The Cindere Herald

APRIL '26

## Stone & Summit Hold the Line in the Ironcrest

A Correspondent who ventured to the edge of the contested mountain passes returns with sobering news: the Ironcrest Mountains are at war, and the enemy is unlike anything seen before in living memory. Since the fall of the star-stones some weeks past, creatures of shadow and starlight have poured from the broken crags near the impact site, pressing outward against every dwarven hold and giant enclave in the range.

Most remarkable among all reports is what one dwarf captain called "a thing that has never happened in my father's father's time" — the clans of the Ironcrest Dwarves and the mountain giant tribes have laid down their centuries of grievance and formed a common line of battle. Dwarven shield-walls stand shoulder-to-shoulder with giants whose footsteps shake the stone, and by all accounts the partnership has held the enemy from advancing further into the range's interior. The sight has drawn tears from soldiers on both sides, or so witnesses claim.

The creatures themselves defy easy description. Those who have faced them speak of forms that appear almost as men — walking upright, carrying themselves with terrible purpose — yet their bodies are woven of shadow, with fragments of cold starlight visible beneath, as though they swallowed the sky and it never quite went dark inside them. By day, blade and axe find purchase on them. By night, the calculus changes entirely. Multiple veterans report that conventional arms pass through them as though through smoke once the sun falls, and the toll on the defenders climbing to make night contact has been grim.

Most unsettling are the accounts of a figure seen moving among the creatures during the worst of the fighting — taller than the rest, utterly still where others press and claw, watching with eyes like two chips of white fire. No one who has described this figure can agree on its shape or size, only the eyes. Scouts who attempted to approach it during daylight hours have not returned to file a report.

The front has stabilized for the moment, but the word "stalemate" sits uneasily with those who hold it. The enemy does not rest, does not hunger, and does not appear to diminish in number regardless of how many fall. One giant elder, speaking through a dwarven interpreter, put it plainly: "We can hold the ground we hold. We cannot hold it forever." The matter remains unresolved as of press time, and Stonebridge is urged to take note.

*Galdren's Provisions & Trail Goods*

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South Market Row, Stonebridge — Est. in the Year of the Long Winter

## *Strangers from Beyond the Storm: A Conversation with the Velstrad Dominion*

Our correspondent sought out Lord Octavian Rellmar, captain and envoy of the Velstrad Dominion fleet currently anchored in western waters, for a brief audience. What followed was an illuminating introduction to a realm most Cindere folk have never heard named. "You must understand," Rellmar began, settling his travel-worn jacket with the easy confidence of a man born to fine rooms, "that the Dominion is not a kingdom in the sense your people would recognize. It is a continent. It is many continents, unified under one banner." When pressed for scale, he described a landmass that would swallow Cindere a hundred times and still have room. Their fleet, he noted, has been at sea for the better part of nine months simply crossing open water to reach our shores. Nine months of open ocean, and still they came.

The Dominion, Rellmar explained, is home to peoples of extraordinary variety — hundreds of distinct cultures and traditions, each maintaining their customs beneath the grey-and-white banner. "We do not erase what we find," he said carefully. "We bring order to it." On the matter of what exactly that order entails, the envoy was pleasantly evasive. More plainly stated was their attitude toward the arcane arts: the Velstrad Dominion does not permit the open practice of magic, and the fleet's own members appear to carry no such abilities. When asked about their purpose in Worland, Rellmar was forthcoming enough — the fleet pursues fugitives known as the Blighted Coven and requires time in port to complete repairs to ships badly worn by the crossing. On both counts, he noted that the people of Worland have been gracious hosts, and the crew of the Dominion fleet have comported themselves well ashore.

Whether the Dominion's interest in Cindere extends beyond witches and ship repairs is a question this correspondent did not press, and Lord Rellmar did not volunteer. He departed the interview with a pleasant smile and an invitation to visit their flagship at the Herald's convenience. As of this printing, no such invitation has been accepted.

## *Thirty Longships from Port Ribe Answer Port Burka's Call*

When word reached Port Ribe of the attack upon their distant kin at Port Burka, the city did not deliberate long. Within a fortnight of the news arriving, a fleet of thirty longships was loaded with salt provisions, timber, medicines, and fighting men, and pointed north along the western coast. The effort is credited to one Einar, a citizen of Ribe who began with little more than a handful of old friends, a cause worth fighting for, and a talent for a well-placed story in an overfull tavern. Word spread from there as word tends to in port towns — fast and with embellishment. Within days, villagers from the surrounding coast were arriving at the docks, many citing kin and blood in Burka as reason enough. Within three weeks, the fleet was ready.

Port Burka and Port Ribe share more than a coastline — shared customs, shared song, and shared blood run thick between the two cities, enough that many in Ribe speak of Burka's people not as distant neighbors but as family who happened to settle further up the shore. The relief fleet carried that kinship in its holds alongside the grain and rope. Non-combatants and the injured were loaded aboard the return voyage, evacuated south to Ribe to recover in safety. Three hundred warriors of the Ribe war-bands stepped ashore at Burka to fill the gaps in the city's defensive lines, welcomed by a crowd that reportedly could not decide whether to cheer or weep and managed both.

Port Burka's situation remains difficult, but the city's defenders now stand reinforced and resupplied. Travelers from the western coast describe the mood there as one of grim determination rather than despair — which, for Port Burka, may be the most that could be hoped for.

## *Orcish Clans Retake Riak — But the Meteor Holds Its Ground*

The clans of the Mire Fields have struck back against the goblin forces who seized significant territory following the fall of the starstones, and by most accounts the campaign has been a success. Orcish warriors swept through the eastern wetlands in a sustained push that reclaimed Riak and drove the corrupted goblin forces back across much of the ground they had taken. Chieftain Grimwar's commanders are said to be pleased — though "pleased" in the Mire Fields, travelers note, looks much like "slightly less furious."

The advance has stalled, however, at a perimeter the orcs are keeping deliberately wide around the fallen meteor near which the goblin forces have constructed a hasty fortification. Scouts who ventured too close to the stone in the first days of the campaign returned... changed. Some raving. Some silent in ways their comrades found worse than raving. A handful did not return to the orcish lines at all and have since been spotted moving among the goblin ranks. No official explanation has been given for what the stone does to those who draw near it, but the standing order is clear: a safe distance is to be maintained, and it is to be a generous one.

The goblins show no sign of abandoning their position around the meteor, and the orcs show no sign of pressing closer to claim it. What exactly the goblins are doing in its shadow — and whether that stone's influence spreads further with each passing week — is a question the Herald cannot answer from this distance.