

To Dame Brionna of Stanway, Chief Military Advisor to the Throne  
From Clarence Strawberry, Director Military Intelligence

Honored Dame -

I have received an intelligence report from the Captain in charge of a scouting group we sent north overland some months ago. I wished to forward it to you immediately, find it following.

## Report

To the Directors of Military Intelligence, Supreme Command of the General Staff- the Archduchy of Canberry  
From Captain Aloisius the Nine Toed, scouting irregulars

As directed by our superiors, we passed through the City of Gates up to the border of the Great Inlet and there split, with our two groups heading east toward the Guard Cities and the rest of us west toward the contested lands south of Hanal.

Group One - the City of Life, which controls much of the Great Inlet has fortified itself for unclear reasons and refugees are spilling south and east to the tune of several thousand, but nothing neighboring countries cannot handle. There is great confusion among the refugees, including discussion of neighbors being abruptly seized and even executed, and about some sort of double raid, occurring over a space of 3 days, recently. The inhabitants know little of what happened in the raid, but it appears to have resulted in furor among the leadership. The Life Guard is at the borders and reacts violently to foreigners at this time (though we lost no one, thanks be to Glor'diadel)..

Passing to the east they discovered that the Guard cities are on guard - of course they always are, but they have turned part of their forces inward, to guard against Life - which is unheard of. The priest assigned to the group did manage to speak to the bishop's secretary, who said that the bishop had received no direct communication but had determined by "communing with the light" that he was no longer under the Ecclesiastical headship of Life - the secy agrees with him, but others in the ecclesia are not certain whether or not they are being led into heresy, or whether Life is.

Passing south and west back to the meeting spot, group one discovered that ragged bands of bandits strengthened by some humanoids, apparently from a failed horde somewhere, were attacking the many disconnected towns and thorps with some, though limited success. Local petty lords and self-proclaimed leaders are arming militias that seem adequate to turn them back in most places.

Group Two - passing west along the Great Inlet and then slowly going West/NorthWest above Masque, toward Hanal we found that the independent city states in the area have armed themselves as strongly as possible and are trying to handle hordes of refugees fleeing Hanal. We also discovered that extremely well organized bands of Pigs, Hounds and Mantis, under strict orders to not loot or disturb locals are patrolling the area. Initially the scouts were concerned that the Queen Empress was considering invading the independent cities, but were quickly disabused of that notion. Hounds are delivering emergency supplies and incredibly poor quality, rough medical care (though our priest noted, better than nothing and saving many lives, though losing more than we would) to refugees, Pigs are apparently apprehending or killing bandits who are preying on refugees and turning survivors over to local cities for judgement and the Mantis... well, it appears that the Mantis are attempting to protect those of hobbit and elven blood and in some cases, attempting to convince (though not force) them to go to either Masque or, oddly, Canberry., and also are attacking certain groups which they identify, somehow. All three groups carry their order banners of course, but the Mantis also carry Ecumenical Council banners and have members of the Order of Man (priests) with them.

We witnessed one small but pitched battle between a unit of Mantis and a larger group of what we initially thought were bandits. The Mantis, while more powerful individually were outnumbered, and out of support for the EC, which we know Canberry strongly advocates, we engaged with slings and arrows - which was enough to finish their enemies. Subsequently, the commander of the Mantis told us that they were directed by their Grand Marshal (the Queen Empress herself) to protect those of "older blood" and to stop any who carried demon taint - which they claimed those we helped them finish off did. Their commander also rewarded me for our help with the flame lance of one of their fallen comrades who we helped to avenge, saying he would want me to have it. I will be glad to be quit of that when we return, it seems a fell, though powerful weapon. I do not know why the Mantis believed those men to be demon tainted, rather than bandits like other bands; but I will leave it up to my betters to determine whether or not to trust their commander's declaration. Perhaps the priest knew somehow? He was a priest of Paranswarm, and that is part of the EC.

After that our journey was uneventful, we passed through the lands of the Crystal City and the City of Bells. As we got closer to the border the evidence of war and ongoing campaigns became more evident and the numbers of both refugees and bandits became so numerous that we turned back and passed by a more southerly route back to the meeting place.

I am sending this report by fast rider back to the ambassador at Gates, from whence it can be gotten to you almost instantly, we will follow more slowly and wait at Gates for further instruction through the embassy there.

May the Light of the Sun shine always upon the Archduke and save him from all trouble.