

Prologue

An excerpt from the travel log of Yena Satham

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“...I do not know whether to class the tribes of the Eastern valleys as worthy of our consideration or not. The Izen, who are sometimes called Apostae, are nothing like us Continentals in their language, manner of life, and mode of settlement and habitation. They have no word for Truth, and ideals such as honor and transcendance are not known to them. Their Table is unprepared. They dress in plain cloth. Their death rites are the very definition of deviance. They fear nothing and they pray to no God...”

Location: City Edisse.

Setting: The Field surrounding the walled city

Rarely does a Swordsman die a death worth writing about. Baron Enzo Tivalli, despite having lived an exceptional life for someone of relatively common birth, was no exception to this rule. Known best through raised eyebrows, allusions, and ironic comments of polite society, he was the sort of man who had bartered respectability for dependability. A trait common to those who must continue to do difficult but courageous things. Like many such men, he had long since resigned himself to the grinding awareness that not even an honorable death would redeem him.

By the time he signed The Truce of New Seren on behalf of the Southern Consortium, his forces -a motley new order of dissidents, Izen mercenaries and the kinds of men who despise the trappings of statehood- had fought against all sides, and were loyal only to Worths and the highest bidder. Once again, Hearth Valley's fertile plains were unstaked, marking another inevitable turn of failed ambition and hubris so typical of crumbling empires,

While capturing City Edisse's third and final gate under Shareth's banners, Enzo Tivalli rode up the slope to signal his reserves forward. Without access to the advantageous Weather Service, rain had compromised the Field forcing his men into a last-minute change of approach. Just before noon, with the sun at his back, he bellowed new orders from the signal point, but his commands went unseen and unheard. Unaware of this miscommunication he descended to lower ground. Halfway down the hill, a stray rock from a trebuchet struck his head through his open visor, knocking him from his horse. Enzo rolled towards the hills bottom, managed to stagger to his feet, took several steps, then slipped face-first into the Field's muddiest part. A sharp pain in his side increasingly hindered him. Enzo's last moments were spent wrestling the weight of his own armor in a stubbornly muddy ditch.

Oblivious to his attempts to redirect them towards drier terrain, upon seeing Enzo's raised hands, his men advanced. Having seen neither fall nor fleeing horse, not one man thought to look for Baron Tivalli as they thundered over the hill and trampled him into the mud. They had somehow won the battle, but the Baron was dead.

Days later, a search party discovered him, his armour pierced not by steel but by the relentless White Weed. Stirred to life by the carnage, its tendrils were already drawing him into the dark silent earth. They removed him from the unintended sarcophagus of armour. His body, now partially digested was returned to Shareth City. A rib broken during the first fall had pierced through his right lung on the second fall. In the unfortunately illegible scrawl typical of official records, a presiding mortician concluded, "Death by Suffocation."

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