

The Tale of Sir Orin, chapter i. Orin von Neuville

Contributed by Robert Minchin
Sunday, 16 October 2005
Last Updated Monday, 17 October 2005

Schloss Neuville stood on the lower slopes of the Grey Mountains, overlooking the wooded vale of the river Reik. The Baron Klaus von Neuville was not a rich man, but he was valiant and honest as too few are. He had served with the Knights Panther in his youth and distinguished himself on the battlefields of the Empire before returning to his ancestral home.

The land was not rich, but the last couple of years had been harder than most. The people spoke of an evil in the woods, haunting the high slopes and descending on their fields. Some farmers had left, others had just vanished without a trace, and there were rumours from the south that shadows had been seen moving around the ruined Blood Keep. That very night, things were to get much worse. The Baron had sent a message to a witch-finder he knew in Altdorf, Kapitan Jurgen Schmidt, asking him to investigate, and had received a message back saying he would be arriving in the next couple of days to investigate. The Baron would not live to meet him.

The enemy came under the cover of darkness, when the only light was the blood-red light of Morrslieb. A blast of magic destroyed the castle gates, and the tide of undead flowed into the courtyard beyond. There the battle raged, with the Baron's men being forced slowly back until they had to abandon the courtyard and take to the keep. The chapel of Sigmar was set ablaze, and the fire soon spread to the stables and the storehouse. The dark knights forced their way into the keep, until they gained the great hall, where their leader, a dread Blood Dragon, bellowed a challenge to the Baron.

Bravely the Baron stepped forwards, and crossed swords with the vampire. He was able to match him, much, it seemed, to the surprise of his opponent, but he could not make any headway against him. All too soon the Baron began to tire, he had been awoken by the attack and had had little rest, while his opponent was as strong as ever. His skill but prolonged his inevitable defeat, but when he did fall the Dragon granted him a swift death.

Their leader fallen, the humans broke at last, and were hunted down. It was only the imminent arrival of dawn that drew a halt to the carnage. The undead withdrew, firing the castle behind them as they departed.

Kapitan Schmidt saw the smoke from his camp the next morning. He pushed on, reaching Schloss-Neuville early in the afternoon. The rubble that had been the castle was still smouldering, dead bodies were scattered around the courtyard, one wall of the keep still stood, but the others had come crashing down as their internal supports burned. He recognised the work of the Blood Dragons in the planning and execution of the attack, and in the wounds shown by the dead.

He did not expect to find any survivors, but he looked around anyway. He did not think the undead would return that night, for there was no sport to be had here now. Hearing a noise behind him, he spun around to find himself looking down the business end of a loaded cross-bow. Behind the crossbow was a boy, covered in soot and dust and with his clothes torn, but with life in his eyes and a sword at his belt.

As soon as the boy was convinced Schmidt was not another vampire, he lowered the crossbow. It transpired that he was Orin von Neuville, the Baron's younger son and, as far as it could be determined, the only survivor of the Blood Dragon raid. He knew all the secret passages of the keep and had hidden while the undead rampaged, then had escaped through a sally port when they fired the keep and left. The sword was his father's, he had retrieved it from his body before escaping.

Schmidt brought the boy back to Altdorf with him, and adopted him as his son. Orin Neuville-Schmidt, as he was now known, proved to be a quick learner and his father had already schooled him well in the arts of war. Now Schmidt taught him what he knew - how to be a witch finder. Orin learnt the marks of the dæmon and the ways of the witch. He learnt how to fight the undead and the Skaven, and how and why to hide knowledge of all these evils from the common folk of the Empire. When he reached sixteen years of age, four years after being rescued from Schloss-Neuville, Orin took his vows to Sigmar and enrolled as a witchfinder-cadet.

Fifteen months after taking his vows, Orin accompanied Schmidt on a mission to the house of the Margrave von Strehlheim. Von Strehlheim was a respected and feared, though seldom liked, courtier in Altdorf. He was wealthy and arrogant, and as a result had a strong influence on matters at court. He was also, so Schmidt believed, a leading member of a Chaos cult in Altdorf. He was away from Altdorf on 'business', so this was an ideal time to take a look inside his house and see if they could find clear evidence of his involvement.

They entered the house with little difficulty that night - Schmidt was an expert at getting through locked doors and around

traps, and had passed much of his knowledge on to Orin - and soon found their way into his study. Here they hunted around and quickly found a secret compartment in his desk. This contained legal papers, some financial documents, and letters. The letters may well have been from other Chaos cultists, but they were written in language that could be defended if they were intercepted and would not do as evidence. Nonetheless, Schmidt noted down the names for future investigation.

Orin found something behind a row of books in one of the bookcases, he called Schmidt over and they soon determined that it was a trigger for a secret door. After checking carefully for traps, they activated it, and another bookcase hinged forward as the section of false wall behind it swung open. Beyond was a small dark room, but when they brought their lanterns in their it became immediately clear that this was a chapel to Khorne, the blood god.

"I see you're enjoying yourself. Come to join me in worship?" They spun around, the Margrave stood at the entrance to his study, looking confident. He reached up with his left hand and touched something out of sight, the hidden door started to close. Schmidt and Orin jumped back into the study, and drew their swords as the Margrave shouted for his guards. Schmidt attacked him, telling Orin to run. Orin did as he was told, opening the window while Schmidt held off the Margrave and slipping out onto the ledge.

He turned back and shouted "Come on! I've got the window open." but Schmidt was fully pressed holding off three guards in the doorway.

"Run!" he shouted, "I'll join you later." Orin turned away and slipped along the ledge, knowing he had lost both his real and now his adopted fathers. Schmidt could not leave the doorway or he would be surrounded and overpowered, and could not last out for ever.

It was Orin's duty to obey and to make his escape, and that he did, working his way along the ledge until he was able to seize a gargoyle and use that to haul himself up onto the roof. From there he was able to make speedy progress around the house until he came to the road, where it was but a short jump across the street three storeys below onto the next roof. He had lived in the city for five years now, throughout his teenaged life, and knew his way around. Soon he was back at ground level and approaching their house.

Rounding the corner, his sharp eyes saw soldiers hiding near his doorway. They had been able to come directly along the streets and had cut him off. He fled again, before they saw him. He knew he needed to escape from the city. He would not live as a petty thief hiding in alleyways, that would be beneath his honour, so departure was the only option. But the Margrave had influence and he would not be able to just slip out through the city gates, nor had he money to buy his way onto one of the more unorthodox routes through the walls.

As morning broke and the streets became busy with merchants, Orin had an idea. He could hide inside or under a merchant's wagon and so pass through the gates undetected. After waiting a while, he saw a convoy of wagons coming past, as the convoy became bogged down in the mass of humanity on the streets of Altdorf, he slipped into the back of the rearmost wagon and covered himself with some rugs he found there.

They travelled on a short way then stopped again. Suddenly an armoured figure appeared at the rear of the wagon and climbed in. The figure looked around, then rolled back the rugs covering Orin and said in a strange accent "Good morning, young man. May I ask what you are doing in my wagon?" Orin had seen the knight, following the wagons on his horse, but had assumed he was just travelling the same way. What would a knight want with a wagon-load of rugs?

"Come on lad, what are you doing here? You're obviously not stealing, but why are you hiding in this wagon?"

The knight pressed, and Orin tried to explain that he'd been with his adopted father, a witch-finder, and they'd entered the house of an important man thought to be involved with Chaos, and that they'd thought he was away, but then he'd come back just after they'd found a chapel of Khorne hidden in his study, and his father had said to run, and they'd killed him, and now he needed to escape from the city before they killed him too. The tears that had been buried until this point burst forth as he tried to tell the story.

The knight put his hand on his shoulder, then said "Don't worry, we'll get you out of here. It must have been some very important person though, they're searching all the wagons. That's why we're held up so." He put his head out of the wagon and called to someone out of sight in a foreign tongue. "I'm having some other clothes brought, you're going to ride out in full sight of the guards dressed as one of my squires. If anyone speaks to you, you don't know Reikspiel, there's little danger of meeting a guard who speak Bretonnian.

A boy a few years younger than Orin arrived with a bundle of clothes, and spoke rapidly to the knight in what Orin now realised must be Bretonnian. He changed quickly into the clothes, then left the wagon and followed the younger boy to where a number of horses were tethered behind another wagon. They sat in the wagon until they drew near the gates, then as the knight rode past to the front of his small caravan they untied the horses and mounted them to ride alongside. In this manner they passed through the gates with little bother, the guards being unwilling it appeared to spend too long

looking through the wagons of a noble, even if he was Bretonnian. None of them spared Orin a second glance.

When they stopped for the night, the knight came to speak to Orin again. He said that he was out of the city now and could leave if he so desired, or, if he wished, he could in truth become a squire and accompany the knight back to Bretonnia. The knight told him that this would be the better option, and Orin was inclined to agree. He therefore knelt and made a vow of fealty to Sir François de Giselles.