

PREMISE

In the northernmost mountains of Schaufften, close to the brewing warfront, two adventurers share a table in a crowded waystation.

Alric of Avallone would be a well renowned knight, provided he had a title or if anyone knew where Avallone was. Most folk are dismissive of the starry-eyed stranger, especially the freelancer and middling tourney competitor Griff.

In the aftermath of a terrible storm, the two would-be knights are left caring for a horned infant separated from the strange folk that lost them.

TIMELINE - HISTORY

Fall – Waxing – 518

Most political support for the Principality of Schaufften is pulled as the war with the Kingdom of Aras drags into its fifth season. Schaufften starts doling out massive loans to mercenary companies, freelancers, and whoever else they can while increasing taxation and the conscription of levies.

The Battle of the Narrows occurs. An Arascan mage disintegrates seventeen of the Fourth Free Company, wounding several more. Despite serving in the FFC, Griff escapes relatively unharmed, suffering from a broken ankle and traumatic stress.

The conflict between Schaufften and Aras ends. Mercenary wages are underpaid, and Griff is forced south to find a spot in any tourney he can before heading home. Tensions over the relative ease of ending the conflict start to boil, with most patriots in Schaufften believing that they were on the cusp of having a better standing on the world stage.

The Cult of the Winter Sun begins openly campaigning the ideals of a “simpler time” in village squares, leaving before most places organize something to kick them out.

Fall – Waning – 518

A peasant uprising kicks off in Schaufften, quashed by the Graf Diedrich’s remaining local men. Griff takes third in a jousting competition in Gelderan, a small nation to the south of Schaufften. He breaks three lances, spending the entirety of his winnings on upkeep. He spends several weeks trying to place in other competitions to make up the cash.

The Court of Gelderan begin making scant appearances, making decrees through Criers. Gelderan appoints the Winter Sun as their national religion. Old temples are reconsecrated and smaller shrines overturned.

In the final weeks of Fall, heavy storms begin to blow in, trapping a group of travelers at Wormwood Crossing the mountains that border Gelderan and Schaufften.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Alric of Avallone

A virtuous, kind, and empathetic wannabe knight. Alric believes in the moral obligation to do right by those who can. If he has the chance to help someone, put simply, he will! He is more lucky than good in most confrontations and prefers to talk through situations instead of turn to violence.

Born in the small village of Wode's Vale to a huntsman and an elven apothecary, Alric became an itinerant adventurer willing to lend a hand. After a few small-time adventures including dealing with a corrupt shire reeve, a child thieving faerie, and the dead of Wode's Vale rising from their graves, he finds himself stuck with the constantly pessimistic Griff.

Alric, in modern terms, identifies as gender non-conforming; leaning towards masculine presentation. He is slim, relatively athletic, and slightly pale. He has vibrant green almond shaped eyes and a puckish grin. I see him as a Dane Dehaan type, with more of a gymnast's or a fencer's build.

He has an unshaken belief in Avallone, a heightened version of the world as it stands. Even if he couldn't physically get to it as you would a town or island, he lives every day to extol the virtues of the pseudo-mythical location.

Isandro Veritas Gavriil de Corsca "Griff"

Ostentatious name aside, Griff is a tourney knight who works a side gig as a freelancer in small military campaigns. He's a firm believer in realpolitik, disregards an ethical or moral look on the world outside of personal terms, and is generally a dour person to be around.

Griff is from the Gavriil Family of Corsca, a near-island peninsula just off the Maeen coast, hanging off it like a large fruit on a branch. The Gavriil Family aren't particularly wealthy; some of them are merchants, some mapmakers, a few are scholars, and a handful are Corscan low nobility. Griff's lineage comes from the lattermost handful. As the story begins, he is returning to a nearby port, by way of crossing though the recently warred principality: Schaufften.

Griff is male, on the taller side of average. He has tanned skin, slightly curled hair, and a stocky torso. Griff is well built, but healthy. A consistent grimace crosses his face, though it isn't intentional. He is usually just thinking and has very little casual control of his face.

His belief in power politics has spoiled his soup, so to say. Griff does not believe in any sort of virtue in nobility, deeds that give status, or even people extolling such virtues.

Supporting Characters

Filius (the Horned Child):

Filius (named by Griff) starts as an infant but grows to approximately fourteen over three weeks. A nasty, selfish, brutish child, Filius is a constant strain on the two adventurers. Due to their rapid growth, "Fil" (Phil) learns to speak through stealing Alric's magic laced words. They move like a prowling scavenger dressed in a toga made from their swaddling cloth (and later Griff's cloak) with no shoes. Messy hair flows around two short horns that protrude from the ridge between their forehead and temple. They have an inherent ability to shape magic, tweaking it to their liking. As they were made to be a moldable and easily teachable figurehead by the Winter Sun, they take to new information and ideology quickly, consuming the knowledge or message voraciously before becoming bored.

Tamlin Longwader:

Longwader is a strangely long legged halfling. Working as a courier and caravanner, Tamlin accompanies Alric, Griff, and Filius across the Gelderan border before heading to Schaufften proper. Generally pretty calm and conservative, he cuts an unassuming silhouette. Four foot two with copper hair and tanned skin, he has soft features that imply a kind nature. He's a bit of a bastard, however, planning to sell Griff out to the local peasantry for his mercenary work in the recent war, trying to frame him as one of the Graf's men. He listens more than he speaks in an attempt to sound smarter than he actually is.

Shona Halbater:

A "knight" tracking Filius and the cult that lost them. Shona hails from Southern Arascan, having tracked the cult up to Gelderan from the scrublands they started rallying in. She isn't exactly landed, or even knighted, she belongs to an order of pseudo-priests that focus on maintaining a balanced world. Shona is a harrowing foe for Griff and Alric, though she doesn't actually want to harm either of them. They're bystanders to her. She keeps zealous faith in her order and, praying daily and keeping contact with non-faithful to a minimum. A woman of few words and fewer actions, she thinks deeply about whatever she does.

Locations

The Principality of Schaufften:

Schaufften is a small country, framed on its western and southern sides by a crescent shaped mountain chain, the Iron Fells. Most of the geography consists of rolling hills, thick forests, and rugged highlands. Two large rivers, the Thom and Zuric, flow northwest and due west respectively from their mutual starting point at the highest peak in the Iron Fells, Ūrbeow. Currently in dire straits due to a recent war and several peasant revolts, the Schaufften nobility is scrambling to maintain their holdings and status. This country holds The Narrows, a river delta with little value that was fought over for six weeks. Schaufften deals heavily in lumber, steel, and wheat trades.

Gelderan:

Gelderan is effectively a minor barony in size, only around three small villages and a central town. Scrublands and forested lowlands encircle a large swampy lake fed by ice flow from the Iron Fells. Focusing trade mostly on textiles and silver, the economy is moderately stable at best. The country holds a significantly trained expeditionary force that, while relatively small, manages to keep a standing military. Outside of a single flagstone road running east to west, connecting the eastern side of the continent to several ports on the western coast, the roads are mostly unpaved. The weather has been horrible for six months straight, coinciding with the arrival and subsequent takeover of the local churches by the Cult of the Winter Sun.

Wormwood Passing:

A trade outpost on the Gelderan side of the Iron Fells, Wormwood Passing hosts only five buildings: one check-in station for carters, one public house, two homes, and a stable. Built in a foggy mountain pass surrounded by temperate forests. There isn't a local constabulary, militia, or guard, the pass makes do with locals from a nearby Gelderlan town. Most income to the area is done through a checkpoint tax on any trade coming through, with a minor stipend from both nearby countries for tax-less trade. A few decades back there used to be a lumber mill in the area, around a two-hour hike from the Passing proper.

World Information

Calendar and Major Holidays:

The calendar of Arascan is split much different than our own., split in a way that can be jarring to look at. There are four seasons, split into two 70 day waxing and waning months apiece.

Tensday, which occurs during the course of the story, is what it says on the tin; a ten-day period of half workdays and very little travel.

Political Landscape:

Currently, Northern and Southern Arascan are in a pitched pseudo-conflict, sniping at each other with satellite states. Schaufften is one of those states, being financially bankrolled by a collection of other provincial states that make up Southern Arascan. After that backing is pulled, Schaufften completely runs out of financial stability and one of these minor conflicts collapses. The story is now dealing with a post war state that can't support its own landed peasantry.

Magic:

Yeah, there is magic. In this story and setting it is treated like a fundamental force, something that exists in the same equilibrium with space, time, gravity, and light. Think about the concept of Plato's Aether. It's the fifth building block to mess with, at least in terms of research and development. It's accessed through multiple routes, the most common being something simply being study and practice, although some folk like Alric access it through language and sheer righteous determination.

Religion:

Aspects of the major pantheon are more often revered than the gods themselves, along with local Saints.

Sendan – Wise and reticent, handling knowledge, the arcane, and measured war.

Boran – Watches over travellers, roadways, and trade.

Igena – A thorn in most other gods' sides, usually prayed to by the shortsighted for easy gain.

Biwos – Fertility and reciprocation are their domain

Corall – Worshipped by those of an inventive mind or drive to succeed

Rahm – An Architect that supports working from the ground up. Commonly worshipped by craftsman, giants, and people of the land.

Hwisp – Secrets and documentation are both his domain

Saenine – Hunters, measured thought, and marriage are under them.

Saint Llewellyn The Willled – Local saint of Gelderan

Synopsis

Alric provides some minor aid to a caravanner heading to Wormwood Passing as a hired hand and guard. Griff joins with the group for cheap passage after losing most of his tourney winnings to keeping his gear in useable condition.

The two board together due to a mutual lack of funds, spending the night in the Passing's stable loft. During the night the weather worsens as a group of strange figures start pouring into the public house. In the morning an apocalyptic storm hits the passing, tearing through and wrecking the checkpoint. The figures abscond into the weather-beaten mountains leaving a horned baby in the wreckage of the public house.

Naming the infant "Filius" and assuming there will be a monetary reward for Griff and the attached glory for Alric, the two set out across the war-torn landscape with one of the couriers from the caravan.

While crossing through Schaufften after the group that left the child, the courier splits from them in order to sell Griff out to the peasantry, a knight errant hunts the baby, and the unrest begins to boil over. Filius grows to look around fourteen in three weeks.

Trying to teach Filius ethics, morals, manners, and common decency is difficult as Filius doesn't seem to care for anything empathetic.

After reaching the Aras border, the adventurers catch up to the figures. They learn Filius is effectively a creature made whole cloth as a mouthpiece for the Cult of the Winter Sun. Not wanting to give up Filius's freedom, they attempt an escape with the aid of the Knight Errant, Shona.

Griff hires Alric as a tourney partner and offers Filius a position as a scribe.

Excerpt:

Alric threw his head back, hoisting his canteen with a thespian's flair and taking a significant mouthful of the Passing's strawberry mead. As he was about to swallow, a retch burst from his lips along with a river of alcohol and a single wiry haired leg.

"You fool," Filius said, belting out a malicious shriek. "I told you not to drink, Alric! Drinking is for terrible, nasty boys!"

"Choose your words, the thing doesn't take context well." Griff said. One could, among the dourness of the freelancer's wooden face, see the faintest break of a grin.

Looping his slender index around the hirsute limb, Alric tugged. A spider larger than any he had seen outside the Old Forest in Wode's Vale came with the leg, twitching and writhing against the pale digit. Despite the rampant disgust brewing in his chest that began to boil over his collar, he simply let the creature down onto his boot. "Thank you, Filius, I could have been poisoned had it not been for your friend taking a dip." Alric said. He smiled at the child with an unnerving mirth.

"Why are you not vomiting?" Filius asked, crossing their arms and stepping their bare foot upon the spider. It squashed to the absolute limit before bursting into wisps of smoke, spiraling up to join its kin above the campfire.

"Well Fil," Griff said, leaning closer to the fire, "such actions would be decidedly unheroic." He scooped up a thick branch and tossed it wantonly upon the fire, dousing its height and throwing a low shadow over the three.

"Of course not." Alric said with a scoff. "I don't want to ruin the mood. It's too pleasant for such things."

The firelight stayed low for the rest of the night, tended in shifts between the two men as Filius slept soundly. The snake Alric found however, was wide awake and very willing to frighten a horned rascal.

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