

Excerpts from a recent diary of Tomberlin Riverlimb, Lord of Laroch

*Tanis's research has lead me to the conclusion that we'll **never** get the sort of raw life energy we need without some sort of starter, in the same way that yeast is a necessary component for proper bread. I admit that this is disagreeable to me. Should not proper alchemy and ingenuity be able to conquer the mystery of post-mortis animation? Orrloth's *Scabrous Ingenuities* has been no help. I chafe under the realization that non-necrotic alchemical tinctures are not enough to create or extend life. Time to expand our research.*

This looks promising: refining and reducing natural essences into an infusion of life energy. Not radiance, as one might presume, but an essence of nature linked directly to the Feywild and the cradle of life itself. Assuming that the fey taint could be filtered out, the remaining energy could be used to jumpstart a golem into sentience. Oh, yes.

Captured and liquefied two dryads in order to collect their vital fluids. Experiment is largely a failure, in that it animated the constructs but provided no discernable sentience. Worth continuing along this line, however. Surprised that this essence is milky and not green or pulpy. The world is full of mystery and joy.

Aha! Fey-woven mithral chains can channel the raw vitae without as many flesh ruptures. I cannot afford to encase an entire construct in mithral, so they will continue to look a bit off, but we're on the right track. Intelligence seems to be slowly rising.

Divinations indicate a high concentration of raw vitae across the border in Floodford. Sending the boys to investigate. A steady trickle from the harvesters continues to arrive, so we are well provided for regardless. Unlikely that many will miss something as reclusive or irritating as a dryad. I wonder if quith vitae would act as a clarifier and improve the efficacy?

A step back. Several local wizards have taken umbrage at our research. Tanis remains resourceful, however, and we invited them to dinner to discuss their concerns. The problem is solved without significant complications, and I'm now gifted with a variety of parts. It is best not to start any ripples until a plausible excuse can be found for their departure.

Delightful! I should have considered this before. The rivulets of power carved through wizards flesh make them superb specimens for channeling power. Give me a single strong mind to direct them and I could work wonders. Not yet, though - still so much to learn.

Moronic. The Duke of Iskaine has rebelled. Worse, natterings and distant whispers suggest that Croghan is supposedly supporting this rebellion. Feeding his ego, more like it. This had best not disrupt my own plans.

More wizards obtained. Tanis promises me a wonderful surprise once her skill improves a bit more.

A surprising opportunity. Anders has written, and the nexus of vitae is not what we thought. Apparently Floodford lies near a place holy to Sklar the Swamp God. There is a local legend about "Aleph" that Anders heard from a local bog-woman. My precocious daughter has grown visibly excited but will not yet tell me why. Has demanded sages. Her lesser work with the recently disciplined grape-pickers is bearing fruit, and I can deny her nothing.

A new shipment of poison has arrived. Superb.

Perfect. Aleph was Floodford's "guardian angel," a reborn deva dedicated to Demis who has not been seen in generations. He (or she) is known to have wielded a living blade of wood with capabilities that varied with the deva's age. That suggests a primal relic, and those are rare. Untainted primal vitae that can be stripped loose and rechanneled! I have instructed Anders to find and recover it at all costs.

The hired sages have inadvertently volunteered themselves for our latest project. They join the wizards in the preparation and dissection room. Mithral thread acquired, although I wince at the cost. Tanis insists.

Extremely irritating. Aleph's sanctum is unknown, and Anders reports that the bogwoman seeks it as well. He believes that he might need to conquer all of Floodford in order to buy enough time to find our battery of vitae. So be it, so long as the effort remains untraceable; this flirtation with independence will be the province's destruction soon enough. I feel no guilt about proceeding. What we seek will transcend modern study and is more important than a few backwater Isken yokels.

Anders and the bogwoman have found powerful allies - lizardmen, and a dragon! - and I have signed the paychit for strong weapons. These will be smuggled north to arm the local fauna. I have no interest in their corpses for research, but any humans are certainly fair game. Godwin has been instructed to handle collections of particularly fine specimens.

Research with my daughter is such a delight. Apparently a primal relic may absorb more moral taint than I had expected, but she has found a way to exorcise either evil, good, lawful or chaotic tendencies. Following these steps for all four will give us the purity we seek.

Tanis and I are hitting a plateau in our work, and I need untainted vitae to overcome it. One new delight: quith vitae has exactly the sort of salutary effect I had hoped, although they are expensive and difficult to import. I could only afford three. Truckle Nineslab is a highway robber.

No news from my boys for some time. I worry.

Alas! Now I know why. Anders is dead, killed in the stupidest way possible. Godwin has returned with his corpse, and we shall endeavor to honor him. I have sent my nephew Nils west with a message to the bogwoman that the attack should continue unabated. I can think of no more appropriate way to honor my son's sacrifice. Meanwhile, Godwin has pulled local strings to ensure the death penalty for the people who caused Anders's death. I hope they burn and scream. Then I will acquire their bodies, integrate them into some of our work, and prolong the pain until their minds shatter. Tanis and I are as one in this regard.

Grey Guard? Utterly unacceptable. (scrawled)