I know that they'll be dancing in the Hall of Heroes today.

# 25th of Phoenix

Lion's Acrh, Fort Marriner.  
  
Back from the Citadel. Plenty of Charr there who were willing to lend us an ear for a good tale of battle over a cask of whiskey. I even met a few of those soldiers who served alongside us in Ascalon, when we were fighting the Flame Legion. That sort of respect is hard to come by from Charr, so I am pleased it didn't turn ugly. With Charr in the Citadel, that's always a possibility after all.  
  
I saw a note posted on the notices here in Marriner when we got back. They're calling for volunteers for several missions in the west. I have a good mind to tell Kristen, and see about going into the Magus Falls after we conclude our hunt. I'm sure da won't mind keeping an eye on Hejja for a few days.  
  
But before that, we go to the Reach, tomorrow, and finish our duties to the fallen.

# 26th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Afternoon of the 27th, but then I wasn't really in a writing position yesterday evening.  
Went to the Reach with Wolfsmaiden, Godsbrand and Crepsilly, to put a capstone on our remembrance, and spread the tales of the fallen one last time. Crepsilly was hungover, and still in a foul mood over a little falling out between her and Bhrom. I told her my way of looking at it. I love Kristen and I love my children. Everything else is merely a detail which crumbles into nothingness when compared to those two small truths. It's why I won't let petty doubts or mistakes come between Kristen and me.  
  
The Maiden's Whisper was busy enough, with some group of adventurers celebrating the return of their guild leader from abroad. There were several of our own there, including Aed, Vatorn and Alexina, though the meeting was by chance. We spoke mostly to an Asura who was keeping record of thing in a large tome. Apparently, it is part of an old Elonian magical study to record the tales of heroes, and let their deeds inspire great power. So, we told him of the battles, and the sacrifices. All of them. I was very pleased to see someone with the same commitment to keeping the legends of the dead alive. I hope he spreads the tales far and wide, like we have tried these past few days. Let the names of the fallen dead live forever in story and deed!  
  
Afterwards, though, it was time to return home.  
I saw a notice up in Marriner asking for volunteers to sign on for special duties in the Magus Falls. Saana and Crepsilly seemed interested, and I know Aed's signed up. With the talk I had with Kristen a few days ago, I'll ask her if she's interested in signing on with me. Sharing that experience with her with only make the bond between us even stronger, and it might do much good to uncage the huntress within.  
I'll see if da can mind the children for a few days, while Kristen and I get some time for ourselves to talk this over. We're about to go hunting for a few days regardless, like we used to. It'll do both of us good.  
  
On a different note, apparently Astrid's mother, Elder Sjofn, is ill. I'll go make an offering to Raven before we depart, and ask him for His boon and protection, as well as to Bear and Ox, to give her the the strength to find an worthy end before the sun of her life passes below the horizon.

# 27th of Phoenix

Yak's Bend, in the Frostgorge Sound.  
  
Traveled to the hunting camp at Yak's Bend during the day. I'd plan on it just being myself and Kristen, but we met a number of the Companions during the day whom we decided to invite along. Embersong, Elder Ranek, and a young lass going by Ulfgardkin that's acquainted with Renn ended up tagging along for the trek. The Elder's recovered somewhat from losing his arm, and is carrying a relatively crude metal claw in the stead. He doesn't seem overly bothered by it, though I suppose that's just him being stoic about the entire ordeal.  
Set off early enough to finish the entire trek north.  
  
We passed by the Shaman's Rookery along the way, as it was only a minor deviation. We decided to run the trials again, just to prove that we had the speed and dexterity to still do it. Wolfsmaiden ended up slipping over a stone on her very first step, though she finished it her second run smoothly. I ran it along with Kristen, though I overtook her because she wasn't expecting me to push past, hah. Still, margin of mere seconds, but it seems Bear does still occasionally outruns Snow Leopard! We made some offerings at the shrine there for Astrid's ma, Elder Sjofn. Hopefully it will help.  
  
It was a relatively clear trek through the higher Foothils and Lion's Road from there on out, though, and we reached Yak's Bend a few hours before dusk. Too late to do any meaningful hunting, but not too late to settle a challenge between Saana, Kristen, with Ulfgardkin participating for the fun of it. I threw up logs, and let the women put arrow shafts in them. Kristen won handily, though that's to be expected. She's got twenty years of experience on both of them. They all did well though. No-one who wasn't born in the mountains would match their shots shaft for shaft, that's for certain. Embersong didn't participate, oddly, but rather stalked about and shot a moa. Not that I begrudge the notion, as we roasted it over a fire when night fell.  
  
I'm writing this by the light of the fire, as Embersong honours her name, and watches over it. Kristen's in my arms, fast asleep now. I can close my eyes, and listen to her breathing mingle with the crackle of the fire, and the soft howling of the wind over the mountains until I die. It is moments like these that I long for when I dream away on tour. It is what made me fall in love with her in the first place. Sharing the simple things with each other, and knowing that we both value them beyond any measure.  
And here I am writing about it, when I should just close my eyes and drink it all in.

# 28th of Phoenix

Yak's Bend.  
  
A good day on the hunt today. We split off early, Wolfsmaiden and Ulfgardkin each heading their own way, while Kirsten and myself went to Leopard's Tail. Embersong followed us along, too. There were heavy snows on the western side of the Sound, and it was cold for Phoenix' season, which made it perfect for the trek.  
No broodmothers out on the Tail, but there were plenty of snow leopards watching us stake out the river. A good sign, if Snow Leopard herself is watching us. Kristen was happy, which is the most fulfilling part of it all. I think that's why we came out here.  
  
I ended up fighting an Arctodus bare-handed, and killing it, as a show of strength. I thank Bear for allowing me to prove myself, and I will ensure an offering is made to Bear Lodge when we return. Got a good pelt and a fairly won bear's claw out of it, as well as plenty of good meat. We took the best cuts we could carry, and then I dragged the rest of the carcass to the water, so the drakes may eat it for carrion. Kristen put it rightly: let them grow fat, so we have good broodmothers to hunt next year.  
  
We also spotted a cave near the waterside, and hoping for some beast's lair, went closer to investigate it. Unfortunately, it was just a Dredge tunnel. Kristen shot out the stalactites, and I bellowed our names down their little tunnel. It would've been uncouth for us to simply pass by without announcing ourselves, after all, eh. We let them mostly in peace after, and went back Yak's Bend through the imp-tunnel. I challenged Kristen to imp-catching, but the lass is too quick on the draw. I only got four or so, to Kristen's eight. Payback for the Rookery run yesterday, I imagine, heh.  
  
Ulfgardkin and Wolfsmaiden caught a troll each, and had the bloodied troll skulls to to prove it, while the former also brought along some wurm mandibles. Renn ended up stalking and talking down an eagle griffon, though she seems rather nonplussed about taking the beak for the trophy. Good meat for eating though.  
Wolfsmaiden seemed distracted, and was acting strangely the entire evening. I'm not sure what's going on, except that was looking to meet her da in Hoelbrak a few days ago, and had a good stack of letters to contend with. I didn't pry, but I hope she's alright. If I'l being honest, I also wish she didn't make a shadow hang over the hunt by being so aloof about whatever's bothering her.  
  
But, I can't complain. Kristen's as happy as she can be, and we've been talking about signing on for that mission to the Magus Falls together, and maybe even going to Southsun with Hejja afterwards. I suppose it'll depend on how we all feel about it. I also want to start preparing the Companion's Moot I want to hold near the end of leave.  
But, sleep now.

# 29th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Long day today. Returned to Hoelbrak during the day, after packing up camp in Yak's Bend. We'd planned to stay longer, but if we're too sign on for the volunteer deployment in the Maguuma tomorrow, we had to break camp early, and prepare for the long trip back to Hoelbrak. We made decent time, and were back in the afternoon. Kristen sped off to prepare her gear and kit, while also mothering over Hejja for a little bit. I can't blame her. Da's still good to keep Hejja on his arm for a few days while Kristen and I head out. Somewhere in my head, I wish we could take the children with us, but I know that's nonesense. I'll spend plenty of time with them after this trip's over.  
  
I went on to Lion's Arch to sign us up for the mission, and then went on to attend Luke and Nymme's wedding in the Reach, with their reception in Lion's Arch again. I was going to bring Kristen, but she was taken up with preparation, and I didn't want to put undue pressure on her about it all, so I went on my own instead.  
It was a decidedly decent ceremony, very human. The reception afterwards was enjoyable enough though! They had different kinds of ale, and I had a mug of each, while I was telling stories to the other guests. Dhianni was there, as were several members of the Crimson Ashes mercenaries, including Calas' sweetheart, Victoria! Spirits, I haven't seen or heard of him in years. I wonder what's become of him. Either case, Luke and Nymme were caught up with the reception for the entire evening, just like when Kristen and I were wed. Funny, because it sort of makes it look like you're missing your own reception, you know.  
  
Ale was good! Ended up fighting over some brownies with an Asura, who then decided to get herself slagged on ale with me, and pass out on the table after half a mug. Hah, lightweights. I'm a little tipsy myself, but that's to be expected after twelve tankards of ale, even if half of it was human beer!  
  
Doesn't matter. I'm back home now, quickly jotting some notes down to settle the mind, before I'll go to see if little Hejja is soundly asleep. She's a beautiful little lass, our Hejja. My beautiful daughter. Spirits, but I love all my children. I should go and visit Freyja sometimes, and see how Aska's growing. So much to do, always so much to do. One day, I'll come home, and there'll be no urgency in anything I do.

# 30th of Phoenix

Somewhere in the deep Maguuma jungle.  
  
Spirits, well, this went down the deep end.  
  
We arrived in Lion's Arch early in the day, and received a briefing. We're part of a team sent into some ruins they found on the edge of the old campaign territory. Apparently the original expedition never reported back, so they sent in a second detachment. They also never reported back. We're the third grouping to be sent in. Our mission seemed relatively simple; find what became of the other expeditions, and return their remains if at all possible. We were also asked to find whatever caused them to cease contact, though the elimination of the creature wasn't a high priority.  
  
The flight from Lion's Arch took most of the day. Most of the search time are familiar to me. Myself, in command by virtue of senior rank. Kristen, who decided to dug up her old Order of Whispers gear for the trip. A pity it's a bit more dire than expected. Wolfsmaiden, Crepsilly, and Aed, as well as Dulaman and Cerili from the Chapter. Then there's Dahgar Fairtongue, from Blade Chapter, and First Crusader Thandiwe Okudjeri, who's our liaison with command for the mission.  
  
We deployed pretty soon as we hit the ground, venturing into the ruins through a collapsed passage. The insides were... strange. We quickly found many bodies, though most of them were old. The ruins themselves seem to be some kind of prison or keep. I think we entered through the dungeon by accident. But, who-ever built this is long gone, as much of it is in a state of collapse. Most of it is grey brickwork, and it seems positively ancient.  
We started seeing and hearing things soon enough, which rattled everyone. Voices. Screams. Threats. And then shadowy creatures appearing and disappearing at the edge of your vision. We called the alarm several times, only to see things disappear before our very eyes. It's almost certainly a spirit or a ghost, though it seems exceptionally malicious. At first, it simply tried to scare us with sounds, and throwing us off balance, but I quickly realized that they were trying to get into our heads. I've fought skilled mesmers in Lake Doric, so I know what's that like. You just have to try and see through it, distinguish what is real and what is no, even though they might be identical.  
  
We found traces of fresh blood early enough, and followed it into the next room, which was some sort of trap mechanism. There was blood covering the floor, and it seemed pretty obvious that whatever has been haunting us, and likely attacked and killed the other expeditionary groups, dragged them through it. Large plates with retracting spikes covered the floor, and there were levers that had to be pulled in sequence to allow us free passage across. It took us a while to figure it out, but in the end, I could see the patterns in my head, and I was able to find a solution. It involved walking out over those plates, and hoping I remembered correctly, or end up skewering us all on the infernal mechanism. At one point, I flipped one of the mechanism levers, and if I had been wrong, Saana and Kristen would have died. I admit, I hesitated, but then I was sure enough of myself, and I was right.  
The entire time, though, we heard voices, and saw things. Many of us were close to losing their nerve. Spirits, I had to steel myself and focus on solving the damn puzzle. We had to move forwards. If I had had more time, I would've dismantled the entire thing, rather than play by the rules, but I didn't bring any explosives with me, nor my sapping kit.  
  
We moved on, only to be attacked by... well... *something*. A mass of screeching limbs came down behind us, and chased us blindly through the corridor we had just opened up. We managed to seal a gate behind us, which seems to have kept the malign presence out. I don't know what it is, though, or how we can fight it. I know it rattled Kristen badly. I tried to focus on keeping everyone together, but it was difficult not to just take Kristen in my arms right there and then, and tell her everything will be alright. We've fought through worse.  
Still, though, we might not have locked the presence out, as much as we locked ourselves in. We're in an old courtyard that is half-open to the night's sky, with several rubble-chocked passages leading away from us. More disturbingly is the tangle of spikes and spears set down around the edge of the yard. We found the bodies of several Pact soldiers skewered on them, including one Sylvari -Fionachae according to her tags- who's still alive. We're fighting to keep her that way, but she's badly injured. All the other bodies were... well, beyond recognition, if not for their dog tags. Oddly, the Knight Baxter Talbot, the officer who lead the second Vigil team, was not among the dead. Even so, I gave order to make camp, and we've retreated to one corner of the courtyard. We've made good use of the otherwise eerie forest of spears and lances, and used them to entrench our campsite, while we cut many down to use the shafts as firewood. I had the dead expedition members we found pilled up on a pyre and burnt, after Aed collected their tags. I doubt we'll have a chance to get all their bodies out, and even then... they were flayed and mutilated beyond recognition. It is kinder to burn them, and put them to rest.  
  
There's now an uneasy quiet, asides from the crackle of the fire. I have third watch, and I'm writing by the dying embers of the pyre, and the more modest light of the campfire. I keep glancing at the sealed gateway at the far end, expecting whatever beast was chasing us to burst through it. Seeing what it did to the other expedition members, I worry if we'd be able to fight if it came down to it. I think the biggest problem is that we don't know what it is. The flayed bodies and mutilated corpses make me think of those damned Fleshreavers, but... I've never seen anything so damned powerful or destructive. A Vigil kill-team should have been able to put those all to the sword easily enough. This? I don't know. I know we'll press on tomorrow. There's no point in going back, even if our wounded Sylvari's only words before she lost consciousness were "Don't go down." If this... presence is a spirit or a ghost, we have to exorcise it, or destroy the source of its power some other way.  
  
Not the trip into the Maguuma Kristen and I were expecting. Still, it somehow comforts me to have her here, and she does much to steel me against the enemy, because I know I'm not fighting for just myself. I need to get Kristen out of here alive, and whatever creature or presence is trying to prevent me will lament the day it tried to put itself between us.  
  
100. Explorer Njalla Hillclimber, died fighting something foul.  
101. Magister Taxxe, died fighting something foul.  
102. Crusader Charles Baker, died fighting something foul.  
103. Recruit Ada Cornett, died fighting something foul.  
104. Crusader Njall the Bastion, died fighting something foul.  
105. Recruit Krukk, died fighting something foul.

# 31st of Phoenix

Hoelbrak, against the odds.  
  
Sleep wasn't good, but that was to be expected in a place like this. I had a little comfort of being able to hold onto Kristen, and try to focus on her breathing, and the beat of her heart when I could feel the numbness of the fear trying to worm its way into my head. The despair was close, but she kep me anchored. We woke up early in the ruins, when light dawned. I'd already made my choice: to go forwards. A place as big as this must have had more than one exit, so I thought if we pushed forwards, we'd find our way out. We dug out one of the side passages north, so our route was set. Besides, we were still missing some of the soldiers.  
  
We were about to set off when the survivor, Fionachae woke up. She was babbling, and started struggling when I told her we were going to go deeper in. Eventually, Dulaman had to knock her out with some medicine, and carry her along with Aed. Kristen mentioned we should've left her behind, but I think she was letting fear get to her. I can't blame her, it did cross my mind that we should consider leaving her, but we wouldn't be Vigil if we didn't try.  
  
The passage lead out to a steep drop, filled with mist. We managed to play a line down, and rappel down the drop, which was just the remains of a collapsed wall. Soon enough, we were on the ground. There was a large pillar dominating a yard, and we could see an arch up ahead, which we thought was an exit. As soon as we got down on the ground though, we spotted another room, to the side. Ceirli mentioned she could feel something dying in there, and we heard a scream. We suspected a trap first, but then I thought it might have been more survivors. I ordered us forwards into what I can only describe as a torture room. It was filled with horrible, vile contraptions of malice. When we came closer, we were all assailed with terrible, horrid images that I can still see flash before my eyes when I close them. They haunt me with their debased malice. But whatever sent those visions to me failed to scare me. It just made me angry. Just as suddenly as those... sickening visions came, they stopped. That's when we found him. Knight Baxter Talbot. He was strapped to a torture device, and it seemed like he had just breath his last. As we were trying to cut him loose, he started moving and trashing again, even though Dulaman kept insisting he was dead. It wasn't until the laughter begun that I realized something was amiss. A malign red mist started seeping around us, and this... thing that was once the Knight distorted and bloated before my very eyes, dragging itself free of its contraption, and baying for our souls, while the entire place was shaking, loose masonry tumbling down between us. I shouted at everyone to get out, and we ran...  
  
We ran all the way across to the other archway, which ended out into some narrow, dark passageway. The creature followed us, like a tide of evil, while we rushed our way into the tunnel. Dahgar set to collapse the ruined archway when the thing reached out, and grabbed Kristen. My heart froze in my chest. I simply dropped my weapons, and grabbed her, pulling with all my might even as the doorway was collapsing. Spirits, but I've never been more grateful for Bear's strength than it that very moment, literally trying to drag my beautiful Kristen away from the grasp of some primordial monster... I wouldn't have let go, for any reason. I would have stood there and died with her in my arms if it came down to it. But with blessed Bear's strength, and the efforts of the others, I pulled her free just as the passage collapsed. The look on her face. May I never see the depth of such abject terror in her eyes again. I was besides myself with fury for this... this... thing having dared to try and put a hand on Kristen. It took me several long moments to convince myself it was alright to let go of her.  
  
We pushed on deeper, only to find a large, pitch black cavern yawing along the pathway. Voices were calling to us from the darkness. The wounded Sylvari, whom Dulaman and Aed had carried through the entire ordeal, woke up and started responding. I think she thought they were her friends. We tried to tie her down, but despite her injuries, she slipped free and ran into the darkness, yelling and pleading. Then nothing. Ceirli said she saw her life force just... end. Then the voices changed, and they became our voices, calling out to us, trying to lure us in. Some of us wanted to... go in there, and see what had become of the Sylvari, but it was a trap. I regret not going in and finding out, but... it was so obvious a lure. I gave the command to move on, and consider the lass dead. Sending us into that darkness would have been madness.  
  
We pressed on through a long, narrow passage. We kept hearing the voices, and people started seeing things. I almost walked with my eyes closed, just to focus myself on the things I knew were real. Eventually, we came out back all the way around to the mechanism we traversed yesterday. It seems the entire passage wound round, and we dropped down into the yard with infernal trapped yard again. Dulaman volunteered to stay with the master lever, while we would run across. However, even as we made ready to head back, the beast that was chasing us dropped down from the open ceiling. We all rushed back off of the trap, and I ordered Dulaman to activate the mechanism now that the monster was squatting on top of it. Sure enough, the powerful spikes ripped through it, before it lashed out and mangled the lever, meaning we couldn't use that trick more than once.  
  
It was a... Ghastly sight. Like an enormous abomination made out of squirming limbs and pain. Fleshreavers flocked around it like it was some sort of king, and it blocked our exit, firmly forcing us into a confrontation. But, we had already wounded it, which meant that we could slay it. Besides, at the time, I was besides myself with rage. I charged at it, bellowing my fury, while the arrows and bullets started whistling over my shoulder. It mashed me into the ground, and it almost felt like it was flaying my soul alive. I lost my footing, and the monster leaped on top of me, trying to bludgeon me to death. Kristen came to my rescue, leaping at it in Snow Leopard's form, and damn well dragging it to the ground with her. She brawled with it, until I was back on my feet, and able to leap in with her. With tooth and claw, fire and sword, we exorcised it, until the spirits using the body as a host fled away, leaving us only with the battered, maimed remains of Knight Talbot.  
  
I wasted no time. We collected his body, and pushed on back into the prison wing we managed to use as our entry point. The spirits that possessed the body aren't gone. We only destroyed the host body. We found our way out, and called up the camp team guarding the entry on the surface. They let rope down, but even as we were making ready to finally leave that cursed place... Fionachae appeared, at the end of the corridor. She was grinning, and her smile just went wider, and wider until it split her head open. And then she was gone in an eye blink.  
  
We handed over the bodies, and the dog tags we recovered. I had a small debrief with the local First Crusader, but then I made haste to promptly board the airship back to Lion's Arch. The flight back was... subdued. We completed our objective, and we managed to at least put some of the missing expedition people to rest but... We couldn't save Fionaechae, and we left her as a puppet to whatever malign spirits haunt that cursed place. I'll write a report to command about what we found there. I am divided. One one hand, I hope no-one will ever be foolish enough to venture in there ever again, and on the other, I hope the Priory rip it apart, destroy those blasted spirits, and lay pour, deluded Fionachae to rest. We failed her, in the end, just like we failed Octavia Skylark, Chloe Alevyne and Sawyer Serie. That cuts me deepest. Should we have gone into that darkness, and try to find her? I don't know. I never will either.  
  
Kristen and I are glad to be home, though. Kristen has a haunted look on her face, and I can't blame her. We fought well, though, saved each other's lives today. I've never loved her more than I do now. She doesn't know how much she kept me sane and focused during these last two days. She was my talisman. I can only hope it will not haunt her too much. She's alseep now, thankfully, exhausted from the ordeal today. I'm close to collapse myself, but I promised I would write down the day's account before I would fall in bed next to her. Writing it down helps me make sense of it all. It's needed after these two days of horror.  
  
Hejja at least seems happy. She was awake when we came back. Da had a curious look on his face when he saw how Kristen and I looked, but he didn't asked. At least he understand exhaustion when he sees it. No doubt the stories will come tomorrow. Kristen took Hejja in her arms, and looked at her like... like I look at Kristen, every time I come home after a tour. They were both asleep a moment later, and da was away. Or it feels like it. I don't know how late it is, or how long I've been writing. At least I'm tired enough not to dream.  
  
106. Knight Baxter Talbot, possessed and exorcised.  
107. Fionachae, left in the dark.

# 32nd of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Slept well, surprisingly. Got woken up by Hejja wailing away in the morning, on account of being a hungry little lass. Kristen took her to her breast well enough, and it was all sorted. It struck me how easy it was to just fall back into the gentle domestic life of raising children, even though it was only yesterday morning that we were fighting for our lives. I still feel sore, and I try my best not to think about the things we saw. It was a blessing to have slept through the night quietly, and I thank Raven for watching over our slumber.  
  
It was several times today that I just stopped, and held Kristen in my arms, or held Hejja or Reuzen close. At moments when I least expected it, I just felt something fall over me. A realization, or a reminder, that snatched my mind away back to that cursed place. It fills my veins with ice, and I am angry at it because I realize I'm afraid of nothing. It's just a memory that makes my skin crawl, and it is too fresh on the mind to fade away for long. But then it passes, and I'm lost in my boy's garbled words as he runs around and shrieks in excitement as I chase him around, pretending to be a minotaur. I wrap Hejja in the Arctodus skin, and watch her look at me with her big, beautiful eyes. They're Kristen's, too. It's those things that keep me from going mad.  
  
Kristen's dealing with it in her own way, too. I'm happy she's here, and I think ultimately, we'll be stronger for having gone through these things together. Yesterday, as we got home, Wolfsmaiden gave Kristen her bow, though I'm not sure why. Kristen's been in communion with Snow Leopard, and has sanctified the weapon, before we returned it to Saana. The Spirits will give us the inspiration and the strength to allow us to see these things through. There is now shadow that cannot be vanquished by even the tinniest spark of light. We have always been that light in the dark, and though the world is a darker place with a place as cursed and corrupted as that damn ruin, we will work that much harder to outshine its darkness.  
  
Seeing terror like that in Kristen's eyes... I remember thew vows we made. I would always be the last arrow on her quiver. When she falls, I would be the one to keep her standing. We promised, and we stayed true, the both of us. In the face of this horror, we stayed strong, and we were by each other's side, much more than the others were. I dragged her back from the demon's grasp, and she smashed it off of me when it was about to crush me.  
Spirits, but it just makes me want to fight alongside her more. To really build a legend between us that would see our names etched into the sky along with the names of our greatest!  
Who knows, perhaps building a Lodge is not the way we should retire, eh?  
  
Well, either case, the day seems like it swept past like a torrent. One moment I was woken up, then I was playing with the children, the next I was at the shrines, consecrating that bow, and now I find that the sun has far set, and the day's out. I'm worried about what I'll see when I close my eyes, but knowing that Kristen and Hejja'll be there when I open them again does much to bolster my spirit. It'll be good to put another day between then and now.

# 33rd of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Sleep was troubled. Kristen told me I woke up with a scream, mumbled something, and then dozed off again. I can't remember what I dreamed off, but I can still feel a small bead of anxiety weighing on my mind from the events of a few days ago. Being home helps. Kristen having been there with me, and being here with me now helps. The children help. We talked about going to Southsun, or doing something, but I don't want to leave Hoelbrak. Not yet.  
I wanted to spend some time here, with Hejja and the Jotunling, before all those leave days have flown by again.  
  
Went out with Hejja on my arm to the Mourn. The Jotunling went along as well. He's being taught well! He pointed to the large Jora statue by Hero's Compass, and asked if it was his mommy. I put them both on my knee, and told them the story of Jora. Now, he points at every woman he sees, and asks me if they're also Jora. Hejja just giggles, and crawls around the Arctodus skin I put her down on. She plays with the snow, as if she wasn't born under falling snowflakes. She tried to put it in her mouth, and cried when it was too cold to eat. The Jotunling promptly batted the rest of the snow from her hands, which just made the girl more distressed. He means well, the boy, but he need to be more gentle with his little sister. No damage done though, Hejja's bawling didn't last more than a minute. A silly face, and kiss on her forehead, and she was back to pulling on my whiskers, and clinging to her Dolyak dolly.  
It's hard to believe my son will be two, soon. It makes me miss Freyja, where she is off to, building her own legend. Every time I go away, and everytime I return, it seems like they have changed so much. Before I know it, they will be slipping off to sit by Shaman Fierena's stories, throw snowballs at unwary travelers, and get in all sorts of troubles.  
  
For Kristen, it is so different too. She looks at me coming and going, and every time I return, she sees me being starstruck by our daughter, and my boy, and not least of all she herself. Sometimes she wishes she could roam as free as the wind across the mountains, and in that, I have built for her a cage with my love, but on the other hand, she sees it all as one of the greatest challenges she has to overcome. She loves Hejja, as much as I love my little girl, if not more, and that love is worth far more than anything else she may have given away in return. Speaking to her removed a weight from my heart that I didn't even know was there.  
For her, the raising our daughter is the challenge she accepted and is determined to see through in the coming years, as she walks the path of the Spirits. Of course she did not change from a huntress into a mother and a shaman overnight. It is a long journey that we walk together, even when we are so far away from one another.  
  
Anyway, Hejja's sound asleep, and Kristen and I are going to share a few bottles of Usha's latest brew together. Would be a time when that'd turn into an evening of outrageous carousing, but with both Usha and us having to keep an eye on the little ones, it's a little less explosively intense, but a lot more intimate. Besides, drunkenly making love to Kristen is pretty much my ideal version of a leave's evening anyway!

# 34th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Woke up hungover from yesterday. Thankfully, went to sleep with a jug of water next to the bed, and Hejja wasn't too loud overnight, or I'd have a splitting headache. At least I can say that Usha's new brew is doing well. Kirsten slept like a brick. At least there was no... well, things about what happened a few days ago in the jungle. It seems drinking that memory away wasn't a bad idea. When Kristen finally woke up, I teased her about getting lazy and sleeping in, hah. When she was hunting in the Shiverpeaks, before we killed that Claw, she was up and away before dawn, bow over the shoulder and quiver on her hip. I joke of course, I'd rather have her sleep in so I get to wake up next to her whenever Hejja decides to perform her own version of the Zintl Hylek greeting to the rising sun.  
  
Day itself passed well. I've set to making preparations for the Companion's Moot with da and Usha's help. We'll need to hold a war council, and da's got plenty of word about prey that might give us all a chance to test our prowess. We've also got Renn's 'friend', Tyr Frosteye to account for. The strange news is that I'm apparently a lot wealthier than I thought I was. According to Usha, I own... uh... a one-tenth share of a ship that trades in Timberline pine along the Sea of Sorrows, and half of a small Lion's Arch forge specializing in tool manufacture. She apparently managed to achieve this by emptying all of my accrued pay into investments, which have now steadily been giving returns for the past two seasons. I'd frankly all-but-forget about the writ I signed over to her, because it happened right before Hejja was born, and were called to muster for the Elonian tour. Usha confided with me that she was able to get a better read on the market thanks to her old Order of Whispers connections with the city suppliers, though she mentioned that would probably be something called 'insider trading' under Asuran contracts, which is apparently why most of the investments are based in Lion's Arch, and not in Rata Sum. I've done my share of penny-counting as a merchant, but Usha's insight into the Tyrian trade is beyond my comprehension. The good news is that I'm apparently making substantial amount of coin out of it, and Usha is looking to buy out more shares under my name if the income is steady. Oddly, I apparently have relatively little actual coin, asides from purse of silver pieces, as most of my wealth is 'tied up in assets'. The silvers I have are my spending money. If I understood it correctly, the longer I wait, the more spending money I will keep getting per season, as Usha takes a part of the profits, reinvests most of it, and then keeps Kristen and I living comfortably with only a marginal amount of the profit?  
So: I have a lot of money to buy a lot of ale. That's really what I wanted to write down, but I think I was just trying to make sense of it all myself by writing it out.  
Between us all, we'll make it into a grand moot, one to be remembered!  
  
Until then, though, there's plenty of time for small things. Once I've set the purchases, and da's followed-up on the hunting rumours, I might still take Hejja and Kristen out to Lion's Arch, or perhaps Southsun. I think sailing, or some beach time will be good. The little girl needs to see the world anyway, and Kristen deserves a little more time away from Hoelbrak now she's got an excuse to tell Valharantha that she'll be spending some days away from her duties as a shaman. Might even take the Jotunling out to see Lionhead's son Leif, or travel up to the Priory to see if Freyja, Grace and Asja are still rampaging around Ogden Stonehealer's backyard. I do miss Freyja, and I wonder how they're both doing with Aska. Such a bright child she always was.  
We'll see. We have a lot of time, for once.

# 35th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Put in my purchases from the brewers, and made sure there'll be food a plenty for the moot. The mountains are also abuzz with unusual prey and dangerous beasts. With the world's magic running rampant, it seems that there's plenty of critters that are growing beyond the skill of the younger hunters. Good! The mountains need good prey and fearsome monsters to vanquish, and it'll give the Companions an opportunity to prove their prowess while we wait for Jormag to awaken again. I wish we didn't need to wait to fulfill our pledges, but we've been waiting to settle this grudge for nigh-on two hundred years. We can wait a little longer.  
  
With the moot settled, Kristen and I talked about going to Lion's Arch for a day or two, take Hejja and the Jotunling along to the beaches. It might help to distract the mind a bit more. I keep having flashes of... well, bad things. When I close my eyes, it is hard not to remember reliving seeing all those horrible, insane things...  
A bit of sailing along the Sea of Sorrows, and building sand castles with my boy will do me good, I think. Me and Kristen both.

# 36th of Phoenix

Lion's Arch.  
  
Pleasant day. Decided to take the children to Lion's Arch with Kristen. I went to pick up Reuzen early in the morning, and found Hrist and Hildr acting a little tense. Not sure if I missed something, or if they're being a little weird about me taking the boy out to another city for a few days.  
Either way, it was good idea. I've seen my share of sand these past two seasons, but I think it was a welcome enough change for Kristen and the two little ones. We passed by the market before we put out a plaid under the familiar sight of Fort Marriner's guns. We had a pail of these tiny deep-fried fishes, boiled and salted eggs and fresh shrimp that went perfectly with the bread rolls. My boy was so excited to take off into the sand though, he was almost too distracted to eat properly! Made a right mess. Hejja was a good lass, though, except for almost upending the sardines into the sand while I was trying to get some sun oil on the Jotunling. Have to be careful with them, sitting out in the cozy comforts of Hoelbrak and mother's bosom all day, they'd get sunburn in the time it took me to blink. I took Freyja out to Lion's Arch for grain trading when she was a little girl once, and she burnt her nose pretty badly.  
  
But aye, going along the side of the bay. We built a sand castle around Kristen and Hejja, using an entrenching tool I quickly ran up to the fort to requisition from the on-staff Quartermasters. If you can't use your connections in the Vigil to get a shovel so you can play with your children in the sands, then you're doing something wrong.  
The boy was apparently a little afraid of going into the water, but I walked him in along with me until he was used to it. Then it was more a question of getting him out again. Kristen helped me also put Hejja down in the shallows, where the waves lapped up at the beach. She was mesmerized with the magic and sound of the sea. She was quiet, just looking out into the water, while the Jotunling was laughing and splashing about.  
  
They're both a bit worn out from the day's excitement, now though. Kristen and I are about to head along to Lionhead's place and put the small ones to bed. Might see if there's anything good happening fight-wise to watch, or we'll enjoy a drink together, catch up a little with Kalla.  
  
For tomorrow, I saw the man who rents out sailing boats at the docks is still there. Might put us all on a boat, like I usually like to do when we're in Lion's Arch, and sail us out into the sea for a few hours tomorrow.

# 37th of Phoenix

Lion's Arch.  
  
Good day! Good day. Drunk, because of a service barrel in the Marriner pub, but I'll get to that.  
  
Went out sailing with Kristen and the children like I wanted. Was a bit overcast in the morning, but the wind and sun both picked up later in the day, and I was able to sail the boat out a good distance onto the Sea of Sorrows. Not out of sight of land, though, but out far enough to be somewhat in the open water. Kristen had Hejja on her knee at the prow for a good bit, while the Jotunling 'helped' me steer the boat along the waves.  
Around noon, I let the sails down, and we ate while the boat drifted along. The Jotunling and Hejja both fell asleep, so I decided to keep the sails down for a while longer, and let myself drift away out into the open sea for a moment. It's one of those moments I'll remember, lazing away under furled sails, Kristen with a grin from ear to ear, while we whispered to each other as to not wake the little monsters aboard up.  
Resumed sail early enough in the afternoon, and then pulled alongside a galleon on its last stretch home from Amnoon of all places, according to its pennants and flags. We passed them by at a few hundred meters, and waved to some of the people on the deck. We were flying a Lion's Arch pennant, so it was a good way to welcome them home. Not long thereafter we sailed under the guns of Claw Island, and then back to port. Was almost dusk by then, and the two smalls one were decidedly knocked out from their long day at say, as was Kristen. Carried the two little ones back to Lionhead's place, and let Kristen have an early night.  
  
I myself went back on Marriner pub. I saw a notice that said there was a service keg for soldiers of the Pact, and sure enough, there were plenty of the Ashen folks there, getting drunk as pie. I was hoping to bring Kristen along, but the poor wife was too knackered after spending an entire day of keeping two norn children on a tiny boat in check, so I can't blame her. Besides, she needs her beauty sleep.  
The service keg was a good laugh though. There was improvisation performance from many people, which included a competition with Crepilly won. I drank more than my fill of ale, and Astrid looks like a carrot, having dyed her hair. Yep. Bright orange.  
  
A few odd things too. One was that Carbine looked like she'd been beaten. Apparently a bad run-in with her own father. She didn't elaborate on it, so I didn't ask, but you know how that is. I can't imagine anyone beating their own children.  
Meanwhile, it seems Astrid's mother, Elder Sjofn, has started to pass under Raven's wing. I can only hope the old woman finds the strength to go out on one last hunt before she passes from the world, and leaves it as she lived. But, that is up to the Spirits and her strength now.  
  
That somewhat grim news asides, the mood was surprisingly light, and many of the performances were funny, and good for a few laughs indeed. No doubt, copious amounts of ale helped.  
But! Now I'm going to perform Operation Slip Into Bed With Wife Without Waking Up Anyone In This House, so wish me luck. If this is the last you ever heard of me: I died happy.

# 38th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Back from Lion's Arch, and back to preparing the moot tomorrow.  
Been a long day, but it'll be good. There's enough ale here to turn the Crystal Desert back into a sea!  
But, tired. Not much exciting, after yesterday's beautiful day.  
  
Sleep's still a bit fucked, though.

# 39th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Companion's moot's started off well! Most of the company made it here, bar a few, and there's plenty of people from the Chapter. I also invited a mercenary company of norn called the Magpies that I know have fought north to attend, and they were out in force, which made for interesting conversation and talk. Some of them are old acquaintances, and plenty new faces too. It was good, though. Very good.  
  
We held war council on Jormag's fate. Many things were discussed, but the gist of it all seems to be that we need Braham here to lead us as a figurehead, to add weight behind the tip of the spear we'll thrust straight into Jormag's heart. But that's only one of our worries. The people who have tried to venture north speak of terrible storms and blizzards that are almost beyond difficult to bear. Jormag's ice covers everything like a glacier. Beyond a simple need to warm ourselves in the cold, we'll need to bring supplies, and deal with a never-ending storm. The Magpies have mapped some of the earlier havens and shelters along the way, which will give us the basis for planning our logistics. The real difficulty will be ensuring my kinsmen won't rush off north blindly, forgetting that they need a way back home. How do you organize a people that traditionally defy organization?  
I wonder if we can do this alone, or if we will need to remember the founding of the Pact, and lean on our allies to defeat our ancestral foe. For all the strengths of the norn, it seems our weaknesses, few as they are, may prove fatal to us in the end.  
  
Hm. Rest of the evening was good. I spent a long time telling stories to some of the Magpies' younger norn, and just joking and laughing around. Maeva's offered to watch Hejja tomorrow, which will mean Kristen might be able to join us on the hunts. We've tracked down plenty of powerful prey for us to slay, and bring honour to the Spirits.

# 40th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Back from the great hunts, that have brought us all great trophies and much honour. We assembled at dawn, and set out in hunting parties around the Shiverpeaks, many of them trekking far and long across the mountains in search for prey.  
  
I accompanied two of the Magpies, Scarletwolf and the young Steinar, as well as my friend and Companion Aghi, north into the Foothills to hunt down a monstrously large minotaur that was spotted nearby called Magnus. We were also joined by Renn's friend, Rehyia Ulfgardkin. We found it, eventually, after some clever tracking done by the lass, grazing out by a mountain cleft. Spirits, but it was huge, like the ones we saw in the Highlands south! It's been a long time since minotaur bulls this large were spotted in the north. Not alone either. There was a minotaur cow, and some calves with them too. I challenged the beast, and the two adult minotaurs charged us. Steinar and Scarlet we're able to wrestle the cow to the ground, and keep her pinned, while Aghi, Ulfgardkin and I did our best to bring down the bull. Spirits, but he slapped me around. I've got a bruise the size of a moa egg on my chest where it hammered me back. I almost managed to spike it with my sword, before it sent me flying, leaving my blade stuck in the hide. Aghi managed to channel a lighting spell into it, though, like a lightning rod. It did much to incapacitate the beast, after which I was able to wrench the head aside by the horns, after which Aghi and Ulfgardkin manage to slay it.  
We had some trouble with the cow, but a fire spell managed to drive it off back to its calves, which is good. We came here to slay the mighty Magnus. The calves will need their mother to survive, and perhaps one day, we will test our strength against Magnusson and Magnusdottir!  
  
At the end of the day, after the sun set beyond the horizon, we assembled again at Hero's Compass, and presented our many trophies. We had Magnus' might horned head to show for the day. Other parties brought back the head of a monstrously large Skelk, and the bodies of several diseased wolves which we returned to Wolf's shrine for cleansing. There was also the fangs of a great frost worm, and the horns of a great Aatxe, all of which were worthy prey brought down by groups of able hunters, and their trophies presented to the Lodges as offerings.  
Kristen and Renn, finally, headed into the upper Foothills to finally bring down Tyr Frosteye for good. From what I hear, they did exceptionally well inf taking on significant group of Svanir, raining arrows down on them as they approached, before finishing them off up close. Renn brought back her rival's head in a bag. Kristen took a few nick on the hull, cuts and bruises on her arms and legs. The fighting knocked the air out of her, because she went to bed soon as she returned. Well, it's not often I get to take care of the injured wife, rather than the other way around! She's in for a treat, then!  
  
Meanwhile, Maeva and Bjorn are still keeping an eye out for little Hejja, so at least the night will be quiet. I hope they're doing well with my little girl! Oddly, I kind of miss her sleeping in her crib nearby.

# 41st of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Sobering up a bit before bed. Everything's spinning after the alemoot, which isn't surprisingly. But, I'd rather be up now, drink plenty of water, and sleep long in the morning than go to bed with a head full of alcohol, and wake up to find daemons dancing in my brainpan. Enough things haunt me there already.  
  
Started the day off well. I woke up early, and decided to put a plan I worked out yesterday in motion to really pamper my sweetheart a little. After our adventures over leave, the Maguuma, our hunting, and yesterday's battle where she fiercely faced a shaman, she deserves a little appreciation. So I made sure I was out of the furs early, without waking her up, and baked her a steak and kidney pie, along with a good pan-fry of mushrooms, beans and a moa egg. Topped it off with a side of chopped root vegetables that I bought for a few coppers in the market commons. Finally, I found Aghi, and had him help me fill up a large washing tub with steaming hot water, and carry it up to our corner of the lodge.  
It's good to be able to put my love into something. Working away the tension from her back and shoulders, washing her hair, and then bandaging her battle-wounds... They're the things I promised to do when we forged our legends into one, and it pleases me beyond word, with every passing breath, that I found Kristen, and she found me.  
Still, it seems she was a little worse for wear, and decided to rest in while I entertained the rest of the Companions. Who am I to begrudge so fine a shieldmaiden a day's rest, eh?  
  
Then there was the alemoot, and Spirits... Hah, it was an adventure. This is what we stocked all the ale up for, and you better know we drank almost all of it! The Companions, guests and visitors together did a fine job of causing a general ruckus, which was as you'd expected. There were three challenges to overcome. The first was the simplest: collect a keg from the ice of the Mourn, and bring it back to the kegstand. Of course, that is the one challenges where I slipped on the ice like a buffoon and fell on my ass. The second challenge was to climb Hrothbeir's Rest, and collect a Dolyak's tail suspended in the branches. I downed plenty of extra drink beforehand, and then still managed to do it handily! I've climbed Hrothbeir's Rest while drunk often enough, usually with Kristen in tow, hah. And then finally, we had to ride ice drakes around the Rest, while the critters were trying to throw us the entire ride. I managed to, by some miracle, hang on, and guide the critter around much like I did when riding Tuhaibei in Elona.  
By the end, despite my earlier setback, it seems Astrid and I were sharing the lead, so we held a kegsplit. I was so drunk, I simply fell over, meaning Astrid's actually won the alemoot, hah! Close second myself, though, so that's good. I blame a lazy liver from being on tour too much.  
  
But aye, asides from that, it's pretty much a haze. I think I spoke to some of the Magpies, and joked about. Eventually, I came back home to find Kristen already abed, so I decided to sober up a bit, and write. Nauja dropped by, and we had a little conversation about what she's been doing. Lately, she's been working on training some of the younger norn to proper warriors, though she finds they lack the necessary experience out here. She's asked me if the Vigil would have them, so I'll take the lot with me to the muster in a few days, and see them enlisted. We can always use more norn willing to see the world, do their part, and learn something about the wars we're fighting within and without the Shiverpeaks.  
  
Anyway. I'm starting to get a mild headache, and my eyelids are turning to lead. I'm going to put away the book, and crawl in next to Kristen, where I may or may not stay for as long as I possibly can.

# 42nd of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Aftermath. Spirits, but it feels like all Hoelbrak is hungover.  
Maeva and Bjorn brought Hejja back around. She seemed happy enough, so that's good. Little lass didn't give them too much trouble, and they both seemed like they enjoyed their time babysitting well enough.  
  
The rest of the day was cleaning up, taking it easy, and falling asleep when I sat down and closed my eyes, with Hejja tucked into the fold of my tunic like a cub. At least there's a few more days of sweet nothing to do.

# 43rd of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Quiet time. Tomorrow I need to depart early enough to report to the Vigil Keep, but I'm not staying the day. I get to come back home for a few extra days, and celebrate my son's birthday before I'm to report back for duty.  
It's been a good few days at home, though. Proper leave, after the seasons over the sea, and a well-deserved rest. It might also have been the single longest time Kristen and I have spent together, which is funny to think about, considering we're married, and have children. It was good, though I think my period of 'rest' was quite the opposite for Kristen. If anything, she's been busy with me and the children for the past few days.  
  
I honestly don't have much else to write. I'm just enjoying being home. I'll need to see about doing something for Reuzen's year day, eh?

# 44th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Set off early enough, but I had to wait for the group of Nauja's students I was going to take with me. In the end, only one of the showed up, as the other three apparently had a fight, and then set off, each heading into another cardinal direction. The lad, one Kunas, was good material though. A little on the quiet side of things, but eager. At least it was better company than heading along the way on my own.  
  
Returned to the Keep soon enough, though only for some medal ceremony and formality. I've been given some recognition for the fighting, which is nice enough. I signed off on the commendations issues, and had the pleasure of handing out a few awards to several soldiers of the Chapter. Here's hoping they appreciate the gesture.  
Also: apparently Warmaster Ironhide has reinstated standard Vigil uniforms, which apparently annoys several people. I don't really see the issue, but I suppose I've just been wearing the reforged Vigil set I've had all along. At this point, it'll survive longer than I will.  
  
Anyway, that was earlier today. I've returned back home to prepare for the Jotunling's birthday. I stopped by Lion's Arch looking for a gift or a toy for the Jotunling, but I didn't really find anything in forms of toy store. I was about to give up and return home when I passed by a carpenter, and saw a wooden centaur mounted on rockers. It was very expensive, but thankfully, I had a gold coin from a bet I made with Scarletwolf over the alemoot, so I bought it, and carried it home. I underestimated how heavy it was, and almost slipped down the road to Leopard Lodge. Imagine that, slipping down the slope and smashing the entire expensive bloody thing to smithereens. It's a beautiful thing, though. I'll use some of the hunting furs for a saddle, and then my little lad will have a mighty steed to go with his armies.

# 45th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
My son's growing up so fast. It seems like only yesterday that I got that letter, and nearly jumped out of my skin to rush off back home. Now he's running around, beginning to learn how to speak, and sing, and all those other things that surprise me when I see him again after the long seasons abroad. Of course, I know that now the real trouble will begin. He'll make up his own mind about things, and I expect Helga, Hrist and Kristen will have their hands full when the lad decides that he does or doesn't want something, or he starts coming home with his first clumsy cuts and bruises. That's norn toddlers for you, eh?  
Talking about bruises, the lad was delighted with the rocking centaur the moment I carried it into the lodge. He must've spent a good hour or so on it, giggling every time the thing tilted back and forth. Hrist was worried he'd fall off and hurt himself, but a good skin underneath should be enough to keep it to a mild bruise. I'm more concerned with his willingness to share the damn thing. There's other children in the lodge, and I can only expect a few of them will want to climber up on the Jotunling's mighty centaur for themselves sooner or later. Ah well, it'll be a good way for him to appreciate lodge life even further.  
  
Happy to have been here today.  
Tomorrow, back to the Keep again. Who knows how long I'll be away this time.

# 46th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Well, here we are again, back in the field. Well, it seems the entire command ruckus with Alleshia and Maeva is still ongoing, so we're being kept at the keep under training routine. We're overseen by several of the command cadre Warmasters, including Alleshia's direct superior, Warmaster Ironhide. She's a decent enough sorts. Shiverpeak norn, despite the notion you might mistake them for a Charr by the name. Astrid and I spoke to her a bit, when I thanked her for granting me the extra few days yesterday and the evening before. Godsbrand though it clever to make a "riding a Snow Leopard" joke when Ironhide asked how I'd spent the last few days.  
  
Truth be told, I did wake up this morning with Kristen straddling me in her Vigil uniform, and an enormous grin on her face, so that was a nice parting gift. The obvious asides, I do feel like leave's been good to us both, despite the troubles and trepidation of our unfortunate adventure into the Maguuma. Normally, when I go on leave, it feels so... rushed isn't the right word. But I feel pressured to make use of every second as if it is the most precious commodity in the world. This time, it finally felt like I could just relax and enjoy myself without counting the days as they passed. It also feels like Kristen and I have grown closer together again. Understanding Kristen's new challenges with staying in Hoelbrak will help us both make each other happier.  
For once, I am also not entirely unhappy to leave. But rather, I look forwards to when I next return home, and see how the garden of my life continues to flourish.  
  
Chapter business, meanwhile, seems to be the usual. A whole lot of new recruits being poured in to replace the folks signing out, leading to a host of new faces appearing at the gates, each one waving their transfer papers up in the air. Not sure how many of them will make the cut yet, but I suppose we'll see in due time.  
  
Oh, and Athy carved an image of the troops in the last stand, at Palawa Joko's gates.  
It actually made me lose my composure for a moment. Duty and honour, my friends, may those who fell at my side be recognized for the heroes they are. We were all ready to exchange our lives for a little time. I know what a few minutes are worth. Sometimes nothing, sometimes a lifetime.

# 47th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Not much going on today, as the First Crusaders have training to themselves. They're doing good enough, and the troops are moving out on exercise often enough. Mostly, it's a holding pattern until the court martial is concluded. I'm not doing much as a result, asides from department duties.  
  
I spoke a little with Astrid. She's in a bit of a weird place, with her mother being on her deathbed. I didn't know she had such a troublesome relationship with her folks and family. We mostly joke around, but she knows she's always got a second family back here, and as a Companion and a friend, she'll always be welcome with me and mine.  
  
Anyway, it seems like more of the same for a few days. I won't bother wasting too much words on it. I've got a few training reports to chomp through before sleep.

# 48th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Another training day, though it seems it was less training, and more of a field deployment. Sinclair had the troops clean out some more of the risen in the bogs near the south-west, which tend to always contain some remnant risen. They looked pretty battered, though. Still, I only saw one trooper sent to medical, and I gave the rest leave to clean up in the lower yard.  
  
For the remainder, we sorted out assignments, and Astrid and I spoke a bit more. She's a bit weighed down with the looming shadow of her mother's death. No last blaze of glory for Elder Sjofn. Astrid's determined to remember her mother how she lived, rather than how she is dying, so that's why she's still here. Not much else to be done except being here for support when it comes down to it.  
  
Meanwhile, duties at the Keep remain light.

# 49th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Quiet again. A volunteer patrol was sent out along the Lion's Road, picked up on what seems to be a raided ore transport. Probably Dredge, as I can't really imagine anyone else stealing an ore shipment of all things. A job for the Lionguard. It bothers me how lawless this part of Kryta always is. If it wasn't for the Vigil out here, there wouldn't be anyone out here keeping an eye on things. The Seraph barely come down further than Ascalon Settlement, and the Lionguard stick to their roads more so than is healthy. Hm.  
  
I rode out on Tuhaibei, but the raptor seemed distressed, and it was not enjoyable riding. I think the climate is distressing them, even though it isn't as cold out here. I've let Wolfsmaiden know, might be worth sending them to the Silverwastes, or south, to climates more like Elona.

# 50th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Fighting Elder Dragons, and Gods, and yet sometimes our greatest enemy remains self-pity. Spirits, I wish they were all norn sometimes, so they would stop trying to think themselves into a box, and instead just *be*.

# 51st of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Another training day. I gave little to say about it, asides from a pleasant enough talk with Fletcher.  
Crepsilly's still in the hole she dug. She'll need to get out, or we'll need to actually start posing ourselves questions about her service fitness. Some people just crack, after all. I'd rather not smash them to the floor, and rob them of years of their life again this time.  
  
Sleep's been troubled. I keep... hm. Just the that Maguuma deployment weighing on me. I feel bad for leaving Kristen alone with her dreams too. I can only hope the Spirits and little Hejja give her some comfort while I'm away, looking after my this bunch again. I'm tired, but I'd rather let the candle burn down to the stump while I stare up at the ceiling than be alone in the dark again. Writing helps, but I don't really know what to say today.  
I think Neya thinks she's broken, but we're all dented, bruised and scuffed. Some must fight, so that all can be free.

# 52nd of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Same shit, different day. No wise insights. Just spoke a bit with people about the... things in the Maguuma. Sometimes I'm still trying to make sense of it all. Astrid's right, it'll be good to get back out there. Drown out the horrors of yesterday with the terrors of tomorrow.

# 53rd of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Slept poorly, which made me cranky. I've tried to keep away from others on the western bastion, just so they don't spike my temper. Figures, after seasons in the desert, this is also when the sun really starts giving me a headache. I miss the cold wind and the snows.

# 54th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Headache's better, at least. I spent the entire day being interrogated by one of the Warmaster's staff, Cleartide, about Elona and Vabbi. She was really proving for an angle, but I didn't give her much room. Still, I was honest about what I knew happened, even though I wasn't there myself. Seems they're really taking the entire thing apart bit by bit, and making sure there's no dirt stuck anyway. They won't find anything, I don't think.  
  
Anyway, First Crusaders are still handling the troops, so I've not had much on hand lately. I think we're waiting for Ironhide's staff to reach a verdict befofe they'll give us our marching orders.

# 55th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Another day. Notice is up, apparently Ironhide is calling a muster in a few days to assign us our "new Warmaster", and then hopefully give us some marching orders. I'm curious as to what happened to Alleshia, and annoyed at the idea we'll get some random idiot to command us into battle. Worst case, it'll be the type that just makes my work so much harder for no reason. I suppose we'll see. I'm not even sure if I'm willing to fight alongside anyone else, short of General Almorra or Braham Eirsson...  
Egh.  
  
Slept well today, for a change. Still miss Kristen when I wake up, more so than usual. These days, I open my eyes, and I ask myself why I should get out of bed, if there's nothing for me to do except wait, and wait, and wait.  
Eh, I'm just being a grouchy old man, I suppose.

# 56th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Hm. Another day at the Vigil Keep. I'm getting used to sleeping on my own again, though I think I keep seeing poor, damned Fionachae, grinning that impossible, head-splitting smile as we departed, haunting me right before I open my eyes. I hate myself for the fact that we did not fully destroy the evil haunting that damned place, and left her spirit in the daemon's paws. I can only hope that it was merely mimicking her form, and that she got some rest in death... A vain hope, I fear.  
  
But I shouldn't let my mind dwell on it more than I need to. Today was quiet, though Vatorn came asking me about him and Alexina again. A problematic conundrum, made worse by their own insistence on circumventing the rules. If they'd just followed the damn regulations, they'd have gotten their permission by now. Bah. Apparently Sinclair also decided to break-up with his fiancé, and take away their son away from her. I disapprove, but I'm not going to meddle in affairs other than my own. Vatorn did bring it up, because it will almost certainly weigh on his ability to work alongside Sinclair in the future.  
A headache in waiting, that.  
  
In all honesty, I'm getting tired of these petty problems that seems to just surface when we don't have enemies for us to fight. I'd rather test my sword on Forged and Awakened again. Spirits preserve me if they ever try to offer my a desk job.

# 57th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Well, it seems we're getting ready to deploy again, with Ironhide running us through department checks and the like. We have one new recruit in engineering as a result, one River Carruso, who apparently used to be a bandit! I'm not sure how much of it is bluster, but she somehow made it through recruitment, rather than into the prison cells, so it doesn't seem like she's as much of a firecracker as she says she is. Either case, she seemed like she knew a thing or two about explosives, so I'll put Aed to task about seeing if we can't turn her into a semi-effective sapper. If anything, a little departmental oversight might help steer the lass away from her attitude issues, and turn her into a better soldier long term. If not, well, she'll either blow her own limbs off, or I'll kick her back to whatever bandit's nest she crawled out of. Nothing of value lost there.  
  
Asides from that, folks are keeping busy. They took down Neya's new heavy-duty rifle to the firing range, and a few of the folks had a good time putting some rounds downrange. Others went for a swim, which I can understand in this weather.  
Oh, shit. I just realized I was having a conversation with Kestrel that I suddenly walked out on when people started bothering me with Knight business. Eh. Should've said something, I suppose. Sometimes I wish folks came to talk to me more about non-official business, like Soulshriek did the day before. Not that I resent doing my duties, but sometimes it feels a little like I'm running the entire Vigil Keep on my own. I suppose the Warmaster and Tactician being court martialed doesn't help much.  
  
Ah well. I suppose the good thing is that every day that passes is another day that brings me closer to home, eventually. After you come back from leave, the seasons always move by so damn slowly.

# 58th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Things are slowly being put in motion, I think, with the same usual buzz of gentle activity. The soldiers do their best to make use of their time, so they hang around, go to swim in the river below the Keep, and generally just try to make the best of it all while we wait for the inevitable deployment order. It's a lazy Krytan summer for most, but an overly warm broil for me. I've gotten used to the sweating and the discomfort of the armour, but I just sit bare-chested in front of the window when it cools down, let the wind pass by. At least we weren't in Elona over the summer season.  
  
I've also given the engineers the go ahead to bring out some of the toys and conduct exercise tomorrow for drill. Hopefully, that'll help keep their memories fresh, and it gives the Ballisticians an opportunity to show off. We'll see how they do with that tomorrow.

# 59th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Well, seems that the verdict's fallen. Ironhide has reinstated Alleshia to Warmaster, and put her back in command. That'd ordinarily be a reason for a lot of rejoicing, but unfortunately, the court martial did find Maeva guilty for insubordination, as she bypassed Alleshia when she accepted the Mordant Crescent terms of surrender. She's been committed to punitive duties for a season, while I received a rank brevet to Tactician. I greatly resent the rank, because I got it off of Maeva's disciplinary notice. It doesn't even mean anything, as I think I'll just be doing the same work I've always been doing. Ranks are just labels that get put on people anyway, what matters is the respect you get from the people you're supposed to command. I'll serve a season as Tactician, I suppose, and then Maeva's welcome the rank when she comes back. She did end up making the tough choice no-one else was forced to make. Despite all the woman's less desirable traits, that does accord her my respect.  
  
We also have marching orders. Out to Orr, but not the usual hotzones. The eastern coast, where the Sylvari have been doing work on nurturing Orr back to life, after the Marshal's work in the Artesian Waters. I suppose it'll be a good opportunity for some of the recruits to get their Orr deployment in. I'll need to start thinking about an ordnance package for the deployment. We have a few days with medical and equipment checks, so I've got the time to pass on the requisitions I need.  
  
Talking about engineering, Sel and Aed were able to run Mai and Layfon through some explosive certifications, giving them the very basics of our demolition kits, as well as bringing Little Zara, our carronade, out for practise. I had them end by firing an actual roundshot chalked with Joko's head into the lake, just to give them a taste of the real thing.  
I suppose we can start of getting back into the swing of things with a bang.

# 60th of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Well, we're down to equipment checks, which always last the entire day as the Quartermasters turn over every stone, empty every pocket, and generally scour the area for anything out of the ordinary. You'd think that at this stage, everyone's used to just having what they need on them, but somehow there's always something here and there that needs adjustment. Well, at least I'll know that they'll all be equipped with gas-masks once we hit the Orrian shores again, and that their equipment's all working.  
  
In other news, Bhrom was recalled to the Citadel, and Neya requested special permission to accompany him for a day, and give him a send-off. I allowed the request, since she will be back before muster tomorrow. Ordinarily, that shouldn't cause any issues, and it's the sort of kindness I've enjoyed in the past. Seems well to pass it on, considering the two behave like model soldiers for much of the time. I wonder how Neya will manage. She's showing little cracks, and I'm on the edge if I want to make she doesn't shatter by intervening early. On the other hand, I think she'll suffer worse from not being allowed to continue her service. A complex question for which I don't have an answer yet.  
  
Medical checks tomorrow. Another long day of standing in line to just tell them "I'm just as (un)healthy as last time!"  
Ah well. At least that's usually a good opportunity to just hang around and talk to people.

# 61st of Phoenix

Vigil Keep.  
  
Medical check-ups, and close to the last stage of readiness. Went just about as it always does, with a lot of people standing awkwardly in line before being peered at by a medic for a few minutes, and then being told you're just as healthy as you were a moment before! I mean, I know why we have the procedure, but sometimes it feels like an exercise in tediousness and futility. But I suppose that's why I'm not a quartermaster or a medic.  
  
Either case, seems like we're just about ready for deployment. Been a few years since we last saw Orr, I wonder how much of it has changed since we were last there. Maybe Trahearne's magic has finally started healing the wounds of the lost land. The briefing mentioned Sylvari settlers. Imagine them reclaiming Orr as their new home. Is it even possible for them to plant and nurture a new seed like Ventari, and cultivate it into the Grove? When you consider it, that notion that so noble a being was grown from the seed of Mordremoth's malice; it certainly does impress upon you the strength of Ventari's conviction and dedication. Also a story of sorts about how much we are shaped by the hands and words of our fathers and mothers. It makes you wonder if Ventari, when considered as the centaur, would have raised his own foal as well as he nurtured the Pale Tree.  
  
Makes me think of my own children, eh? Maybe one day they'll read these scribbles. They're no Ventari's Tablet, but perhaps there's some note of inspiration to be found somewhere in here. May they all grow up to tower over me like the mountain does over the valley. I would look upon the peaks of their accomplishments, and feel nothing but pride.

# 62nd of Phoenix

Hoelbrak!  
  
A nice surprise, that. Alleshia gave us all a two-day stretch of leave before muster, and then a straight deployment into Orr shortly thereafter. That means I hightailed it back to Lion's Arch, and from there through the gates as fast I could. You always have to make as much use of these free hours as you can. Still, seems I've caught Kristen at the exact time she went out to pay homage at Leopard shrine in the Foothills, so I'm just sitting in Leopard's Lodge, having a pint of beer, and writing down the journal for today. Hopefully, Kristen'll be back soon with Hejja and Valharantha. Until then, well, I can get merrily drunk, and see if any of the other Chapter norn will drop by the lodge.  
Just have to make sure I don't get too drunk.

# 63rd of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
Spirits, what a night! I got roped into storytelling, and drank myself way past beyond merry before Kristen got back. I vaguely remember standing on tables and retelling the tales of the Elonian tour. I must've gotten something in my head, because I woke up with red pain smeared over myself and Kristen, and half the furs, and my armour no-where to be found. Thankfully, it seems Elder Mikkul kept himself sober throughout the thing, and passed it to Shaman Wovil in the morning, who told Kristen where I could come and collect it. The hangover made the morning sun and the wind feel like a pair of Jotuin dancing in my skull, but that's how you know you're alive. A good wash to get that damn red paint off helped as well. According to Kristen, I had "surprise tactician' daubed on my chest, and I all but carried her off. I suppose I wasn't *too* drunk then.  
  
The children are doing well, thankfully, though I miss Freyja being here occasionally, when the little ones remind me of her. If I had more time, I'd go and visit them in the Priory, but with only a few days to spare, it seems too short. Next leave, however...  
Hejja's still a bright little gemstone of a child, even though Kristen's told me she was ill for a few days before. Da and Skaadi helped Kristen take some extra care of her, though, and she's a healthy pumpkin again. I hope she remains in good health. Being away knowing my sweet little lass was ill would trouble me no end. I think I'll go with Kristen into the Foothills tomorrow to hunt, and make an offering to the Spirits, asking them to keep Hejja and Reuzen in good health, when they are still so vulnerable in childhood.  
  
No stories for Kristen yet, this surprise leave, though keen to hear we'll be heading to Orr. Kristen was in Orr back in 1325. Imagine if I had met her then, eh? She seemed almost keen to come with me, though I think the memory of the Maguuma still lingers a bit. It feels good to wake up and no longer be alone, though. Makes everything in your head just go quiet.

# 64th of Phoenix

Hoelbrak.  
  
A long day in the forests and the slopes, out hunting, but without a catch for the day. That might seem disappointing, but it wasn't. Walking through the forests with Hejja in a basket, and Reuzen on my shoulder was worth the day. We made a fire with pinecones, and I set to telling stories to my son while Kristen tended the fire. I don't think we had much need for actual hunting, truth be told, as we stayed until the sun started setting before we made back to Hoelbrak.  
  
No hunting trophy for the Spirits, so I brought them back roasted pine cones from the fire. Not the skill of the hunter, but the love of the father, for that one.

# 65th of Phoenix

Lion's Arch.  
  
Well, we're leaving tomorrow, setting off to sail south to Orr. Aed's got an ordnance package listed, and Seleea and Vaxun submitted a golem-suit to the engineering supplies, which spares up a good amount of supply space on the yaks, as long as they can keep the thing running. The issue is usually that when the Asuran stuff breaks down, you have to leave it behind. I suppose we'll see how it goes in Orr, eh? As good a field trial as any place in Tyria.  
  
Fletcher also held a training exercise today after march, giving the troops a taste of what it is to be put under marksman fire. It seems to have gone well from what I saw, though I'll admit I was preoccupied for most of it.  
  
On a sadder note, Elder Sjofn, Astrid's mother, seems to have passed into the Mists over these last few days, and Astrid is not taking it too well. She seems determined to occupy her mind and hands with other matters, and I cannot fault her for that. It always cuts deeply when an Elder dies of sickness, rather than the glory of battle. I pray to the Spirits that they there is some rest in the Mists for all who pass, even if they do not sit at the warrior's table with the battle-dead. I was angry at Astrid for a bit, because I didn't know what happened, but I think we settled it in the end. I can understand her pain. Best to give her the room she needs, but be there as the friend she needs when it matters most.

# 66th of Phoenix

Shipboard, making good time to Orr. Wind is a good south-western gale, heading south. From Dwayna's Heart, we'll arrive near the Orrian shores tomorrow around noon, unless the winds change overnight.  
  
Meanwhile, I'm enjoy the sight and smell of the open seas. There are uncomfortable memories to these waves, but also good ones. Of freedom. Adventure. How I wish I could take the helm, and steers us out into the Unending Ocean, turn Dwayna's Heart to my back, and simply see how far the horizon really stretches! The world is so large, and yet we know only so little of it. Perhaps, with terrors of Orr dying down, we can once more rediscover the world around us?  
The question of what we will find in far-away lands is enticing. Who knows what secrets and marvels are hidden away at the very edges of the world?  
  
But first, duty calls us to Orr. The stepping stone to the rest of the world.

# 67th of Phoenix

Reclamation Camp.  
  
We arrived a little than I expected, though I took a sighting from the ship's deck before noon. Funnily enough, we're not very far south from where we passed around the Steamspur's cape, and then headed east. It's funny that thinking back now, I can remember the excitement we felt when we thought we'd braved the worst of the Orrian straits, and were in clear waters on to the Crystal Desert. How bitterly disappointed I would be afterwards. Looking down into the waves, I felt fear and anger. Now, I can only see my own reflection in the water. These last few years have changed us all, I think. I don't know what I was looking for after Zhaitan died, but it was a difficult period. Going home was... filled with bad memories, and deep feelings of guilt that clawed at me, but seem silly in retrospect. Instead, I ventured out into Kryta, and fought for the Queen's Jubilee in Divinity's Reach. I think I was trying to become a different person. Not the baker I was, or the deserted father I had become. Thinking back, I think I wanted an opportunity to become more than a tradesman, and the excuses I needed to move away from a long, and quiet pastoral life in Hoelbrak came quick in easy when Zhaitan struck at Lion's Arch. From there, I walked a new path. The soldier, the gladiator, the explorer...  
Funny that I ended up shipwrecking my ambitions alongside with much of my life, only to wash up in a place called Judgement Rock. I don't speak about my time very often, except that I am thankful that they kept me alive. I pieced back my mind, and eventually returned back to Tyria, though a long voyage across the Steampurs where I was born, back to Tyria. By the time I arrived, Mordremoth had awoken. I decided that of all the things I had been, the Pact naval marine had done my best. Funny, really, how the same act that I used to kick me away from Freyja, and home, made me rebuild my life, and find purpose where I had so little. Now when I look at what I *am* and what I *was*, the difference is like night and day. We walk the most winding of paths, and find love, beauty and purpose in the strangest of places.  
  
I suppose I should find it funny that Orr seems to have once more moved me to introspection and thought. In truth, there is much to think about. As the isle came into view earlier today, I was prepared to return to the barren, dead wasteland and its surprisingly beautiful corruptions. I was not prepared to see trees, grass and flower finding their way back into the world. This camp, this place... it is filled with people from all over Tyria. Palm trees and lush greenery breathe and snake between the Orrian ruins, somehow only adding to the magnificence of it all. To see Orr bloom once more... Marshal Trahearne's great labour has been fulfilled, and I can't help but feel part of it all. We stand here in the living proof that the damage done by the Elder Dragons can be undone! One day, I hope to feel the same elation as we look over the expanse of the Far Shiverpeaks. But that is the future.  
  
On a more mundane tone, there was some minor communications problem when we were busy offloading the supplies from the vessel. Mostly my own problem, as I didn't pass on my instructions as accurately as I'd have liked, and this prompted a section to fall back to camp, rather than fall back to the ship. Thankfully, it seems not to have cost us anything, asides from some mild annoyance on my part. Something I should endeavour to fix in the future.  
  
I sit here looking out across the shore, listening to the waves sing, and the sound of life returning to the world. Two sounds I didn't think I would ever hear, this close to Dwayan's Heart, as it glistens high above is in the sky. More than anything, I wish Kristen was here, so I could share all these beautiful things with her. I will carry it all with me, in my mind and heart, to bring it back home for her.

# 68th of Phoenix

Reclamation Camp.  
  
Started our area patrols, looking for those rumoured Zaishen remnants we were set out to hunt down. We didn't find anything of that sort, but we had a pretty good look at how Orr's changed in these past few years. Still plenty of Risen, but it seems that nature itself has done its part to reclaim what Zhaitan stole. Where once it was all just bleak rot, now it feels like walking through a garden left to grow out of its bounds. It reminds me most of places like Astorea, right outside the Grove. We even saw an Oakheart, side by sides with a Risen Giant! How this place has changed, and yet somehow remained strangely familiar.  
Slightly west of us, we found an ancient statue of the human goddess Melandru, though her temple seems to have long-since collapsed in on itself. The proud arches and the shattered dome of whatever structure once housed still stand, but everything else has collapsed into ruins. Further in, we found another statue, of Grenth this time, hidden in a deep cave below a waterfall. It seems there are many old structures further inland from the beaches, though I'm not sure what purpose they serve yet. It's a lot of ground to cover, so I don't doubt we'll set out even further tomorrow, in search for the last remnants of Balthazar's forces.  
  
It is actually peaceful here. Can you believe that?

# 69th of Phoenix

Reclamation Camp.  
  
Orr is changing. That seems obvious, just looking around at the grass, and trees growing here now, but it is much, much deeper. We ventured on much deeper and extensive patrols today, and found areas completely devoid of Risen, or wraiths that were simply... not attacking us. Unfortunately, we were not all so lucky, as we also found the body of a settlers, and the Risen that killed them. Bizarrely, the Risen did not respond to us in any way, so I had Vatorn destroy it, while we recovered the body.  
Still... To see Orr so... becalmed, is strange, and enchanting. It gives a glimpse at what these people at Reclamation Camp are building. It is a worthy dream. I would come here, I think, if Kristen and I had not had children, and if I had not vowed to my Companions to reclaim the Far Shiverpeaks. Still, I look at this place, and I can feel pride in knowing we stand on the dream of Marshal Trahearne. A dream I helped him fight for. Those five years seem like an eternity. Spirits, looking around, and thinking of the difference between then and now, it was an eternity.  
  
And Orr remains as impressive as it was before. We ventured deeper, and witnessed more of the monumental architecture of the ancient Orrians. It is hard to distinguish what was built by the humans, and what was built by the Gods, but there is no people on Tyria that I have seen who could build like the Orrians did. We passed through an ancient temple of Abaddon, thinking it was an impressive structure, only to realize that the vast, looming cliff behind it was man-made, carved with Orrians spirals, and glowing from within as magma coursed through it, and spilled out in thick runnels. They tapped a volcano, harnessing the primal strength of the mountain, and bending it entirely to their will. It is insane and majestic at the same time. To see what it must have been like before it collapsed...

# 70th of Phoenix

Reclamation Camp.  
  
All quiet, with the reports coming in. The scouts are being sent out tomorrow for additional recon, but... well, it seems the settlers have indeed managed to carve themselves a little peaceful slice of Orr. I wonder if this relative tranquility is lasting, or if they're in for a nasty surprise when one of Zhaitan's stronger minions decides to regain some control. Though honestly, it seems like the greater Risen are slowly becoming extinct. Makes you wonder, in a hundred years, will I tell my great-grandchildren that I was alive when there still were Elder Dragons?  
  
Anyway, I've filed my reports, and now I'm going to smoke a nice pipe overlooking the Sea of Sorrows before I go to rest.

# 71st of Phoenix

Reclamation Camp.  
  
Another day here, in the shadow of the old human gods, enjoying the bizarre quiet of this settlement. It is easy to forget where you are, which makes it all the more dangerous. It takes effort to keep your guard up in circumstances like these, and I worry we'll get jumped and caught unawares. Since the White Mantle raid on our camp in Harathi, I've tried not to let my concentration lapse too far, but... it is hard not to. So little of the greater world matters out here.  
  
I spoke to Alexina Rayder about some, uh... irregularities over her leave. Apparently the lass managed to hide an entire plot against her life, the details I uncovered only because Alleshia asked the officers to investigate some rumours. From the sound of it, it's a whole heap of human Dolyak dung, covered with sprinkles. The gist of is that Alexina was raised by some Elder, and that there was an issue with some paper of inheritance. As a result, it seems that the old lady has been orchestrating attacks on Alexina, including burning her own house down. Or, well, it does seem like the old lady's plot, but of course there's no evidence to the entire thing. Either case, she didn't think to mention that someone was committing terrorist attacks on her person, which might've put the entire Chapter at risk. Luckily, their reach doesn't seem to extend all the way to Orr. I'll have to talk to Alleshia about writing to the Order of Whispers, and probably but the lass on protective custody once we return to Tyria.  
Probably would've saved us all a lot of hassle if the lass had just offed the treasonous bint when she had a chance, but that's not really an option anymore.  
For once, it seems Orr might be the safest place to be for her!  
What a strange world it has become...

# 72nd of Phoenix

Reclamation Camp.  
  
An exercise with Calder messing with the soldier's heads.  
A good idea? Not so sure. But I suppose it's one way to prepare you for something most people aren't prepared for at all.  
  
I've slept poorly. There's a grinning, damned Sylvari back in my dreams. I can only hope that Orr stands as proof that no matter how ancient the evil, it will eventually be excised by the roots, and crushed under the boot of the righteous, no matter if they are Vigil, Sunspears, or Seraph, Guild Warrior, or anything else. Perhaps... perhaps Kristen and I should go back. It would absolve us of our mistakes, and temper our courage by facing something that nearly broke us. I should talk to her about it. I wish she was here, so I could get these damned nightmares out of my head. Spirits, I am a steel-clad giant who has seen Elder Dragons and gods laid low, and yet I am afraid to fall asleep alone...  
  
I'll make some tea, and perhaps help the settlers settle their last watch. I won't get any more sleep anyway.

# 73rd of Phoenix

Reclamation Camp.  
  
Slept a little better, but I'm still bone tired. This place doesn't help. It is almost dreamlike, and that makes me feel like someone cast a spell over me. It is like I'm ill, and hallucinating a fever-dream. I need to find something to keep me busy, and speak to a medic about getting something to sleep, before my heads turns inside out.  
You know what they say, an idle mind will wander in dark places...  
  
These settlers must have something they could use a Siegmaster's hand for, surely.

# 74th of Phoenix

Reclamation Camp.  
  
Long day. Or it feels like it. I didn't sleep much yesterday, but I managed to tinker with Seleea and Vaxun's golem, managed to have the thing flash-transmit warship code into the air on a loop. Little chance someone will fly close enough to pick it up, but the gesture of just hurling a message into the air was a funny thought. Mai took some interest in the light-cadences, and wants to learn some of it, I think.  
  
Actual duties were, uh... chaotic. The scouts put out recon for that magma tap we found, noting it lead all the way back to a shrine of Balthazar, hewn into the heart of the mountain. Seemed like the place go looking for our errant Zaishen, so we set out in force. We found some remnants of Balthazar's armies alright, but no Forged. Mercenaries, and a few errant priests arrayed around a lava-pit. As we approached, we mistook their lack of cohesive response for an unwillingness to fight, but they were summoning a lava wurm from the heart of the mountain. We dispatched the priests, but then the wurm reared up and caught us unawares. It managed to hawk great globs of fire at us before we were able to fall back.  
Lance came around the back for support, but Rioleth got caught in the blaze. We pulled back, but since Astrid's sense of navigation got lost somewhere in Elona, we ended up getting accosted by swarms of elementals before we fought our way out. If a handful of errant priests and a elementals is why they sent us out here, I'm disappointed. I suppose we'll continue our patrols, and mop up any remnants we can find.  
Once more I'm pleased I had runes of protection etched into my armour.  
  
Afterwards, Occult did their regular readings, and Athelstan said he had to discharge some magic from me, before he cast a spell that made me feel really ill. Thankfully, Mai's given me a vial to help me sleep, so I'm going to take that right after I finish writing. I'm feeling frayed and ragged, it'll be good to just have some sleep, and clear the head.  
I'm too tired for much of anything else.  
I wish I was home.

# 75th of Phoenix

Reclamation Camp.  
  
I woke up with a clear head, which felt like something I hadn't felt in days. Somehow, Sel's golem was stood outside, flashing a badly constructed signal message at my tent. So I covered it in little chalk dicks, and then swabbed it down with hardening varnish, and made them clean it all off. It was actually very relaxing. I like having something to occupy the mind. Usually I clean and polish my weapons and armour, but this was a nice change of pace. It makes you think what you can achieve if you set your mind to accomplish a single thing. You just need to actually do it, is all.  
  
Today's duties took us back to the Grenth shrine, with Occult for some data-gathering. All in all fairly uneventful, asides from a sudden, very intensive attack by several greater Risen, including an actual wraith! Maybe it was one of those shrine spirits that mistook us for intruders? Hard to say. Either case, it was a taste of how many of the veterans remember Orr, as opposed to this... well, changed land. Klixxa got cursed, but we got her back in time to dispel it, so she came away with the fright of it all.  
More interestingly, there might be a connection between all these weird Abaddon statues we keep finding. There was one near the Grenth shrine, apparently heavily magically charged. That's weird for several reasons, one being that Zhaitan used to track down and devour any magical items in Orr. It's strange that he missed this, which suggests that maybe it was dormant, and only recently reawakened. That doesn't answer any questions, though.  
Still, I suppose we can uncover some mysteries one step at a time, in the hope of catching a glimpse of the truth in the process. No doubt the Priory will be interested, if they're not all down in Elona still.  
  
Anyway, more patrols come the morrow. Maybe we'll find our answers sooner rather than later.  
Here's hoping sleep comes easier this night.

# 76th of Phoenix

Reclamation Camp.  
  
Well, the Zaishen made themselves known to us, in no uncertain terms, by igniting an enormous magical beacon over the Abaddon's Reliquary. We rushed there, to be met by a rambling Forged who... uh... claimed the Pact Commander killed Balthazar to save Kralkatorrik. He... or it... wasn't exactly coherent. When the Warmaster challenged it, it engulfed us all on fire, and forced us to fight a Champion of Balthazar. It was... like from a dream. This great roaring column of fire made it feel as if we were fighting inside an oven, the light almost blinding, and drowning everything out. We could see that we'd been scattered with one fell motion, and others were waging their own battle against flaming avatars of war, harnessing the power of the Zaishen to invoke their dead god... I was slammed aside, and smashed my head into the stone, which made my head ring. Next I know, the Champion was stood over, sword raised ready to strike... but Force smashed me out of the way, I think. I bit my tongue pretty badly. It feels swollen, and I keep tasting blood. But I'm alive. It seems that these zealots didn't realize Balthazar was truly destroyed. Their god forsook them in their moment of need, and we destroyed them for their weakness. As they fell, their beacon sputtered, and died.  
I wonder if this will be the last we hear of them... of Balthazar...  
I wonder if what the zealot told us about the Commander is true. Why save Kralkatorrik? Are we not all sworn to destroy the dragons where-ever they stand? I wonder if they were just lies, but... why would it lie? It had no reason to deceive us, in the moment of its perceived apotheosis.  
  
I shouldn't let doubt take root in the mind. It will grow to a greater poison if it is nurtured, instead of excised at the root.  
At least I'm tired enough after the entire ordeal to expect a good night's sleep out of it all.  
If I wanted answers to every question, I suppose I would've joined the Priory. For now, I shall be content to have a story for Kristen and my boy when I return home.

# 77th of Phoenix

Reclamation Camp.  
  
Everything is so surreal. We're pulling back out, considering the Zaishen threat as defeated. If not for my tongue aching where I bit it, it would be hard not to dismiss what happened yesterday as being a dream. Everything here feels like a dream. As if it not quite tangible. It feels unfocused, false, and invented, as if I'm not really here, or merely looking in from the outside. It's weird, being so detached from everything, because I'm not. I'm here, right now. But it feels like I'm an outsider looking in. I look around, and I don't see Orr. I know we're here, but... we're not. I can almost see the lines in the skin of the earth, like a writhing tattoo, marking out a pattern too cosmic for me to understand. But I can see the fragments. I can feel them course through the air. They make my eyes sting, and my skin tingle. Like a buzz slightly too low for you to hear, but just enough for you to know its there.  
  
I don't know what I'm talking about. I'm so tired again. It feels as if it is still the same day as we arrived, though I know from these entries in the fieldbook that's not true. Sometimes I fall asleep, and when I wake up, I don't know if I've slept for an hour, or for days on end. It is just the same bone-deep weariness that drags at you. I banished it, so briefly, but it came back. Sometimes I think I remember something. Sometimes I wake up yelling, without remembering what it is I'm reaching for. I feel like it is all in my head.  
  
We're leaving soon.

# 78th of Phoenix

Reclamation Camp.  
  
Went out on one last patrol to the old Abaddon shrine. I was on sentry for most of it, looking out over the view you have from the southern lip. I almost got lost in it, peering off into the distance, seeing the jagged outline of the Orrian rock, blue and black, as it has always been. Perhaps one day it was regal, and stately. Now they are simply the gravemarkers for a fallen realm, like the great stones they used to carve to commemorate great hunters and great prey. But it does good to see the garden bloom once more. I doubt we will ever restore Orr to how it was at the height of its majesty, but we can build something else on the ruins.  
  
There is something here affecting the mind. Some magic in the air that makes it hard to sleep soundly, or to focus. Iluoana lost her senses for a moment during the patrol, before we were able to dispel the magic. It was strange. I keep feeling like I'm outside, looking at everything else through a sheet of glass. I can't wrap my head around these statues of Abaddon, or the Zaishen. As if it never really happened, and I'm already trying to forget it. As if it all wants to be kept a secret.  
  
I listen to the sound of the lapping Orrian waves, not so far from where I sleep, and I'm reminded of so many things. The first landing in the Straits of Devastation. The grinding muck, and the smell of death ingrained into the sand. The rolling weight of the ship below my feet, right before the keel was smashed in two like a mere matchstick. The cold, worse than anything I've ever felt in the freezing mountains, sapping every bit of strength from me, while I asked Bear to give me the strength to hold on. The dull blast and the hard, spinning cast iron that zipped over the waves and nearly split me in two. The worst pain I've ever felt.  
The pearl white of Southsun's bays, watching Kristen use a knife to leverage the shell off of a Karka. She was still Wolfsbane then. My son, playing in the sand in the shadow of Marriner's walls so he didn't get sunburnt... Squid, fresh out of the bay, roasted with a little lemon. Laughing. Finding an old Vigil helmet, half-submerged in the water, wondering which memories once sang and danced inside, and how different they must've been from mine.

# 79th of Phoenix

Fort Trinity.  
  
Well, we're back to good old Mother Trinity, the clanking, rumbling monstrosity that stands to the testament that the Pact was not mincing words about going for the throat of the dragons when they founded the Pact in Lion's Arch. Strange how that feels like ancient history, but it only a handful of years in the past. I suppose was makes time goes by slowly.  
  
I'm happy to be out of Orr again, in some way. The sounds of Trinity are familiar and soothing. I was secretly hoping we'd be given leave again, but that was wishful thinking. They're sending us back south, into Elona again, but this time we're on the offensive, it seems. Palawa Joko seems to have declared a war on Tyria, and we're going to be the on the offensive in the vanguard. We lack the numbers for an open assault, but there are apparently still Sunspears to be found who can be our allies.  
It will be an adventure, I imagine. I just hope we won't be away for seasons on end again. I'll write a letter home to let Kristen know.  
  
Oh, also, I ran into Thalius and Rosalie, who were loitering about the fort after we'd disembarked from our transport. They apparently heard we were coming in, and decided to sit around until we arrived to say hello, even though they had been given leave. Spirits, I would've been sprinting down the gate to Hoelbrak. Still, good to see they're both still alive. They were talking about requesting a transfer back to the Ashen Chapter, which surprised me a little. I'd imagine they'd be thinking about it a little differently if they'd been part of the Elonian deployment into the Desolation.  
  
Hm. I'm still feeling tired, and drained. It doesn't help that I'm not looking forwards to going back south. At least we're not going through the Desolation this time. Spirits...

# 80th of Phoenix

Airborne, somewhere along the coast of the Deldrimor Front.  
Choppy headwind breeze makes the airship shudder and hang a little.  
  
Slept well in Trinity yesterday, which helped keep myself focused today. I still woke up in a sweat, but I can remember what I was dreaming of. I was holding Kristen, pulling at her while some nameless evil was clawing at her, trying desperately not to let go. I woke up when my strength finally left me, and I had to let go. It terrified me. For a few long, abysmal seconds, all I wanted to do was die. Then reality settled in again, and I was just left feeling empty. I know I didn't let go when it really mattered, but it doesn't feel that way. It makes me feel weak, and guilty for having brought her to that damned place to begin with! It is just trying to claw its way into my head. We should've destroyed that evil when we had the chance...  
  
I shouldn't dwell on it. That just gives it power over me.  
We're on our way to Amnoon now, about a day's flight out. The airship is familiar, as it has been for a while now. I can still see the repair marks from when we restored the hull in the Maguuma. She's been a faithful companion, the old *Willhem's Vengeance*, much like the *Ramming Speed!* used to be before it was brought down over Orr.  
We'll be setting down over Amnoon, and then going further south along the Elonian coast on a ship. It's supposed to be Corsair waters, so I hope we have a captain and crew who know what they're signing up for.  
They'll sail us to the legendary isle of Istan, where we are supposed to begin a revolution among the people against Palawa Joko. Command's sent us this Nundho Bahyet, the Mordant Crescent turncoat who helped us escape Vabbi, as an advisor. I have questions about why they're sending a former Mordant Crescent to meet up with the supposed Sunspears. If Palawa Joko has been spinning it to claim that we fought for him against Balthazar, we'll be hard-pressed to convince the Sunspears we're here to help... I also wonder why they're not deploying the Order of Whispers... Probably because we'll be expected to throw some military weight around. I don't expect it'll be easy.  
Not that it matters. I've got a few scores to settle with Palawa Joko, so at least I'll have the chance to exact some much-needed vengeance.  
  
Out of the fire, and into the frying pan.