

22.12.215.3.3

The 22nd cycle of the Twelfth Moon of the 215th Year of the Third Age of the Third Era

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Out-of-game note: The first mission is not published publicly. This version of the chronicle record is available only to adventurers, with an additional warning to read to the end of the first mission before publicizing that we met with Eldar, or have any connection to them. If Saffron has not directly handed you this chronicle, assume that you have the public version.

In the public version of the chronicle, the missions are also retitled so that the tunnels is named as the first mission, the Bellmorn Quarter riots are named as the second mission, and the smuggling ring investigation is named as the third mission. No fourth mission is listed.

Abstract

The following is a summary review of the missions completed on the day of the Winter Solstice, 22.12.215.3.3, in the Riftlands, Halidar. Most of the account is given in a more objective tone, as according to the wishes of the author. However, a statement of bias is also included at the end, and should be noted in any review of this document. For your consideration, the topics of hanging, Morganti, and actions resembling attempted suicide are also discussed, so readers are advised to make light of their days by turning away from the accounts of the second and third missions, should they find any discussion around those topics to be harmful to their psyches.

Written 23.12.215.3.3.



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Account – First Mission: To meet with the ambassador from Eldar

Before directly discussing the first mission, I would like to note the odd tiredness of our innkeeper, Kuyag, during the inn discussion today. Nenio, our doctor, brought up the rise of a peculiar illness that has surfaced recently, but confirmed that this was not at play in Kuyag's weariness. Rather, the weariness could be explained by the overwork of building in preparation for the Winter Solstice celebrations, but it may also be linked to a dream they had. They described falling asleep in the chair next to the hearth of the inn, and looking up to find the fire crackling and burning, and their shadow getting up and slipping out the doorway into the street outside. We are yet unsure of the meaning of this dream, but it certainly seems an ill omen, particularly given the prevalence of other malign dreams in our communities, primarily associated with Cracked Road (see below), but perhaps also with a malady that is creeping over All-Hearth, or all of us.

On the way to the Bellmorn quarter, we encountered a collective of giant cockroaches, covered in trash. Most of us progressed past them, but several of our party members followed them back to their source. After they later caught up with us, Nenio and Raz'kt, among the handful who broke off to follow the trail, reported that they had discovered the body of a person killed with Morganti. This is yet another in the string of Morganti assassinations being conducted recently. It seems that the killers, be they new or old (though likely the same as before, see below), are no longer torturing their victims or killing them normally, but instead are snuffing out their souls permanently with no pretense.

As this was ongoing, the rest of us found the ambassador from Eldar, who intercepted us on the way and led us down a side alley to speak privately. We were searched, as before, and then allowed in. They then allowed us in to speak more formally. The ambassador told us first of their return from Eldar. They said that they were able to deliver the message, but not without a cost. They have also been able to return, and this time have brought a collection of historians with them who have access to some rare historical manuscripts and knowledge not found in other regions. They did not specify how long they would be staying, but I hope that we can continue to access their reserves of historical knowledge for some time yet, since there is still much to unravel of the patterns we appear to be trapped in again.



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In conjunction with this volume of history they brought, we also requested that they send some historians to perhaps help to preserve the story rocks that were on the verge of tipping into an eroding gap. They agreed to help, but instead recommended sending some of their knights, many of whom are both physically strong and quality historians, so we may hope that those story rocks were preserved, despite the fact that we were unable to address them ourselves. In addition to this, we related much of what had happened in the absence of Eldar's representatives from Halidar, including the particularities of the conflict between Coradel's bounty hunters' guild and the village of Old Hunters in the north of the Riftlands, where Chumkali called out 'Hatred is here' and we met its opposite in the Court of Light.

The rest of the conversation centered around Eldar's efforts. The ambassador stated that they (Eldar) are "playing a game that requires their opponents not knowing what [Eldar] know[s]"; it "requires [them] not to tip their hand." In pursuit of this, they once again were tight-lipped on their knowledge and what they could offer to us. However, they did give several pieces of advice and wisdom, which I believe to be extremely useful, if not crucial.

Firstly, they offered us a mission, which was time-sensitive, and thus needed doing sooner rather than later– and specifically, today. They would not tell us what it was without our agreement to assist with it first, in order to preserve maximal possible secrecy, but we did not accept, due to the volume of other items we had planned to do. Hence, we still do not know what insight they were pursuing or task they wished us accomplish, but perhaps another will come soon.

Second, they offered confirmation that they would be explaining to some of those who had been wondering about their departure, and specifically that they had already sent some representatives to (if my memory does not fail) the Torkord Quarter, in order to reassure them of Eldar's continued presence in and support for Halidar. Hector mentioned the idea of a potluck that we had been constructing over this past moon, and hoped to implement this moon, as well as Illionor's participation, and suggested that Eldar also invest in appearing there. The storytelling traditions of the Solstice were also mentioned as an opportunity for Eldar to appear and reassure the people of their continued presence and support. The ambassador assented to both of these ideas as being quality opportunities, and mentioned that any endorsement we could give to Eldar would help them help us, as it



were– the more we bolster their reputation, the more they are able to bolster ours. They did, however, emphasize that the exception to this was with Bellmorn, and recommended that if we visited the Bellmorn Quarter, we not speak of any affiliation with Eldar, or show any hints that we were collaborating with, speaking with, or receiving advice from them.

Finally of those things that I remember, the rest of party concluded that they were satisfied, and since time was of the essence, that we should be departing soon. However, I had a final question, which some stayed behind to hear. For context, when examining the missions last moon, I and several others realized that none of the options we had found or provided were what we needed to be doing. This moon, I thought over our situation again, and there was something more– something missing that I could not find, but nevertheless a puzzle that I think was even more crucial to unravel.

In light of this, I asked the ambassador, who had previously given us some advice in a similar topic and manner, what we were missing with the larger pattern, and the thing which is in our hearts, and peculiar incorrectness of all of our mission choices. In response to this, they had three things to say: a piece of advice, a premonition, and a precaution, as I recall it, though my memory has unfortunately hazed over the premonition they gave. (I may be confusing the premonition with other memories and they may indeed remember it correctly that they said that Spring is coming, which I know Kaja later echoed, and others discussed – that Evil may indeed have tonight, the darkest of the year, but Spring is coming soon and Good will bring the Light back.)

First of those I do remember, was the piece of advice: ‘there is saying in Eldar, “weeds come in many forms”’. To paraphrase, if you simply try to kill the form the weed takes, it will merely come back again in a new form. Many types of plants are weeds, and to remove one of them, you must take it by the roots and rip it up. This echoes one of the items that I discussed with my group during our breakout to decide upon missions this morning. Kuyag did not have a name for us, but described the group as those who sink their teeth into something and do not let go. It was comprised of myself, Quaker, Izik, and Lawn. It was primarily Izik and I, and to some extent, Quaker, who attached to the idea of latching into the correct thing. As I stated then, so I state again now: we can bite into the arm and cling to it, but all we will do is be swung around. We must bite into the heart, and when we



have found that, then we will not let go, for it is the heart– the root– that must be ripped in order to end the body– the weed– and cease its strangling of our beautiful blooms.

I cannot fully recall the ambassador's premonition, so instead I will take a moment to note another item we discussed later in that day, which was the process of not only killing the weed, but also replacing it. You cannot simply rip up the plants, kill the enemy, eliminate the darkness; you must replace it with something, find something to fill its space before something finds its space and chooses to fill it without your assent. This was mentioned later, but it bears mention again, even more so for all those who did not hear: we cannot simply find the darkness and attempt to rid ourselves of it. We must find the darkness and bring to it light. We are currently in the season of Winter, where darkness reigns. For all of those of us who wish to aid the World in Her turning towards Spring, it is our Duty to seek the darkness that we have all around us, in this nighttime of life, and bring to it the light that we carry within, for the light is, in this time, more sparing than the dark.

Third of the ambassador's words, a precaution: 'remember what your mission is.' To paraphrase again, we must make sure that we each start from our missions and take our steps onwards from those beginnings. There are lines of an old paper whose thread of deciphering can be found here which state, 'the world keeps on turning only through the work of those who tend their burden.' We each have our Duties; you know yours. Move from there, and surely we can find Spring over a horizon, if only we keep walking towards the World, rather than looking only to ourselves.

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Account – Second Mission: To delve back into the tunnels, and uncover and take care of the group using Morganti

As a couple of moons ago, on All Hallows', we delved into the tunnels to investigate rumors from Cracked Road, of Morganti deaths and shadows from the first moon, so today, we ventured out again to pursue claims of this group resurfacing in the tunnels. Amidst this enquiry, we also had rumors from Gree Ment that Cracked Road had been smuggling Morganti through the tunnels, as well as reports of dreams by some members of Cracked Road. In particular, on the way to the tunnels' entrance, we found two groups of people from Cracked Road, several of which were aggressive to the point of murderous, seemingly wracked by nightmares.

Among them was a duelist, an assassin, and at least one other, all well-equipped and generally hostile. The one I spoke with primarily was the assassin, who described the dreams as being like the feverish sort after food poisoning, where it's like the normal events, but everything is fecked up and weird, and wrong. They seemed in an incredible amount of mental agony, and I think their instincts must have been flared like a cornered animal because they seemed to want nothing more than to kill the nightmares, to get rid of them. They seemed to think that they could do this by getting rid of the people who were responsible, which appeared to mean either killing the people in the tunnels, or killing the people in their way, or other members of Cracked Road.

This encounter was resolved by my party members hacking and impaling the aggressors, and afterwards resurrecting the non-aggressive members. I also attempted to use the blessing I received from the bet I won on the first of this moon to cleanse the assassin and the other of charms, but it had no effect on the second, and only appeared to enrage the assassin further. I am still unsure what mission this blessing was meant to serve, but perhaps it should be taken more as a clue than a power.

After resolving the fight as best we could, we moved into the mines with heavy hearts. Senna and I took a path to the right, opposite to most of the rest of our contingent, in order to follow the tracks we found of some Under Foot clan members. From the initial cave, we stopped at two more waypoints that curved around to the left before arriving at a third that branched again between a leftwards route, a route straight ahead, and a less

obvious route to the right. We followed the last of these, which held the Under Foot tracks, and found a member of the clan hiding from something on the other side of the cave system. Another came out from hiding to join the first after Senna and I introduced ourselves, and together they told us about the person farther in who had killed most of their group, leaving only these two as survivors. The person apparently had a Morganti weapon, of some sort of sword, not particularly long, but a little longer than a dagger. We guessed that this was the same assassin we had found last time in the tunnels, and supposed that the rest of our party may have already found them.

We began guiding the two members of Underfoot to the exit from the tunnels, as they described the rest of the situation. Apparently, the group had an exit that the Under Foot folks had seen at the back of the room where they found the killers, but not identified or fully recognized. Last I saw, we brought them back to the entrance, but they went back in after some of our party members, the wild mage saying they had regeneration touch, and could maybe save them. Senna and I took the opposite route to try to find the rest of our party members. We retraced our steps to the same room where we found Senna's clanmates, and from there proceeded to a further room that also connected to the three-way exit we had been at before.

In this room, we encountered a pair of gnomes, who were looking for a bright lady in white, whom they said was glowing. They'd come from the opposite route, farther down the passages into the tunnels, which was the way we had not gone yet from here, but we persuaded them to return to see if we could find their lady that way. We found another room at the end, then took a left to a room where we found most of the rest of our party, along with what Paku identified as a hazy sort of atmosphere, and a presence that she'd sensed outside of the mines, but also very familiarly before. See her account of her prior encounter with the presence here.

While in this room, Brakis, a new member of our party, found a mallet for a singing bowl, though we have not yet located the bowl, and I think that we may have lost the mallet when Paku was later slain. We waited in the room for a while, and encountered several roving bands of Cracked Road clan members, many of whom seemed to be highly trained assassins, vikings, and duelists– often a mix of multiple of those at once. They were quite aggressive, very much like the ones just outside of the tunnels, but I do not believe that we



confirmed whether any of them were having dreams or nightmares of the sort described by others. Just before another band entered, Paku confirmed that the room was somehow muddling our thoughts and perceptions, and after the next skirmish, we quickly departed to the room Senna and I had come from.

Here, we encountered another band of Cracked Road while we were investigating, but were able to persuade them to go on. We also at some point lost Senna and Cassius, who I believe may have died, as did several of our other party members, including Izik, who returned to us and reported of having found the option to be resurrected closer or farther. His sense of danger told him that the nearer one was safe, and so he submitted to it and found himself waking up having been returned to life next to a figure roughly the size of an average human or elf, but whom he said felt monumental, as large as a roc or wyvern. I imagine that this was the figure that the gnomes were searching for, since he described them as being dressed all in white, with a white mask painted with red roses.

It has been noted before that gnomes always seem to appear when there are members of the Courts nearby, and this seems to have been no exception. Paku immediately stated that she'd mostly heard of the feeling Izik described in cases where one was meeting a god, but Senna and Cassius appeared to have been discovering simultaneously to our journey deeper in that this was indeed a member of the Court of Light. We still do not know what member of the Court it was, but they later told me that they guessed Peace, Generosity, and Compassion, all of which were met with a simple 'no.' The member then departed, but first told Senna 'I know you' and Cassius 'and I hope to get to know you', or something of this sort. We have since been meditating on what Light it is that Senna has embodied and Cassius has not. My first guess was Kindness, but I do not know the answer.

In the room that the rest of us travelled to, Brakis again found a secret passage, farther in and towards the opposite side of the tunnel system. This one led us to a larger cavern, where we found a shrine, presumably to the Court of Darkness, or at the very least, one of its members. There, the group of assaultants stood in a roughly curved line, and the assassin we recognized from last time sat cross-legged in front of the shrine, holding a Morganti dagger point-back to their chest. We entered slowly, observing the scene.



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‘Have you come to make the sacrifice?’ they asked. -and we asked what sacrifice they meant. ‘You have come to kill me, haven’t you?’ they asked. -and Paku said ‘not like this.’ -and they looked at her evenly and said ‘then I will come back’, and looked to the rest of us, ‘over, and over again’. We should have known better. I asked ‘what do you want?’ and they looked at me with the same placid iciness and said ‘I am satisfied. I have what I want’. ‘Then why are you here?’ I asked, and they looked up to the others and said ‘we know why we are here’ and the others nodded and made sounds of assent. ‘We have accomplished our mission’ they said. So where did that leave us?

I tried to accept the dagger, but so did Quaker, and they took it. Now the assassin has been stabbed once through the chest with Morganti, but before another, Paku engaged Quaker in a Duel. Izik and Saik talked to them, calmed them, convinced them. This is not the way. Paku left the Duel, and Quaker made a choice. They flung the dagger well past the entrance to the tunnel, and chaos erupted. Eto and I sprinted for the weapon, but he arrived first. Had he trusted, I think we may have won, but I escaped just in time to regroup. I do not think we were capable of winning that fight, and I am little use in a melee in any case. One of them, a witch, followed me, but they turned back as soon as they felt the soul fear evaporating. They did not attack; they wanted only the weapon. I went back, desperate to see if I could rescue it. I told them I did not mean to fight, it made no difference. One of them, trained as a duelist, viking, and assassin, trapped me in a Duel and broke my arm, nearly impaled me, but thankfully for some reason bowed out of the Duel and freed me to sprint past a pyromancer and away from the losing fight. At the end, I remember only I, Brakis, and Kirizal, waiting in the next room over solemnly. Brakis tried to convince us to return, but we no way of healing our injuries, and none of us were skilled enough to make a difference. By the time he built the courage to return with Kirizal, it was too late. The fighting had ceased, and we had lost.

Many of those who died acquired varying symptoms which seemed to me to be more extreme than the normal effects of death. Quaker was disoriented, cloudy, having trouble focusing. Izik’s left eye now bleeds black from a Morganti wound. Saik has passed on, barring any intervention of a deity.

The last time we came to these tunnels, I thought that we had found a terrible force. Now, I think we have suffered the cost of not knowing, not trusting– of missing something I



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know is there but cannot see. Perhaps this next moon will reveal more, but it seems to me that our darkest moments came before the night, so perhaps our lightest will be around the fire and in the shine of the stars. Company, I think, is the brightest Light we can share right now, for in good company, all the Light we have in ourselves is held by all who are there. I hope I am right, but I truly believe that the power we have is to better each other into Lighter selves.

Spring will come again, and as much as we may wish to cut down the weeds, it is the roots we must find, and replace with not another weed, but instead with seeds of our own.

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Account – Third Mission: To address the riots in the Bellmorn Quarter

I hope that Kaja or Lethe may provide a more complete account of this mission, since I chose not join it after the events of the tunnels. However, I can relate from what Kaja told me that Bazil was kidnapped and killed by a mob of people from the Bellmorn Quarter, in which Kaja called out Despair and summoned Hope to bring light into their darkness and cleanse the Court's influence from their hearts. Even with the member's swee gone, there are still fires to put out, and perhaps more to do there, lest they find good reason to hold that, or another, darkness again.

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Account – Fourth Mission: To follow up on a miskmarmot smuggling operation

From all of the things we have learned today about Cracked Road, including Quaker's review of their criminal history as smugglers, it appears that there is sometimes, if not frequently, infighting in the clan over trade and smuggling disputes. I imagine that it may have been the purpose of the group in the tunnels to spark these feuds again, but I do not know. In attempting to resolve this issue, the idea was brought up to attempt to discuss with some of the Cracked Road leadership, in order to try to resolve the issue peacefully, or at least with help from the clan. However, this was opposed by the recommendation that such a claim could be taken as over-accusatory or hostile, and hence, it was decided instead to investigate a lead that Senna found on the party's way to the Bellmorn Quarter.

He reported seeing a line of miskmarmots stealing from moneychangers into a burrow, and followed them to find what appeared to be a Cracked Road smuggling ring using miskmarmots to pilfer gold. I also did not attend, but I presume that this mission went well, though I again would direct any enquiries to Senna, Eto, Chumkali, Evar, or any of the others who were actually present for those events. In any case, there does seem to be evidence here for more than one Court member with Cracked Road– and perhaps three separate ones feeding on the dissonance of their beats to darken their hearts. This is only speculation, but it serves as a thought to be held and turned until it has revealed its true form, such that we may determine if that form has any use to us.

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Account – Party Members:

Senna – As ever, I am grateful for his fire. He burns with such hope and light and care, and I wish only to help him keep the kindness he has alive, for he may be better than us all in the gentleness of his soul, and the strength he still carries within it.

Kaja – Full of determination, as ever. I wish her all the luck in the world with what she must face, not in the world outside, but in her heart and the hearts closest to hers.

Paku – As with her sister, full of determination. Paku also has a nose for danger, and a desire to step in puddles I would not want to wade in, I think, if I were able to see them as she does. Yet perhaps I am mistaken in that by my own choices. Nevertheless, her and Kaja both seem pushed to their limits. I fear for when either should tip, but I hope they both will find strength and grounding in each other, and those of us that stand to catch them, rather than letting the fall take its revenge.

Eto – Cheerful is not the word for Eto, but he certainly is bright and warm. I hope to know more of him, rather than what he does, but he seems the type to have an air of welcome that brushes you past his doorway rather than into it.

Lethe – There is still much water to swim through before she could say she knows the ocean, but I think she is a faster swimmer than many, and I hope her paths are kind as she learns the currents' pushes and pulls.

Evar – I have few thoughts on Evar, only the instinct that I am obligated to have some.

Quaker – Thank you for your choice. Your head may be ringing and your eyes drifting, but I believe you can find your way yet. Thank you for being here.

Cassius – I noticed him once get angrier today than normal. Perhaps it is in the abundance of anger, perhaps there is something else, but he has a wolf nipping out of his jaws, and I can see him snipping at heels. He is good to have around, and I am glad he has let himself speak and move more naturally, but he still seems bound. He was as confused as I on the count of the dispute between Ember Moss and Echoed Steps, though we have both heard



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from our clans that it is over shared gathering grounds. I have another promise to keep this moon, but I trust him and hope that he might attend to it in both our interests.

Izik – He is strong. I hope he has supports for when that strength is finally cracked. I would be happy to stand by him if he fell, and listen until he is ready to get back up again, for I do not believe that he would ever stay down.

Brakis – A fool, but remarkably amusing, and very helpful. I wish him luck with his choice of career. May the seas not slap you upside the head for your foolishness.

Lawn – Perhaps a greater fool, in that he is a dangerous chaos.

Sasha – I have no fair evaluation of him, but I would love to work together at least cordially, if he were willing to release his spite and voice his criticism with a mind for encouragement and improvement rather than destruction and disdain. What might come of the people around you, if only you chose to believe in them?

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Author Bias

The statement from my first chronicle applies as ever. I am still a member of Ember Moss, still an historian, and still have an imperfect memory. Though I have noted my subjective thoughts as much as I can where I have found them, it is the nature of bias to appear in ways you, as influenced by it, neither perceive nor fully understand. Hence, I submit also my philosophy, which I have reinforced and restated over the course of this chronicle, both because it is in part shared by some here, and also because I believe it important in this time to speak as a truth, not always of words, but always of connection, emotion, and unity. I believe that there are seasons to this world, as the stories and books tell us from before. I believe that, as with any seasons, these will turn eventually, as has been stated before. I believe that we are in the time of Winter, not only now, the day after the Solstice, but also throughout our lives– I, especially, as an elf with blood from Illion, have a winter within me. I believe that, because it is Winter, sometime– a time that I hope is soon– the world will turn to Spring, and light will surge back into us. I believe, finally, from the truth I feel thrumming in my heart, from the things that I have known within my soul, and from the knowledge I have sought and gained through my eyes, my studies, and into my mind, that we do indeed have Duties in this world, of this World, from the World. I do not think that we can weather this night, nor survive the hail and snow of this Winter to plant the seeds that must bloom with the river in Spring, unless we hold closer to what we are than to what we think is ours. Thus, I leave you again with thanks, for it is my role as an historian to name these deeds and rest pen, and I thank you, who reads this, for giving me reason to pick it up and write again.

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Signature

Once again, I place upon this composition of words and memories my scholar's promise.

