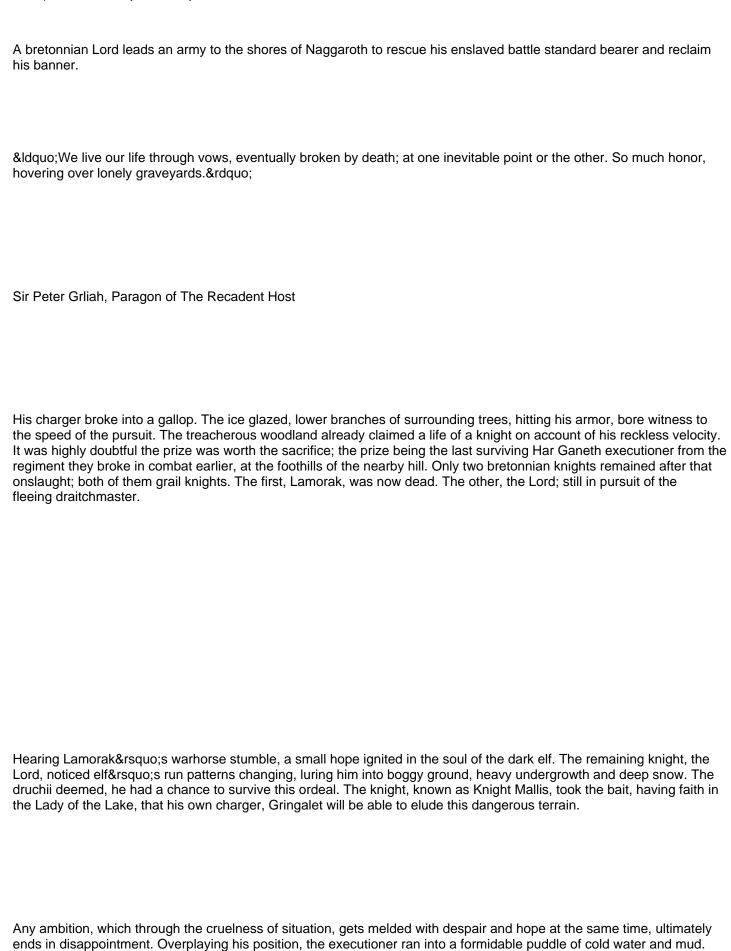
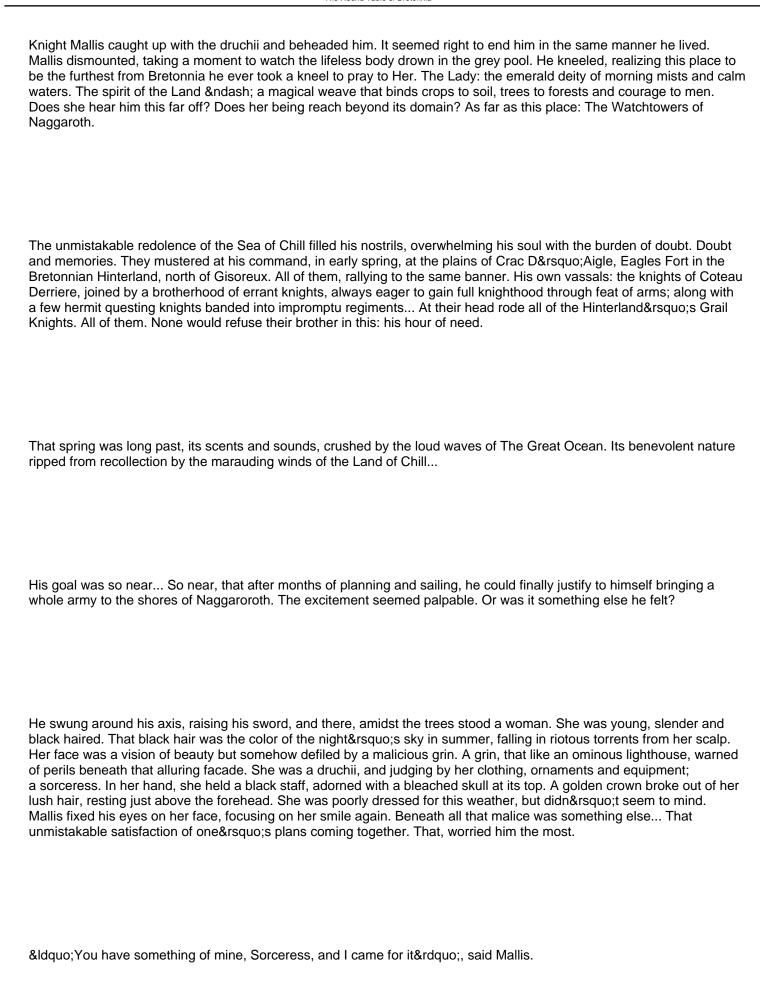
An eagle's winter

Contributed by Mislav Gorupec Tuesday, 03 December 2013 Last Updated Wednesday, 15 January 2014





| The Dark elf smiled, the innocence of that smile, devoured by evil intent beneath it: |
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| "You are in no position to demand, human. Well, perhaps make last wishes, but" |
| " Silence Sorceress. I have not travelled half across the world to indulge in your grandiloquence. Your raiding party is dead, and your ships are being claimed by my men. I have come for my Battle Standard. The banner, you took from a lone knight, riding towards Marienburg, late this winter. I want them both: the flag, and its carrier. " |
| The staff erupted in dark energy and it was soon enveloped by black translucent fog, swirling towards the bretonnian Lord. Surrounded by the unnatural miasma, the knight lost his sense of direction. He could not discern how close he was to the cold pond, unsure of his footing. He was unable to move with any degree certainty. Thus, he stood in place. The sorceress was pleased. |
| "I see you made time for me. Tell me more of these men of yours. Were they all wearing blue tunics and riding loud horses?", asked the Dark elf. The knight hesitated. He replied: |
| "Yes" |
| "All of them carrying large cumbersome swords?", continued the sorceress. |
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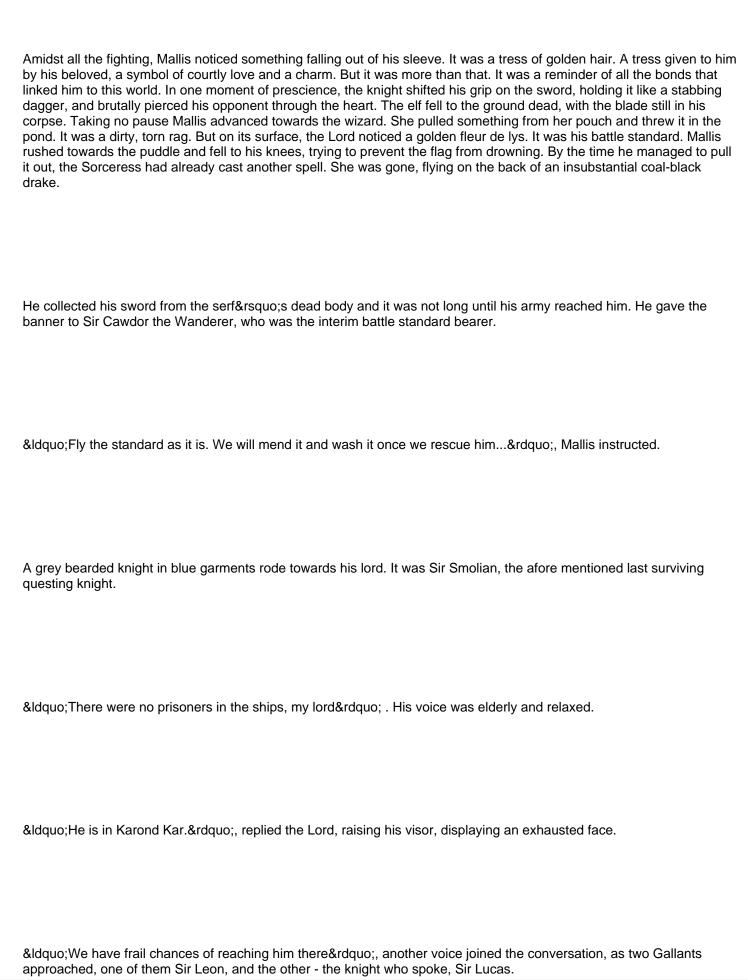
Mallis was silent.

| " They were naive just as they were slow. Most of them met their end at the tip of the bolt. My Shades had no mercy for these old men. The regiment was routed with only one grey bearded human alive, fleeing towards the sea " |
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| The knight suddenly raised his head. His metal helmet showed no emotion, but his voice behaved otherwise. |
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| "There were two.", replied the knight, just slightly louder than a whisper. |
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| "Foolish human! There was only one. I saw him with my own eyes." |
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| "No, Sorceress. There were two regiments Two regiments of questing knights, have I sent towards the |
| shore." |
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| The Dark elf paused. She became nervous, calculating whether this could be true. The Bretonnian capitalized on this, and continued, partly reassuring himself: |
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| &IdquoTwo questing knight regiments were sent towards the ships. I went up the middle along with my grail knights and |
| all of the errant knights. The errants were broken by the" |
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| "Black guard", interrupted the druchii, with a poorly hidden concern in her voice. |

| &IdquoYes.", confirmed Mallis, slowing the pace of his speech. &IdquoThe errants were routed, but we slaughtered the Black guard, overrunning into the Executioners, whose Draitchmaster lies at the bottom of this puddle. With the ships taken, the centre lost, the only question remaining is that of the outcome on the left flank." |
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| They were looking at each other as the miasma started to disperse, both of them, obviously trying to determine the odds on that left flank. The knight took the initiative and ended the pause: |
| "Two units of heavy cavalry, my own vassals There is no way they could have lost the flank." |
| "If they did, the humans guarding the ships would have an exposed rear", she retorted. |
| "There is nothing in your army that can withstand the charge of my cavalry." |
| "Oh yes there is, haughty human" murmured the sorceress; more to herself than to her adversary. "My witch elves They wouldn't dare break. They know I bear the crown The golden crown on my head given to me by Morathi herself. They would not dare betray me" |
| Both of them turned their heads towards the hill, hearing noise and commotion at its top. |

| "We will soon get our answer Sorceress. The answer will present itself on that slope yonder. " |
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| A moment of silence passed between them. Both of them sharpened their vision, focusing solely on the hilltop, bathed in an orange hue from the impending sunset. And than, a figure appeared at the hill's summit. First it seemed only a shadow, devoid of feature: but soon the dark outline became a rider - its appearance clear. There, on a rampant black horse with flamboyant dark mane, clad in bloodied armor and bearing the black and gold livery of his domain, stood Sir Leon the Paranoid, a knight of the realm. He brandished a mace over his head, and behind him, emerged whole regiments of bretonnian knights, piercing the horizon with lances held high. The Recadent Host of the Hinterlands, galloped down the slope to the sound of trumpets. |
| The Sorceress turned to face Knight Mallis. Her eyes were pools of anger. Her full lips unable to verbalize the rage she felt. She was not outsmarted by this armor-wearing pig farmer. Her demise was of her own doing. She should have scouted the enemy forces better Perhaps called for aid. But greed got the better of her. A bretonnian army, shipwrecked on the shores of The Land of Chill was to delectable a prey to turn down. But now she realized one implausible fact: they were here on purpose. The emotionless visor of the knight's great helm was fixed on her. Mallis broke the silence: |
| "Return my Banner to me. Hand over its carrier, and you will live." |
| " You invade Naggaroth for a piece of worthless cloth!? What possible justification could you have for such an act?! ", she asked in shock. |
| The knight lowered his gaze slightly, and without looking at the Druchii, replied silently but with utter confidence in his words: |
| "Honor is all. Chivalry is all." |

| A gust of wind whistled past them carrying the sound of hooves from the incoming knights. It ruffled her black straight hair. She looked at the knight and addressed him. At first her words were mere whispers, but they became louder by every passing moment, morphing into loud threats like a wrathful crescendo: |
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| &Idquo Your standard bearer was on another ship A ship that has long since docked in the cold harbor of Karond Kar. If he has survived malnourishment, disease and torture, he is now a slave. He is rotting in a cold cell, the likes of which your men will experience as well. He is beaten, tortured and humiliated. And there is no escape. He will die there. As wi your insolent knights. You, you will not see the dark walls of Karond Kar, nor its sorrowful streets. You will die here. You knight, have spent all this time planning and plotting how to save your battle standard bearer. Have you stopped to consider, mine" |
| A halberd hit Mallis from the back. He was flatfooted and stunned. Another blow hit the torso, shaking his ribcage. Neither blow pierced his armor. He started to turn but stumbled and fell into the snow. The Sorceress was laughing. |
| "He is my servant and my lover. He will sacrifice his life to take yours. Even in victory, you are beaten. Finish him Liokor." |
| The masterful elf warrior swung the weapon to deliver the killing strike, only to find that the ground was covered by low thick mist. The polearm hit the ground, missing Mallis completely. The strange mist vanished, leaving the dark elf maste befuddled. There was no confusion in the mind of the Bretonnian knight. The answer he sought earlier came now. The Lady was with him. |
| This gave Mallis enough momentum to stand up. But as soon as he took up a battle stance, the same miasma surrounded him as before, hindering his battle prowess significantly. The Sorceress did everything to help her lackey. She was successful. Mallis could not keep up with the swift movements of the elf, and was getting tired quickly. His knights would not reach the site of the duel in time, and she knew that. She was waiting for him to die before taking here leave. |



| "Frail? I would say none.", interrupted a questing knight paragon, who was just joining them, Sir Peter Grliah. |
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| The Lord was listening but he turned his gaze towards the south, staring across the wild Sea of Chill. Somewhere on that perilous horizon was the dark elf city and harbor of Karond Kar, and in it: one of their own. |
| "We sail for Karond Kar. There is no other way." spoke Mallis. |
| His vassals looked at each other. Grliah replied: |
| "It is a valorous effort my lad my lord. But we cannot hope to infiltrate such a fortress." |
| Mallis bore a solemn expression, knowing full well the magnitude of his next words: |
| "I do not plan to infiltrate it. I plan to tear down its gates, storm the streets and kill every slave trader I find inside its walls." |
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| Sir Smolian stepped into the conversation: |
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| "No one enjoys a glorious charge like me, my lord, but I am afraid that steel and ardor won't get us into Karond Kar. Stealth and cunning might." |
| Despite knowing that his paragon was right, Sir Mallis concluded: |
| "Unfortunately, my friend, steel and ardor is all we have. Prepare the ships! " |
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