

The Day Before the Next- Part VI, A Hunt Given Chase

Contributed by Jeff Hyde
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And so Dante Marcel now known as alive, Jean is reunited with an old friend and family member as Beregond attempts to hunt Jean's brother

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Summer, 1539; it had been days since I had lost my way. What few strangers I found cowered from me... the mark of a heretic being this symbol from hell. As far as I know the accusations against me didn't stop at the borders either. Some even tried to burn me as I entered their town, though this became more and more common as fanatical peasants seemed to roam the countryside.

I knew not where to go, nor who to see, but I had found myself wandering into l'Anguille again. It was summer so I could survive the nights for now, but come winter I wouldn't know how to. The only good side to any of this nonsense was that I knew where I was. I had forgotten any goals, any life, any hope as I stepped over the horizon of a hill.

I looked down and sorrow darkened my face further. In the distance there was a cliff's edge only a good walk away as I made my way there. I stood at the edge of it as the sun set and the night seemed to demolish any light in the sky.

It was dark now, and the rain that had began pouring only made it worse. The mist from the sea by my homeland of L'Anguille brushed up against my face, my hair dancing with the wind as it flew past me, out of my eyes. I turned to see what was behind me: a ruined castle... crumbled beneath chaotic feet... and burnt to the ground. Its rule over the small city by the Northern Sea had fallen. Who knew how long it had been like this.

Thunder roared and lightning flashed lighting up the fields, the sounds of the waves crashing strong against the cliffs below. The lightning flashed again... you could see something come out of the shadow, they were 2 crosses. I walked into the ruins and picked up a piece of wood. It was inscribed: Marcel. I only stood there amongst the wreckage, thinking to myself, remembering the past.

"Father..." I said softly as I remembered him. What had I done? I could not even stop the murderer of my family... what kind of man was I? Regardless of what status I had ever earned as a knight, stripped from me or not, regardless of my age, I was no man; not yet. The sound of a horse could be heard from behind as I turned in the cold rain to see a figure approaching.

I looked away for a moment as they came close enough to see me. "Jean? Jean Marcel? Is that you?" The voice asked... I knew that voice... yes! Yes I did! "Dominique?" I asked into the night. "Yes, it is I. It is good to see you Jean! What has happened to you! I have heard many unfortunate tales!" He said as I turned to look at his face. He gasped in a slight shock from the scar born upon my cheek and looked down in disappointment. "I'm sorry Dominique..." I said. He snickered for a moment. "For what? I am disappointed in this world today for those who think the son of Uncle Alexander would be tainted!" He said with a chuckle afterwards. My heart swelled and then sighed in a safe relief.

Earl Dominique Claronne was my cousin. His father brother to mine, they had time and time again fought by each other's sides and in the greatest hosts of knights the family of Claronne would hold the great Battle Standard of the house of both Claronne and Marcel. His father had a timely passing in a fight against a horde of orcs 10 years ago, though, and Dominique took his rightful place as Earl over the small town of Bryesse.

"Come with me, come, come." Dominique urged as I stood up smiling and followed him westward to Bryesse. "You may stay as long as you like... after all you're family and it is what counts here." He said, nodding happily. I nodded in return as I longed to ask him a question, but didn't want to seem insane. "Is something troubling you, Jean?" Dom asked me. He's always been like that- as if he knew everything going on in my head. Turning to him I asked him clearly: "Dom... what year is it?"

Dominique laughed. He knew I had been gone for some time and this man had a heart of gold. "Why, Jean, it is 1539!" He replied with a chuckle afterwards. Then this confirmed it- whatever happened in that forest, whatever it was that had kept me there... it had been 2 years since I could remember. "And what are the rumours you hear of me?" I asked back at him. Dominique's head looked down for a moment and then looked at me. "Witnesses claim... that after Gresdale was sacked you followed a chaos worshipper into a woodland area and didn't come out. At first they thought you were dead until there were reports of your sightings in Lyonesse! The very guards of the Fief of Borechard and some theorists in Roiglan claimed to have seen you murder the guards and slit the throat of Henri Borechard himself. They didn't doubt that you may just have well have killed Lord Forésen while you were at it. You weren't seen for a year and a half. You then showed back up... you were said to be branded with an 8-pointed star on your cheek, the mark of a heretic, and that you were to be hunted for murder."

"I did no such thing Dominique!" I protested. "I know you didn't Jean, it is like you to be rash, but not THAT outgoing." He said, again with a bit of a chuckle. He had his ways of lightening the mood with his laughter even when it may have been... uncalled for. Either way I made it back to Bryesse safely and was let inside with no harm. That was the first night for a while that I had slept warmly in a bed. I can't even remember if I had dream... it was so peaceful a sleep.

Beregond ran from the camp quickly, trailed after by a few trained knights, yet lost them in the mountains. Dante was taken to Couronne after being wounded in battle. Thinking to himself for a moment Beregond pondered- did I not kill that fool of a knight only so long ago? His memory was beginning to wear obviously, but it didn't matter- he would slay the man regardless. If the Gods wished his head on a platter than it was what he'd give them.

He walked through the mountains yet again. Taking the routes through the bases of the mountains originally dug out by Dwarfs and reinforced by Bretonnians for merchants, he came upon the borders of Couronne. The main city itself stood as a testament to both Elven and Human craft. Beregond removed his armour, hiding it away in a mountain cave, only keeping his great sword. Donning upon him a hood to mask his face from being revealed, he headed into the city. There were so many people... and it would take a long time of searching... and even then Beregond had to get into the military barracks.

It only took until late winter, early spring of the following year for Beregond to find him. He had not yet strike, though, simply followed him in the city for months- tracking his movements, waiting for the right time. In the very city of the King himself, one cannot pounce upon one's prey until the coast is clear. As long as this knight was on leave from battle... he would be in the city. Beregond was forced to wait.

As I awoke, I looked through the nearby window. The sun had just risen; I had lain in bed for moments, thinking to myself about everything. Life itself had been so hard, and is not easily overcome... yet I began to think. At the ruins... there were two crosses. "Mercedes and Alexander? Where was the cross for Dante?" I thought to myself.

Was there any chance of Dante being alive or was I just hoping to see my brother's face again in these times. It had been almost 5 and a half years since I had seen him, what possible chances were there of him

being alive? "Didn't Reginald say everyone was dead? Well... why can't he be alive? There's nothing saying he isn't... maybe... maybe he could be." I continued to think. Grasping at the concept it seemed like a fools hope, yet as I thought about it more and more I found myself realizing it one step at a time. "He must be alive! He just... can't be dead, he can't. I didn't see him die, nor did anyone else. If his cross isn't standing there Dante must be breathing!" I had thought out loud, drawing my hopeful conclusion. Quickly getting up I ran to wake Dom.

"Dom... Dom wake up!" I shouted, shaking him. His eyes opened wearily as he looked up at his cousin. "Dante... he's alive. He must be!" I stated boldly, "If his body wasn't at the site of the ruins, then he could not have just gotten up and walked away, neither would he have retreated! He must be alive!"

Dominique pondered for a moment. "Shouldn't we check to see if your thesis checks out?" He asked me. I nodded to him as we got up and took a morning stroll. We headed out to l'Ambertrou, or at least the ruins thereof. As we had approached it was exactly as I had seen it: Two crosses; one for my father and one for my mother. A smile crept on my face as I looked over to Dominique.

"We can try to find him then." He said smiling back. "Where would we start?" I asked quickly in reply. "Simple. Couronne... the Fey Enchantress is there with the King now... if we could get a meeting with her grace, we could locate him!" I rolled my eyes as Dominique suggested it. It wasn't the easiest thing getting an audience with the Fey... but it was worth a try. "To Couronne then!" I said. "Hey... we haven't even stopped for breakfast!" Dominique replied with a chuckle.

We sat down in the dining room as Dominique's wife, Rosalyn, walked in with a cheery smile. She had cooked us up some fine morning delicacies as we sat down to eat. A home cooked meal? This was truly a dream I had to wake up from! I mumbled "This is a dream." under my breath in disbelief to find Dominique pinching my arm. Looking at him,

raising a brow, he winked at me. "Wake up lad." He said with a grin. I felt almost at home... family like him could never die, even if he was gone.

We quickly mounted upon steeds as my face was covered for protection. "When it comes to these kinds of things," Dominique started, "Let me do the talking." His smile was refreshing- someone to talk to. I think that's all I may have really needed at that time. It took a good ride to get to the city itself and we had spent the night at a local inn, heading out to a night at one of the local taverns. Dominique sat down with me at the counter ordering the Lady knows what as I rolled my eyes and settled with some good Bordeleaux wine.

"Hey... what's with your friend there?" The bartender asked after a number of minutes to Dominique after a few minutes. Dominique smiled and put his hand on the man's shoulder. "Why nothing my friend, why worry? Pass me another pint!" He said with a smile. "Ask him to remove his hood... them shadowy types aren't going to settle with me." The bartender replied.

Dominique raised an eyebrow. "He has done nothing wrong, leave him be." He whispered at the bartender somewhat darkly. "Look if your friend is afraid of showing his face then pay the tab and leave... I can't trust your-" The bartender said being cut off as Dominique grabbed the collar of his shirt, dragging him across the countertop. "You know nothing of me and you know nothing of him. Without any doubt I could tell you this man to my right has more balls than you." Dominique said, shoving the Bartender back into the cabinets of drinks behind him, crashing down on the poor man. "I think we better leave, Jean." He said with a stern look on his face.

Yes that was his character... although he was a light-hearted one, when Dominique was crossed with he could go on the borders of rude or defensive. Leaving a pile of gold coins on the counter top, Dominique left, allowing me to follow.

"What if thissss one interferesss?" A dark voice said, distressed.

"He will not... it is in our hands." Another said in reply.

"We must reach Dante before the one finds him." A third voice streamed out.

"Yes... yes... finally bleed him out... let us hope Beregond has done his duty." A fourth voice stated.

Beregond stood amongst the ruins of Couronne. His blade driven deep into the ground, Wings spawned from his back, and horns from his head, his glowing eyes trickled in a yellow-red light as he smiled evilly at the fires of the King's very own throne. The mass of bodies scattered amongst the ruins, he stepped forward. "Grace me with your power; grace me with your praise for I am the bringer of destruction." He said laughing maniacally, sitting on the steps that led to the Cathedral of the Lady which now lay in ashes. "Your job is done, Beregond, you are a chosen one and a true example of the powers of Chaos." The voices said happily. Just as they did, Beregond turned to only see the flash of a blade, his

body hitting the floor, bloody, as his breathing slowed down. His last sight, slowly opening his eyes from the exhausting pain was Jean standing over him.

Beregond woke up in a sudden, his head hitting a rafter. Feeling his forehead in pain, he turned to look out the attic window. "Summer weather, Perfect." Beregond thought. No matter how evil one can be, you can always enjoy good weather. As we walked outside, hooded again, his day of duty had come. Dante was ahead of him now. Following him to the military barracks, it wasn't long before Dante was out, riding alongside a number of peasants, heading back out to the Marches of Couronne on duty.

"Perfect indeed." Beregond said with a grin as he quickly ran out towards the city's exit. He had a way to cut him off and he would murder the fool and be done with this... ridiculous quest.

Back through the mountains he traveled deep in the pale sisters, taking the fastest routes he had learned in his time to get to him. As he went to retrieve his armour, he had found it right where he left it. Reaching to grab it he felt a stick bang his arm. Turning quickly a group of Goblins who had tripped over his armour looked angrily at him. "Foolish things! How dare you challenge a warrior and chosen of Chaos!" Beregond yelled at them, drawing his blade. The little blighters jumped on Beregond, taking him to the ground, gnawing and biting. He managed to throw one or two off, but they were everywhere. It was only with a loud bang that the Goblins scampered off.

Standing on his feet, Beregond saw a man at the foot of the cave holding a rifle in his hand. Pulling his rifle to aim at Beregond, the man gave him a questioning look. "And with what due respect do I owe this?" He asked. "My name is Beregond, Knight of l'Anguille." Beregond said with a smile, "I was attacked by goblins as I came back here on patrol." He stated, "Thank you for saving my life."

"Ah... goblins... yep those buggers can give you a good one, can't they! Name's Maximillian Vultoff! I was here on

merchant business and found myself lost in the mountains after I attempted to take the merchant paths home." Max said. Nodding with a smile, he offered his hand as a gesture of friendship.

Beregond shook it and smiled evilly for a moment. "I am on duty after a heretic by the name of Dante... he is a cultist under the cover of a Knight of the Lady herself, maybe you could help me... you have a nice shot with that rifle." He said. Max nodded in response "Anything I can do to help! If we can't thwart the threat of Chaos within our own borders, how can we do so on the outside? That is... as long as you can get me out of these damned mountains." "Of course." Beregond replied. Yes... this would make things interesting.