

The Memoirs of Willem Malchanceux - Peasant Rebellion

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Â Winner of the 2nd place in the 2013 Literature Competition

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The seventh errantry war, declared three years ago, had been crumbling like the solitary statues found rearing out of the dunes. Nearly one-hundred autumns ago, Mathieu Droitcoeur had begun a foolish Errantry War following a winding path through the deserts of Khemri; the same path as the one his descendant Louis Droitcoeur intended to follow now, however Sir Mathieu had failed to return from his crusade and if not for the suckling babe left in his diminished chateau his proud lineage may have ended that day.

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Sir Louis Droitcoeur had been leading his men through the seemingly endless dunes, weaving around the dusty tombs like the native skullsnakes. The column crawled towards what was known as Blancfleur; a Bretonni camp held close to a clouded Oasis, the only source of water for miles. If Louis had ever thought he would find any trace to his ancestorâ€™s demise he had discarded any hope now. Meat and grain were low and the water was all but gone. Knights were at the top of the food chain, and with having to feed the few remaining warhorses many peasants simply dropped dead due to starvation. That was if the drought didnâ€™t get you first.

Several days after the food became scarce many men suggested to eat the dead or lame horses. Louis, being of high birth, would suffer no such indignities and proclaimed â€œIf you wish to eat horsemeat, journey to the land of Kislev. But whilst you march with my column any such act will not go unpunishedâ€•. Â Many chose to take their chances than continue the excruciating march through the barren lands. Lack of food and water soon began to drive the men into a state of delirium and frenzy. Louisâ€™ force was now but a tenth of that he marched into the desert with; starvation, drought, illness, weakness, desertion and executions had all but crushed his force into the sands; as if they were nothing but the foul smelling insects one may find burrowing into their leg in the middle of the icy nights.

The men became noisier with every barked order and nothing Sir Louis did or said could stop this, that was my role.

My name is Yeoman Willem and I had always been an emphatic child, quick to learn and make allies in any situation. I

had commanded the loyalty and blades of the remaining men at arms with nothing but respect for their common situation. As a child I had been chosen to be Louis's whipping boy. I had always suffered his beatings as an unchangeable factor that I could not avoid. It could have been anyone, I had always told myself, somebody had to do it. Louis's father had raised me as nothing but a servant, however my close ties with Louis led to most of the Chateau being kind enough to let me wander freely. I attended the same classes as Louis and attended the local Grail chapel where I learnt my letters and how to read the holy scriptures. I had always seen Louis as a brother, if not by blood then by motive, however, several days before Louis's Errantry War the Lord Droitcoeur, Louis's father, lay on his deathbed, struck down by Bonerot. This was where my eyes were opened for the first time.

"Will, father wants to meet with you" I recall Louis saying "Be quick though we will be leaving on the turn of the moons, we need to prepare for our journey. I hear the undead are particularly weakened at this time of year" Louis stopped and paused in a second of blissful silence. I had moved to leave when Louis had span and called after me,

"Have you cleaned my armour yet? I can't possibly wear my helm if it is still muddied from the tourney"

"What did your last servant die of?" I called back with a wry smile on my lips, turning to leave the courtyard I mounted the first cold steps to the eastern tower. I heard the echoes of Louis's reply chase after me "A poor work ethic, if I recall correctly" grinning like a fool I reached the top of the stairs and brushed past one of the many ancient tapestries that cloaked the dilapidated halls. I rapped my knuckles thrice upon the Lord's chamber door before hearing a pained grunt from within. Stepping into the room with my right foot so not to offend the ailing noble I had greeted him with a curt nod of my head.

A weak rasping voice stumbled out of the skull of Louis's father, he beckoned me to walk towards him and seat myself beside his bed.

"Willem".

I sat still, slightly revolted at the stench that was rising from the corpse-like man next to me. "Ah! loyal Willem, there is so much you do not know."

"My lord I do not understand"

"Ha! My Lord, Mi' Lord, High Lord... they mean nothing to me. Louis is the Lord of this keep now and has been for some time. Although that would not always have been true" if I had only known.

His voice trailed off, and a distant look had appeared in his eyes.

What was he suggesting? I remember thinking, my mind working furiously to try and comprehend what was happening. Lord Droitcoeur had always treated me coldly, why now was there a sudden show of affection after so many years?

â€œYour motherâ€• Â he gasped, â€œBefore Louisâ€• my sonâ€•

â€œYes my lord, Sir Louis is your son and heir, he is leading the kingâ€™s seventh errantry war in a few daysâ€•

â€œYesâ€• and no, he was notâ€•. you were the... first...sonâ€• and with his final breath Lord Droitcoeur had unraveled all I had believed to be true. I remember rising suddenly from the bedside and marching out of the room, beckoning for the guards to enter, before climbing the ramparts and violently vomiting over the edge. My blood had pounded in my head and I remember being physically affected by what had been made apparent. The thoughts had tormented me, I looked down at the tents that had assembled beyond the walls and swore on that day, my fatherâ€™s chateau would be mine. My vows that day had triggered events, events I still observe every night in the torment that is sleep.

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Having spent years Â studying the old tomes in the chateau library and talking with the old yeoman had led me to know all of Bretonniaâ€™s strengths and weaknesses, and also how to win in the direst of situations. Louis, evidently blinded by his faith in me, had wandered aimlessly through the desert upon instruction from my outriders. Finally nearing a deep valley, named the Mouth of Petra, I informed Louis that within lay the edge of the desert and the last source of water. Mounting as many knights as he could, Louis rushed his men in a forced march to the valley leaving any unhorsed nobles to trudge with the peasants.

This was where I struck.

I stood and observed the scene below, the few knights rode into the valley who were shortly followed by my loyal peasants who appeared to push close behind as if to vie for a chance at kissing the cool waters of Blancfleur. I can still recall the feeling of anticipation as my plan unfolded before my eyes. The nobles suspected nothing until they found no water, only the mountain of rubble piled high ahead, blocking any advance. My men had discovered a small secluded oasis days ago where they made camp, and under the guise of desertion left the camp to construct this blockage, all I had had to do was pull Louis around the desert until this was finished. Confusion apparent on my Lordâ€™s unarmoured head he turned and called out â€œMake way for your knights, the way ahead is blocked.â€•

Loyal to my command; nobody moved.

As I watched the scene unfold I could feel the tension as Louis's horse stopped a hands breath before the closest peasant and snorted the dry air into his face. "Move back I said" he called, his voice pitching towards the end. He always had been afraid of confrontation. Sensing the moment was right I stepped forth from the top of the valley, accompanied by several dozen grizzled longbowmen carrying lit braziers. "This may not be the place where your ancestor died brother" I called down, my voice echoing off of the walls of the valley below "but it may ease your death if you thought there was some historic significance to your demise" I stepped back to avoid showing any weakness as I severed the ties of a lifelong friendship. Silently ordering the men to nock and draw their bows I waited. Silence thundered around me, not even the hot whistling winds of the desert could be heard now. Only the panicked whinnies of the malnourished warhorses broke the still air in the canyon below.

I never knew why Louis just sat there, perhaps it was my sudden betrayal or something simpler however Louis sat in his saddle stunned, only moving when an arrow found its mark in his left eye, throwing him backward and causing all hell to break loose.

Burning missiles flew through the air, gouging flaming wounds in the lightly armoured knights below, horses panicked at the flames and as expected, many tried to throw their riders or became injured in doing so. Those that managed to remain saddled were soon pulled to the ground by my men and crushed under the weight of bodies, the knights who stood amongst the crowd were simply overwhelmed by the numerous levies before being sliced ear to ear with rusted dirks.

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Two summers later Yeoman Willem Malchanceux returned with only a few peasants and choice yeomen, I told the grieving Lords we were the sole survivors of a massive undead assault upon their young lord's column as it had made it's way through Petra's Mouth, "We were lucky to have escaped at all" I had said. I remember stopping in the grail church to inform the monks that Louis had betrayed us all but the words stuck in my throat, as if Louis himself had grabbed me and was attempting to choke the air from my lungs. Instead I told them he had died protecting the grail banner and should be remembered in the scriptures for all time.

Guilt followed in my shadow from that day forward and although the people intended no pain, I suffered, and suffer still. The Lady is not kind to her wayward subjects as I have discovered. I have written these memoirs to try and resolve my sin, however now they are finished I realise I am unsuccessful, I hope that one day some Monk or Knight may find this book so that I will not be remembered as the hero I have never been.

Warden of the Gate,

Yeoman Willem Mathieu Malchanceux

