

## After the Ceremony

Contributed by The Marquis d'Ascoyne  
Friday, 07 October 2005  
Last Updated Friday, 07 October 2005

Cessation of wars oft brings times of celebration and Bretonnia was no exception. The King had decreed that for one month Bretonnians would celebrate the Victory over Chaos; pay tribute and respect to the fallen; to give thanks and worship that the Horror was no more. Members of the Cadfael Court were gathered to receive the Medal of Valor from the Empire and many a noble accepted the symbol of a Great Wolf in Silver graciously. After the day long ceremony it was time to celebrate individually.

The Marquis d'Ascoyne did not like to celebrate alone and so he set a plan in motion that would make ripples for weeks to come.

After the Ceremony

He arrived at mid afternoon, complaining how standing in full battle dress was complete torture for such as he. His wife made inquiry as to details and he said "There I am standing before the King, along with many heroes and this old chamberpot [the Marquis's word for Chamberlain] goes on and on and on and on and we are given medals by the empirical ambassador and honors and titles and just before we all collapse, the ceremony is over.

She had, long ago, given up asking for details as to fashion, gossip, and other feminine needs. She shook her head and sighed.

He said "Why publicans do not consider the plight of warriors is beyond me. My rump is still tender, my joints ache and tonight I and the lads are outing for relaxation."

There. It was out in the open and said as if etched in stone. He was off to the Festival with other nobles.

Lady d'Ascoyne, overseeing her itinerary for things to be done commented. "Tis your age, old warrior, you are not as young as you once were." No comment about his evening out.

He cocked an eyebrow, The monster was stalking the corridors! Try a different approach.

"I mean all of us, commoner and noble did our duty and after many died we celebrate and get a medal?"  
His voice did not hide his "piety". "It is so" and here he uttered a word with distaste, "Empirical".

His wife of many years completed checking her list, turned and faced her husband. "Milord, all Bretonnians, Noble and Commoner alike, rallied together to aid a county more a competitor than ally and defeated the powers of Chaos." She shook her head and he noted that the grey had not started in the auburn hair that first caught his attention so many years before. She continued matter of factly. "More importantly you and your friends fought to save humanity from an evil dedicated to our enslavement."

She looked him in the face and gave that quaint little smile she always used when driving home a point of reason. He returned the quaint smile with the thought that although he loved her more now than ever before, the Gorgon was parading before him and he had to start his plan for that evening. Throw her off guard with a subtle bribe.

"I trust you have enough coin to purchase your hearts desire in the market"; He withdrew a large coin purse and laid it on the table. Bait.

She smiled, knowing the old fox was up to something. "Yes, love, I will return at sunset with all my treasures." She moved past the table and the coin purse had vanished!. Took the Bait.

He walked over and kissed her on the cheek. "Dearest, I may not be here when you return. Some of the lads and I want to celebrate with a fine dinner at the Cock and Bull."

How appropriate, she thought but answered. "Fine dear, it is your day";.

He removed his armor with the aid of a valet. "Well it will just be Tertius, Georgal of Entraglia, Sir Gindle, Etien de Rochfort and a few others. After the meal we'll be off to the Dancing Gryphon for desserts and sweet wine."

She answered. "Fine dear, Today is your day";.

"Oh, and a brief visit to the Marketplace will follow , but I should be back before midnight."

Her eyes looked up and out the window, They narrowed a bit as she contemplated what was going on underneath his white head of hair. She replied sweetly "Tis also your night m'dear";, and left him to bathe and prepare. Near blushing with his accomplishment He swaggered to the bath, confident of victory.

At the very start of evening the worthies met at the Cock and Bull. They hailed one another and reminisced and had one tankard of ale, each. The entire function took less than half an hour. From there, they briskly walked to the Dancing Gryphon and enjoyed Tarts and pastries and puddings and cakes. As they were leaving a bevy of the most beautiful daughters of Araby paraded past them. The wondrous sight stopped them all in their tracks. The Marquis explained rather pontifically that the young women were dancers of Araby, al sharqi dancers and on their way to perform lord knows where.

Tertius, as sensitive a man that ever was, stared to the horizon pondering the facts. Sir Gindle and Sir Hillier asked about 'Al Sharkee'. Etien de Rochefort said they danced rhythmically to the sound of drum, cymbal, horn and lyre. He had seen such dancers three years earlier. Tertius looked at the Marquis and said in a monotone voice "Tis fortunate we saw them as we were leaving!"; He looked closer at the Marquis and studied him. The Marquis was the very picture of propriety and therefore guilty as sin in Tertius's trained eye.

It took them less than twenty minutes to enter the Marketplace, which spread for three miles. It seemed all of Bretonnia was there. The Marquis led them hither and thither, never truly stopping, but pushing forwards through the milling throngs. They arrived at the huge Orange tent of one Omar das Al Rhuubi, a purveyor of entertainment and good food. The banner read Games of Chance, Wrestling, Bare Knuckle Fights, Fine Foods, Fine Fabrics and Gold and Jewelry and went on and on. Almost as a footnote, the listing of 30 Al sharqi dancers was the final entry..

Soon they were seated before the arena where the dancers would perform. The food, far better than the snacks at the Cock and Bull, were spread out before them. Duc Guillaume le Courageux. noted how good fortune had followed them for they had been chosen &ndash; all of them- to be seated at the Table of Honor!

Etien commented how fortunate that they were the lucky patrons who 'won' the Table of Honor. Tertius agreed, saying casually that the action must have been 'divine'. The Marquis agreed. Tertius was about to disclaim, "pull the other one, d'scoyne";, but a shaking of bells announced the dancers were ready.

The first three came out and danced well. Even Tertius attention was diverted. Then six lovelies emerged from the curtains with lit candelabras on their head and performed a dance that was sinuous, near acrobatic and done flawlessly. Then the candelabras were replaced with huge swords, proven sharp by the slicing of melons. All three women slowly controlled themselves in falling backwards onto the floor, the swords balancing on their foreheads, but not touching the floor with their bodies, only their long tresses. Guillaume le Courageux marveled at the show of strength, nudging his comrades and staring at the spectacle before them.

The Men of Cadfael Court were mesmerized. The first hour passed swiftly and Sir Hillier was captivated by the music, swaying to and fro to the rhythms. Sir Grindle and Tertius studied one dancer move coins up and down her abdomen with muscular contractions. Etien de Rochfort inquired how one would show appreciation and the Marquis, ever the font of information, replied "clap to the music, shout bravo or Hola!" he drank some wine, "Throw gold coins onto the floor of the arena when the dancers are done" His voice grew stern. "Do not make catcalls. Do not utter double entendre or vulgar remarks. Absolutely no whistling. These ladies appreciate gentlemen"

Within moments each of the worthies had a small sack of coins before them and when each set of dancers finished, it rained gold from the Great Table of Honor. The men were enchanted and the women danced with much gold driven enthusiasm.

Alas, all good things must end. The worthies got up and saluted one another. Patrons marvelled at how much spirits they had consumed and still acted nobly. They left to return to their domiciles.

Moving along the streets, Duc Guillaume le Courageux had somehow obtained the finger cymbals and was keeping the rhythm of the music with his hands. Sir Hillier drummed the beat with his fingers on his leather belt. There was much laughter and when they passed the Campground, Robert de Giselles and Baron Loben bade farewell to the entourage and went unto their tents. They entered humming the music of the evening, kept humming through undressing and hummed in their beds until falling asleep.

Tertius was a cool one. He went to his apartment, effortlessly climbed the stair, bade his comrades goodnight, entered, closed the door and passed out. He was asleep before his head struck the parquet inlay.

Sir Gindle was grinning ear to ear. At his doorstep he tried three times to walk through and failed. "Can't get my grin across the threshold" Etien de Rochfort suggested opening the door first and Sir Gindle disappeared into his room.

Sir Hillier was downright jolly and the Marquis decided to buy this good friend one of those stringed Arabian lyres for he had a knack of remembering the music. Sir Hillier appeared sober and alert, saluted his comrades without flourishes or dramatics and then struck a pose most Arabic and shuffled into his apartment. Now Sir Etien was the very picture of Bretonnian propriety. He had imbibed enough spirits to lay out a Giant, but appeared sober as a judge. He knocked politely at the door to his apartment and it was opened by his lady. He bade farewell and thanks for a fascinating evening to the Marquis.

This left Guillaume le Courageux and the Marquis to walk to their respective lodgings. Guillaume inquired as to how those women could move their bodies in the manner they did and the Marquis said "years of training". Guillaume admitted the evening had a profound effect on him and the Marquis responded that he too, had been effected but not with churlish thoughts.

For the dancers had danced, and undulated and wiggled and shook, and they were happy. He saw the sincerity of

enjoying the music and the dancing. Their female laughter had been genuine and they were able to have old fuddy duddy Bretonnian Nobles relax and forget about the horrors of war.

&ldquo;Sir d&rsquo;Ascoyne, I am not an old fuddy duddy&rdquo;, protested the younger noble. The Marquis reminded le Courageax of the red haired dancer. Guillaume immediately understood for she had danced in front of him and their eyes had met many times during that long dance. The younger Noble blushed, &ldquo;Oh, I didst behave unnobly towards her, I fear. I shall not hide behind the alcohol or the company of friends I was with. I feel most badly about it.&rdquo; They arrived at le Courageax rooms and the Marquis bade him a goodnight and a bit of information. &ldquo;That&rsquo;s all well and good, Sir Knight, but she came to me and made bold an inquiry as to your name and your duchy. She said she could help you in many ways.&rdquo;

Guillaume le Courageax was sobering up fast! He leaned against the wall and sighed a deep sigh. An Arabian Beauty at his doorstep! Oh the havoc that would bring! And a Dancer at that!! The Marquis tapped his companion on the shoulder. She is not &lsquo;just a dancer, Guillaume&rdquo;, he said calmly. She is a Scribe of the first order, she keeps the Accounts of her father&rsquo;s shipping service. She is educated as well.&rdquo;

The information sank in slowly, like thick oil on a sponge. I am providing you with her location in L&rsquo;Anguille as she lives there with her father. Do as you wish, I feel she is sincere in wanting to work for you.&rdquo; He patted the young man on the back and guided him through his doorway and then down the stairs to the street, 70 paces west and into his own apartment..

Now it was the Marquis turn. He entered the apartment chewing sprigs of mint. He tiptoed across the outer room and entered the bed chamber. The room was well lit and his wife of 38 years reading in bed. She asked him without looking up, . &ldquo;Were the dancing girls of Araby to your satisfaction?&rdquo;

&ldquo;By the stars, I have never seen such lovely rhythmic women, young le Courageax may have found the Seneschaal he has been looking for and-&ldquo; Here he stopped in mid sentence. The Gorgon had struck!! He could feel his feet and legs slowly turning to stone!! His heart sank, he stared stupidly ahead.

&ldquo;Oh Hercule, When you are honest with me I forgive all!&rdquo; She came out of bed to help him undress. Realizing that the Gorgon had blinked and spared his life, he sighed a great sigh of relief. His wife continued. &ldquo;Honesty is always the best policy, m&rsquo;dear&rdquo; and she gave him little kisses as tokens of her affection.

Dumbfounded, he was led to bed to dream of Djinns and Efrits and Flying Carpets, but mostly about dancing women.