

The darkest night, the brightest dawn.

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It was the seventeenth day of the siege when the city of Hergig, capital of the Imperial province of Hochland, finally fell to the forces of Stykkaar. For the last five days, the troops of Count Leudenhof had been joined by the brave knights of Bretonnia, but the walls had finally been breached by the arcane war machines of the Skaven and the allies forced to retreat. Thankfully, the valiant defence had bought time for virtually all of the civilian population to be evacuated to Schoppendorf, but the loss of the city was still a grievous blow to the defenders of the Empire.

With Hergig burning behind him, Stykkaar now advanced on Schoppendorf. The servant of Slaanesh was not interested in plundered wealth from the vaults of the city; he wanted the humans that had fled before him, and he knew where they now hid. Behind the walls, the Bretonnian force stood ready to sally. Their leader, Marquis Etien de Rochefort, had vowed revenge on Stykkaar who had evaded him at the Struhelspan and at the fall of Hergig. Now he swore that the Slaaneshi leader would not escape him again.

The forces of Chaos arrived before the gates of Schoppendorf on the evening of the day after the fall of Hergig. Combat was not to be joined in earnest until the following morning, although there were many skirmishes during the night and the fires of the camps seemed to fill the plain. Within the leaders took counsel and it was decided that attack was the best form of defence – the Bretonnians would take the war to the enemy.

There were many great captains of Bretonnia there. Sir Robert de Giselles, Sir Gaspard de Chabennes, Sir Guillaume le Courageux, Sir Ryant de Cooke and Sir Etienne d'Arden to name but a few. But the leader of the force on that day was the great grail knight of Quenelles, Sir Etien de Rochefort. He who had dealt the death-blow to Krell at the Battle of La Maisontaal thirty years before sought now to do the same to another servant of Chaos.

The morning sun shone red through the smoke from the burning city to the east. It seemed at first that the light was insufficient to raise the shadow from the ground before the gates, but it slowly became clear that this was the darkness of countless black-armoured knights of chaos that no light save the light of an avenging sword could clear. "To arms!" rang out the cry. Horns sounded, cannons roared their defiance, and the gates of Schoppendorf swung open to let flow a tide of light. The Bretonnian knights, the sun gleaming from their armour, sallied forth in all their might. Banners flying, standards raised, horns blowing, swords waving, battle between light and dark was joined; and at the very front rode Sir Etien, proud on his horse and with the light of the Grail in his eyes.

From the very first it was clear that the favoured of Slaanesh could not stand before the blessed of the Lady. The Goddess of the Bretonnians smiled on them that day and granted them the victory, while the God of Chaos turned his face from those that called upon him, for he took equal delight in the agony of their defeat as in the ecstasy of their victory. In desperation, Stykkaar sought to do what he had evaded previously, he dared combat with Sir Etien de Rochefort.

Now was the reckoning come. Now was the time when the fate of Schoppendorf rested in the balance. Now were these two who had opposed each other at a distance since the siege of Zundap finally come face to face. A path opened across the battlefield, and through it Sir Etien saw Stykkaar sat on a great serpent-like steed atop a mound of bodies. Feeling the bright eyes of the grail knight upon him, Stykkaar turned to face his foe.

Almost a hundred yards separated them, but the great Bretonnian warhorse and the Slaaneshi serpent closed the distance in seconds. Sparks flew as swords met armour, brilliant white blazing across the black of Stykkaar's chest and sickly purple against the shining breast plate of Sir Etien. Both fell from their steeds, and both rose once more to their feet. Again they clashed together, neither sparing a thought for defence as they sought to take down their foe, dropping their shields to wield their swords two handed. Sir Etien thrust his sword deep into the side of the Slaaneshi champion, giving him what seemed to be a mortal wound. But Stykkaar's convulsions tore the sword from the Bretonnian's hands, leaving him defenceless as Stykkaar turned to hew him. The blow stuck, Stykkaar fell across his own steed and commanded it to bear him from that place, leaving Sir Etien motionless on the ground.

The first to arrive was Sir Orin, one of the lieutenants of Sir Robert de Giselles. He jumped from his horse to try and lift Sir Etien's body, but a Slaaneshi knight took advantage and rushed at him. Defending himself with his shield, he was unable to avoid the lance thrust that pierced his leg and he fell to the ground. The knight of Chaos turned to finish him, but Sir Orin had fallen across Sir Etien and as their blood mingled, healing spread through his body and Sir Orin rose again to strike down his astonished foe.

Next came the Questing Knights of the Liz Azur. Between them as Sir Orin, Sir Etien's body was lifted and borne back to Schoppendorf. Out on the field, Stykkaar's flight had removed the last piece of resistance from the army of Chaos and they were in full rout. The day belonged to the Bretonnians, and Schoppendorf was safe, but the bright star that had blazed before them through all the dark days of Archaon's assault had been extinguished. Sir Etien de Rochefort, Le Doberman, lay dead in the very moment of his greatest victory.

That evening, the mood was sombre in the War Council. There was little point in remaining in Schoppendorf now no enemy threatened it, but arrangements had to be made for returning Sir Etien to his homeland with due ceremony. Eventually it was decided that the Bretonnians would march north to Fort Schippel where the army of Nurgle under Feytor, supported once again by the foul Skaven, threatened to overrun this bastion that had now stood besieged for nineteen days. The body of Sir Etien would be carried in honour to Middenheim, where it would be laid in the Temple of Shallya until it could be returned to Bretonnia.

This deployment was soon made. The Knights of the Liz Azur took the body of their fallen master on a stately bier and brought it by roads clear of foes to the great city of the northern Empire. At Fort Schippel, the Bretonnians had to withstand bombardment from Hellcannons and the foul magics of Feytor's sorcerers, but thus strengthened the castle held.

It was four days later that word reached them that King Louen Leoncouer was come and that they were to make all speed westward to Grimminhagen, for Archaon was on the point of breaking through and all his forces were pulling themselves back to join the assault on Middenheim. Indeed, it could be seen that Feytor's force was departing; trusting that this was not a feint but that the King's messenger spoke the truth, the Bretonnians saddled their horses and rode westward.

Late on the next day, they met with the King just to the south of the village of Grimminhagen. He summoned the captains to report to him and to receive their orders for the battle. He gave his dispositions, and then asked Sir Guillaume, Sir Robert and Sir Etienne to attend to him a moment longer when the other captains were dismissed. Looking at the three knights, he asked, "Where is the Marquis Etien de Rochefort, who was appointed head of my War Council?"

Silence fell for a few moments. It was Sir Guillaume who found the courage to tell the King what he had to know. "Sire, we bear ill tidings. Sir Etien fell in the great victory over the forces of Styrkaar at Schoppendorf. His body lies in the Temple of Shallya within the city of Middenheim."

"These are ill tidings indeed," the King responded. "Who now commands here, with Le Doberman gone?" The three captains looked at one another and then replied with one voice, "You do, sire."

The King froze for a moment, and then laughed out loud. "You three are as thick as thieves! I wager that you have paid no heed to the proper feudal order and have divided the command." The silence and the expressions on the faces of the three lords gave him his answer. "Well, it seems to have worked so far and you may as well keep it up! You had better be back to your forces, we ride for Grimminhagen in a quarter hour."

And ride for Grimminhagen they did, and there did deeds that would be sung for as many years as there were minstrels to sing them against the dæmon host of Be'lakor. The King himself drove the Dark Master back and freed Grand Theogonist Volkmar from his chains. Lifting him onto the back of his hippogriff, Beaquis, King Louen carried him into the city, while behind him his captains led the victorious knights up the southern causeway.

Landing in the square before the Temple of Shallya, the King was surrounded by priests who took the Grand Theogonist and carried him within to tend his wounds. Louen surveyed the building before him. Within lay his friend, Etien de Rochefort, and he must soon go within and pay respect to a great warrior who had given his life in the battle against evil.

Pausing for a moment, he offered up a prayer to the Lady for strength. Looking up again he saw a man on the steps on the temple, unarmoured but carrying a sword. It took him a few moments to realise that it was Sir Etien who stood before him, but when he did he rushed over to greet him with a most unregal haste.

"Sir Etien, I was told you were dead! How can it be that you still live? Were you but injured that the priests of Shallya could thus repair you?"

"No my liege," the knight replied, "I did truly die. The Lady has sent me back to finish the tasks she has assigned me. Once more, my King, I offer you my sword." He knelt, and held his sword out to King Louen. Taking it, the King said, "I accept your sword, and I return it to you. May it bring death to your foes, deliverance to your friends, and destiny to its wielder."

Sir Etien took back the sword and came back to his feet. His body was still feeble from the week he had lain dead, but the fire in his eyes was hotter than any the King had previously seen among all the many Grail Knights he had known and the King's eyes could see the bright halo that surrounded his head. Turning to the crowd in the square, which by now included many of the Bretonnians who had entered the city up the southern causeway, he cried aloud, "Behold the one whom the Lady has returned to us from beyond the grave! Behold Sir Etien de Rochefort, the Living Saint!"