

Chapter 4.1

Further notes on the Preparation of Lavender Honeyed Duck

Always preferable to use a duck from land in Enchordance, or perhaps circle lands. If one can find Duck from an eastern Lavender farm, that would be best. On occasion I have had ducks with flesh so heavy with the scent of Lavender that I did not require any additional help from sprigs dried flower. Sadly, these fine specimens are increasingly difficult to procure within the city. Regarding the collection of innards, these may be pureed in accordance with eastern Table, and added to the sauce if one has the taste for it.

By Chef G. Frin

Featured in “Recipes from Notable Chefs, 1345”

Published by: Antin Press

Location: Shareth, City by the Sea

City: Shareth, The City by the Sea.

Setting: Villa Inaka, Drawing Rooms

Villa Inaka sat upon the ruins of old vigil grounds. Where huts had once clung furtively to hillsides, Lord Inakas home now dominated the slopes and peaks. Verdant hills appeared to lean on the Villa in the same way that people of Shareth had come to depend on House Inaka. At noon, from beachside boardwalks it obscured the sun. In the late afternoon its windows were thrown open. Careless silks in soft grays and antique creams drifted through dramatic seaward facades that weaved ever upwards. Challenging the sky itself, sunset seekers seemed obliged to choose between light from a distant star or the immanent grandeur of the villa.

Moving as one who is used to speaking with his body first, his gestures second and his words last, Captain Zallah, stalked through the outer drawing rooms occasionally glancing at the horizon. He was looking for a face. Lord Inakas wife and children of Izen origin. *Where are they?* In the first drawing room, she, and her two children had

been conspicuously absent from the numerous family portraits of women and children faithfully rendered in fleeting happy moments only to be trapped inside eternally thick wooden frames. *They are still hidden... even now...*

Zallah felt the Villas' casual opulence. It was everywhere and it wanted to reveal itself further. Long lines of black marble drew eyes towards intriguing shapes hidden in half shadows. Hands tempted by texture glided from surface to surface. Touching something, stroking something else, but always exploring further. In a second drawing room an extravagance of wild floral garlands hung from ceiling rafters, petals occasionally drifting down onto lustrous marble floors with a nonchalant charm particular only to flowers.

Numerous sketches and captures of family life hung on walls, three frames deep in some places. A lavish wedding lunch, the reconstruction of the Southern wing, Lord Inaka in the stables with a woman, children at classes, children by the sea. *Still no sign of her or the children. Why should he hide them?* By an open window, cast in white irons deliberately mysterious texture, the faces of four women.. *Wives no doubt.*

Through a small door Zallah chanced upon yet another room. *Ahh the artist of the family.* Rekath Inaka. Galleries had fought bitterly over his disappointingly meager output. Able to paint only when trapped by some personal tragedy or the other he had once said, "Love seems to be the end of my work, as despair for love is almost always the beginning." When he died, in a fit of the sudden sentimentality death seems to inspire in some, Lord Inaka purchased every piece of his brother's work back from galleries and private owners, sometimes at double or triple the original price.

And here they were. Ceiling high canvases darkened by forms bearing curious shamanic messages, always challenging eyes to see something more, and minds to recoil into their own darkness. On a long ivory table sketches lay disarranged under oversized sketchbooks that had thrown themselves open to immodestly declare their contents.

Zallah fingered his way through "Sketches 1345 - Summer", with the concentrated interest he reserved for things that seemed to need further undoing with his hands, eyes, or thoughts. Raketh's sketches were of peculiar things. A woman with hands on

fire staring out from a page with wry diffidence, behind her a red half circle, a large bowl filled with two black cats one twisting into the mystery of the other. Pages crammed with open mouths arranged into disconcerting patterns. Fingers reaching through rib cages. Dark wordless eyes always closed. Long after the images themselves had faded from memory, their impressions lingered on, bloated with undisclosed meaning.

“Captain Zallah,” the low commanding voice of Lord Inaka came from a doorway that had remained concealed until now. “Come through to my study, I loathe this room.”



Chapter 4.2

Chapter Begins with a Review of Whiskey from A Western Distill

By Briste Nesseth

Featured in “The West Continent Herald”

Published by: Medlow Printers

City: Shareth, The City by the Sea.

Setting: Villa Inaka. Lord Inakas Study

Lord Avra Inakas’s study, darkly lit, smelled of smoke and conspiratorial late night whiskies. It was small. An intricately vaulted ceiling hung low. Other than a writing desk, a sideboard carrying a decanter, three old chairs, candles and several portraits the room was empty. Through an oversized window, twilight sky faded to purple. Beginning to glitter across the sprawling hillsides of Sareth by the Sea were lights from other lives now finally done with the day, and ready to begin their night.

“Mind your head Zallah, but please sit.” He motioned off handedly at an old chair. *So this is the man, The infamous Izen Captain whose sword services I seek again.* Lord Avra Inaka was of average height but he stood taller. Next to him one tended to feel slightly insubstantial. His dark gaze, distended and brooding seemed to see through time, and time in both directions. For Avra, life and the things of it, occurred in broad strokes. Weeks, months and years were preferable to a disjointed parade of dates in an endless series of moments from a transient now.

Not handsome by the standards of Sareth and yet by some other measure, perhaps on some scale that favored strength over pleasing aesthetics, his features were heroic and compelling. Dressed in unadorned pale green tussar folds there was something of an Easterner about him. When he spoke his voice was insistent. Sentences punctuated by expressive fists restlessly clutching at the air told of a man permanently concerned with his ability to provide for those that needed him, while being deeply aware of all that was necessary to do towards this singular end.

Arranged by proxy through House Tivalli, Inakas recent contract with Captain Zallah had been something of a fiasco. Arith Tivalli, son of the late Enzo Tivalli and close companion to Zallah had drafted the present contract. At the outset, Avra had wanted five full companies totalling 2500 men, and five Captains but he was not prepared to pay the full amount. Privy to the details of the negotiations via Arith, Zallah made the first of four moves.

Citing a dearth of available campaigns for full companies such as his own, he sent in an offer of service slightly lower than that of the other four captains. Avra accepted. Nervous that Lord Inaka would look elsewhere, the four remaining captains dropped their prices to match.

In the name of Sareth City, under the banners of House Inaka, two thousand five hundred men marched towards Erudin City. On the first day of the campaign, unbeknownst to the other captains Zallah sent messages to each of the three Erudin houses implying that all five hired captains were willing to accept counter offers on account of having been forced to accept unfavorable terms from House Inaka. That was his second move.

On the second day, the entire combined force rode to the walls of the City and burned three effigies. One for each Erudin house. Izens, whose death rituals forbade interring the body into the earth, dug up fresh graves and flung body parts over the walls. A rumor spread that the city's wells were poisoned. Any passenger cart leaving or entering the city was put to fire, goods and provisions were redirected to the sword camps.

That night, a fight broke out. Between the five captains a heated debate took place. Though all five Captains worked together frequently, trust of one another had eluded them. Isterz and Gethren accused Zallah of settling for far too low a price, but Zallah countered with the observation that a low starting price makes a counter offer more likely. Those watching never knew whether he had acted out of some perceived slight, or a deep need to settle matters of pride that had long existed between them but Isterz threw the first punch. Zallah threw the last.

On the third day of the campaign, a messenger arrived with bribes from all three Erudin Houses. All Captains agreed to the terms. That was his third move. That same day, a message bearing the seal of Erudin City arrived at Villa Inaka listing all five captains as traitors.

Lord Inaka was furious.

He felt strained, as if a tide was turning against him. The counter offer from Erudin was not what bothered him, nor was it a surprise. What was truly loathsome to Inaka was that the five most notorious captains of recent years had snubbed him. All of them. Men who in his estimation he felt he deserved to have on his side. Men who he thought he had much in common with and now all five of them had rejected him in favor of Erudin Worths. Swordsmen and Captains were easy to come by but not all of them were noteworthy, and fewer had reputations worthy of House Inaka. Slipping into something of a momentary uncertainty completely uncharacteristic of him, Avra spent the night in his son's room.

By the age of seventeen Avras son Turello and his younger sister Itreth had led several successful Northward campaigns. Unable to give them a place in court on account of their Izen blood, Avra had opened every possible door for them on the Field and they had forged their way through faithfully and fearlessly. On the day Turello died, Avra had ordered for a Possession. Whether it had worked or not, he would never truly know, but on that terrible day the ritual had given him something to cling to. Yet as he paced, sat, thumbed through books, lay down, got up and paced some more across Turellos room, hope was not forthcoming.

When on the fifth day he received a note saying that one captain had in fact continued the campaign he lapsed from despondency into a state of mild anticipation. The note had been vague, but it seemed as if a fair amount of damage had been inflicted on the Erudin surrounds and more than 1000 men still remained under the Inaka banner.

On the sixth day a messenger from Zallah arrived with a full brief. This was the fourth and final move. All five captains had indeed accepted the bribes, four fled taking hundreds of men with them. Captain Zallah took the bribe, but continued the

campaign, destroying four granaries, two chapels, and a small village near Lake Bledloe. A hundred ransoms were captured and traded for further undisclosed sums.

It was underhanded but bold, and now the man sat before him.

Avra took the measure of Captain Zallah as he poured each of them a whiskey. He was extremely tall, muscular. His grey eyes hovered over hollow cheeks. On his long narrow face a crooked mouth sloped sideways dropping downwards into long permanently disapproving lines. There was something quietly dramatic about the way he smelled. It was heavy, dark and intrusive. Vetiver, wet fur and amber fused together in a slow creeping dryness. When he spoke, he spoke in the formal phrasing of the Izen, rarely referring directly to himself or the person he was speaking to.

Avra began. “Recently acclaimed for ransoming the Green Knight not once, but twice and then ruining him once again in the papers with a salacious “Letter of Public Explanation.” Involved in a bloodless Spring Revolution that transferred power to the Nello Family in a single morning. Able to retain his men in the face of staggering defeats...” Lord Inaka listed the accounts he had heard thus far of the Izen Captain “...and now this recent scandalous situation.”

“Later.” Zallah pushed the glass Inaka had placed in front of him towards the center of the desk. Across the table the two men gazed at each other neither willing to reveal their curiosity about the thoughts of the other. For the Captain, Lord Inaka was the deepest pocket in the South, he was pleased that Isterz, Gethren and the two other captains were now considered unwanted and unwelcome and he could count himself as the prime mover of this particular chain of events.

“Ruin on multiple fronts. Fiscal, material.... Efficient but...” Inaka continued, “Accepting the bribe from a second party while continuing to do the bidding of the first... there is an air of disloyalty about this...” *Unscrupulous*. Bribes were common. Swordsmen frequently changed sides, deserted, refused to fight against their countrymen but this dishonorable continuation after accepting a bribe bordered on shamelessness. *Brazen. Truly brazen.*

Outside bats had begun to flutter through the darkened evening sky. A single firefly floated aimlessly between the two men. In the harbor ships laden with goods from as far as Sonor & Seren were picked clean of their boxes by dock workers .

“One must consider that financial loss is equal to loss of men and equipment. A bribe that falls on the way is an opportunity. Twice as much damage becomes available. Extra wages keep men happy. If the task is to diminish the other party, there is no reason to refuse on account of *honorable behavior...*” Zallah drew the words out disapprovingly. “Isterz and Gethren, the two others, were free to do similarly. But they chose to *honor* the terms of the bribe, and as such they were forced to betray... divide forces... make it seem as though loyalty in others is hard to manifest.” He stretched out his legs, and then relaxed back into the chair watching as the firefly circled the candelabra. Avra waved it away.

“Men can be bought.” he replied flatly. “It is not the work of a Captain to provide men with opportunities to act *honorably* or engage in acts of righteousness. One should leave that to The Temple Sect.”

There was something about the simplicity of the man that appealed to Lord Inaka. *Little care for useless sentiment.* With a hard flick from a long finger Zallah redirected the firefly into a translucent lick of melting wax.

“Our service contract will be renewed.” Inaka stated. “In spring we will continue to move North, and I will join my men with yours. But I have called you here to arrange something else for me. I need an envoy to your people. We mean to begin forging alliances Eastwards. Marriages.”

Zallah pulled his mouth downwards into something that passed for a smile and tilted his head towards the vaulted ceiling, “You mean a hostage exchange... Our people are not compatible. A marriage under these conditions is nothing better than a hostage exchange.”

“The Indulgences exist for a reason... alliances with the Izen are necessary. The northern valley can not be held without Izen allies. You are known now, on both sides

of the mountain. The position of envoy is not appealing to you?” Inaka looked at him attempting to read the Izen captain's passive face.

“How many daughters are there?” Asked Zallah.

“All the children you have seen here today are mine. I have 15 daughters. 18 sons.”

“*Thirty three children?*” For the first time that day, Bernabo saw a flicker of something other than a carefully managed mild disdain cross the man's face.

“Hmmm...” Inaka puffed out his chest as one does before beginning to tell the sort of story that requires the listener to be mildly impressed at the end. “My father had many mistresses and a large household staff. He was endlessly plagued by lists of expenses. Wives have children, mistresses have children, household staff have children. Children are endless lists of needs that must be paid for. In the end one pays for one's own children, one's children from mistresses and the children of favored household staff. So I decided to do things differently. I have taken no wife. All my mistresses and their children live in this villa, and I save the household staff the trouble of trying to lure me into an indiscretion by offering them a single child sired by myself. Everyone is reasonably content.”

John looked at him with an approving look. “Things are typically cheaper in bulk,” he added offhandedly.

As if finally proving a point he had somehow failed to make earlier Avra added, “... and, when one keeps one's children close, there is a greater sense of ...loyalty.”

“Loyalty is for those who have nothing else to offer.” Zallah replied flatly, reaching at last for the whiskey. An imposing hawk-like nose dived into the glass and inhaled. “West Country?”

“Western Distill, aged. – Stay the night Zallah. Meet my two daughters. Tomorrow we will contract the marriage proposal out. I've no mood for it now.”

Invited by pleasant smells Avra crossed to the window. Duck and lavender. In the courtyard below, expert hands fussed over a small fire, coaxing it carefully through an iron grill. Two cherry trees which had grown steadily towards each other over the years now dangled several dozen lilac flamed candles from their intertwined branches. Beneath them a long table bound in chestnut leather awaited dinner guests.

“As you wish.... the Izen children. Is that them?”

Having finally located evidence of the Izen family, Zallah gazed into the dark corners of the room. Taking the candelabra with him, he stalked towards the portrait shoulders first. Lord Inaka stood an inch shorter than his Izen woman. In front of them two children, almost identical. Two boys, each with ear length dark hair, pale skin and dark eyes.

Momentarily confused, Zallah queried, “Is not one a girl?”

“Their mother didn’t care for her daughter to be *daughterly*. Nor did I, and nor *DO I*. The taller is Turello, the shorter Itreth.” Lord Inaka had crossed the room. Both men now stood silently in the corner in front of the portrait. “They were inseparable.”

“And now one possesses the other... Was there no fear that both would be lost? Possession can not be done in halves. For possession to work the vessel must be expendable. Is this daughter expendable?” Zallah had drawn back from the portrait and was looking down at Avra disapprovingly. He folded his arms across his chest and continued. “It is hard enough to live with one mind in one body. Now she lives with two minds. She has been burdened, and there are questions as to why. In every account of their deeds they were equal to each other. Perhaps if the boy had been gifted far beyond the girl it would be easier to understand the choice. But that was not the case.” Zallah’s unassuming sincerity caught Inaka off guard. Moving briefly into the familiar he said in a voice that was oddly secretive, “In Spring you will join your forces with mine. Your daughter will be a captain alongside me. There is no room in my field for uncertain minds. My concerns are justified.”

Forthrightness. Annoying. Avra replied calmly, “I need not make excuses for my decisions.”



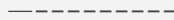
Chapter 4.3

Chapter Begins with some commentary on the snails and molluscs common to the eastern people.

By Briste Nesseth

Featured in “The West Continent Herald”

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Point of View: Captain Itreth Inaka

City: Shareth, The City by the Sea.

Setting: Villa Inaka. The Izen Courtyard

Unable to use her own room, which was now an impromptu guestroom, Itreth Inaka had spent the night in her brother's bed. From Turellos window she observed the four men in the courtyard. Her father, Captain Zallah, a notary and a bookkeeper. *Contracting. I wonder how long this will take?* Her list of grievances was growing. Last night upon arrival she had been denied access to her room. At dinner she had been placed between the notary and the bookkeeper at the far end of the table. She had requested for a second supper to be sent up, but it had not arrived. On the way down to breakfast this morning she had found the tray meant for her, outside her room, untouched.

She was now waiting, peering out of the window, for the moment when her father would retire to his room or study, hopefully alone. She had planned to descend upon him immediately.