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This account is an unofficial interpretation of existing data, an attempt to set down a GM-level balanced account as background for my personal Harn campaign. I find it easier to set down “historical accounts” (are they garbled or not?) for my players once I already have the plain account of what happened. If this article helps clarify the event and its’ aftermath for others – or if it simply stimulates someone else’s imagination to creating a version they like better -- then it has well served its’ purpose.

No attempt is made to infringe upon any copyrights held by Mr. Done, Auran, Columbia Games, or N Robin Crossby – the creator of Harn. Without his vision, this extraordinary role-playing world wouldn’t exist and all our lives would be that much bleaker.

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The Battle of Sorrows is unquestionably one of the pivotal events in the history of Harn. 1400 hundred years ago, near present-day Chybis, a combined army of human, dwarves, and elves stood against an invading barbarian army from the Lythian mainland. Had the battle gone different in only a few key ways, it is likely that the Alliance would have gone on to drive the barbarians all the way back to the eastern shore of Harn and into their ships.

By most measures, the Alliance was far more than a clear victory -- it was a rout. Something over 75% of the Lythian force was killed, removed from battle by wounds, or captured. The Alliance suffered casualties of less than 15%. The extent of the victory is all the more extraordinary when you consider that the Alliance forces were initially outnumbered nearly 2 to 1.

That the battle took place is common knowledge among Harnic nobility, even among many tradesmen and some of the peasantry. Many educated humans in Harn could even tell you when it happened. None could tell you exactly what happened there. Few translated records exist of the battle itself. There are runic scrolls among the Khuzdul, rarely opened. There are songs among the Sindarin, rarely sung. There are tales in the oral history of the Jarin, rarely told to outsiders.

Something happened at the Battle of Sorrows – something much more than a military victory. The price of the victory was so high that it forever changed the balance of power in Harn: it drove the Khuzdul and the Sindarin apart and largely removed both from Harnic politics; it reduced the Solori to a shadow of their former military greatness; and it paved the way for humans from the mainland to become the dominant force in Harn.

What happened?

**Wars happen for a reason.**

The Sindarin and the Khuzdul lived together on Harn in peace for thousands of years. The age was known as the Codominium. Daelda, the King of the Sindarin, was acknowledged as the ruler of all of Harn, from the northern shores to the southern reaches of what is now Melderyn; from the eastern shores to the western islands. The Khuzdul, largely in their two retreats, had their own kingships but acknowledged the supremacy of the Sindarin. About two thousand years ago, towards the end of the Codominium, the Jarin – humans of a particular culture – came to Harn as persecuted refugees from the mainland. They came in peace seeking a home, and were accepted by both cultures, dwarvish and elven. The Jarin had skills that benefited both the Sindarin and the Khuzdul.

Hundreds of years went by. The inevitable stresses between such radically different peoples grew.

About 900 BT, the mainland cultures which had driven the Jarin out found where they had gone to. A new land to conquer; a new place to colonize. They came in numbers and settled along the coasts of Solora and Horadir, the same coastlines the Jarin had settled centuries before. The difference was that the new settlers did NOT come in peace; they came with swords and spears, and intended to make all of Harn their own.

The Khuzdul objected strongly, and disputes became armed skirmishes. The elder races were militarily superior, but the Lythians were far more numerous, and reproduced much faster. By the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BT, the entire regions of Horadir and Solora had been abandoned to the Lythians. Many Jarin moved north of the Ulmerien River, to areas where the Sindarin and the Khuzdul still held sway.

It wasn't enough. Over the next century, Lythian growth pushed the elder races time and time again; these conflicts are collectively known as the Atani Wars. Time and again, the incursions of the Lythians prodded the Sindarin or the Khuzdul into striking back, and then pushing back the barbarians, keeping them on their own land. For awhile, this was able to keep the Lythians more-or-less contained, with borders that were reasonably stable. Towards the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BT, new immigrants from Lythia appeared; the Solori. These tribesmen had made a considerable name for themselves among the civilizations of the Lythian mainland, where they were highly skilled mercenaries. Once on Harn, they quickly became the military leaders of the Lythian forces.

One warlord, Tharek, was a particularly capable war leader and often spoke of pushing deeper into new lands. In 685 BT, he was able to unite most of the Lythian clans and began carrying out his plans. He outflanked the Jarin along the Ulmerien River and began conquering the lands up to the Osel River.

The Khuzdul simply did not have the resources to counter an assault of this nature. They tried; the Gods know they tried. They had the skill, and the equipment; they did not have the numbers. This invasion Tharek led had the potential to divide Harn, cutting the eastern provinces off from Lake Benath and the western reaches. The King of Azadmere appealed to King Daelda for help, pointing out that if the Lythians were not stopped, both the elves and the dwarves could end up as small nations completely surrounded by barbarian lands.

Daelda watched, and listened to the dwarven Kings, and to his advisors. He sent scouts to gather first-hand information about the Lythian incursion. What he heard, and saw, dismayed, and then angered him. Finally, the Sindarin King had had enough. In early 683, he held a meeting with the Kings of Kiraz and Azadmere, and the clan leaders of the Jarin. Held near present-day Olokand, the meeting lasted a full tenday and was fraught with high tempers and impassioned speechmaking from all sides. The end result was that Daelda ordered an immediate campaign against the Lythians. He further ordered that the combined force should assemble by the end of autumn, on the plains south of the Kathela Hills in present-day Kaldor. This was significantly further north than the Lythians had been, making the site reasonably safe from observation as the force gathered.

The King of Kiraz expressed his doubts about being able to muster the needed force on such short notice. The King of Azadmere gave his unconditional support and only asked how large a force he was to bring. The clan leaders of the Jarin protested against the hardships of a campaign in the winter, a thing so draining of resources that it was virtually never done, even on the mainland. Daelda responded that it was vital to drive the Lythians out before they could establish a stronger foothold, and that the barbarians would be even less prepared for winter warfare than the elder races.

### **Preparing for War**

Over the next few months, Daelda systematically pulled warriors from all over southern and western Harn. The Sindarin army was never very numerous -- for the Sindarin, a large army was a few hundred because elvish archers tend (then as now) to make short work of any enemy they find. Slowly, an army began to grow in the Kathela Hills. The warriors of the Jarin arrived throughout the summer, as well. A few dozen arrived the first tenday, a few score the next, another two score the tenday after that. By the early fall, the force in the hills was larger than the Codominium had ever needed before, but Daelda was determined that the invaders were to be decisively dealt with.

Logistics issues were already beginning to appear; such a large force demanded extensive resources, far more than just food and water. Water is rarely a problem in

Harn, but food can be. Therefore, arrangements were made to extensively harvest the surroundings for fresh food, and to have long-term rations cached along their intended route.

This served several purposes besides providing food: first, it kept the supply train small and therefore allowed the army to travel faster. Second, it kept down the signs of the army's travel, giving the enemy less notice of their arrival. Third, it dramatically reduced the food available in the area for others, making it harder to support Lythian scouts and sympathizers in the area. Hundreds of warriors and hunters, and foragers, were engaged in this, spread out ahead of the main battle force. They were a vital part of the Alliance troops, but were unlikely to be available for massed combat.

By late summer, dissension in the ranks was growing; not only were the troops becoming restless, but the commanding officers refused to allow a group of mounted Sindarin Knights to join. They were acknowledged as excellent warriors, but the footsoldiers protested. As a compromise, the Knights were accepted as a detached unit and sent on a mission to deal with outlying Lythian units. The army was intended to move quickly while leaving minimum trace; as stealthy as the riders were afoot, the horses left a trail.

There was yet no word from Kiraz. Daelda and his couriers knew only that the western Khuzdul were supposed to send a strong force. Messages were sent to ensure the King had current information.

Word arrived from couriers that a sizable force from Azadmere had worked their way down the Sorkin Mountains and was currently camped along the eastern side of Lake Tontury. By return courier, they were instructed to deal with any Lythians in the area, and rendezvous with the rest of the force at the fork of the Upper Osel River. Daelda was delighted with the news; the Azadmere force was several clans of Jarin scouts, hundreds of medium foot troops and three hundred of the legendary Superheavy Foot. It was clear that the King of Azadmere was sending the best troops he could muster without stripping needed manpower from the task of keeping the Kingdom running smoothly in a hard autumn. Best of all, the force was led by the Prince of Azadmere himself. With such superb troops, the utter destruction of Tharek's horde seemed assured. Officially calling itself the Army of the Elder Alliance, the force marched east and south from Kathela.

### **The Road to War**

The path of the Alliance army can be followed even today. From their mustering base in the Kathela hills, they marched southeast, crossing the Osel River near its fork.

The crossing of the Osel River had been given much thought, for it runs deep and fast along there. Scouts swam the river upstream, then gathered the cords that trailed from arrows fired across the river. Using these as pilot leads, light ropes and then heavy ropes were drawn across. Two such cables were used to outline the path for a floating

bridge, assembled from sections of matting built as the army traveled; a third was used as a guide to draw the bridge sections across. The resulting bridge was not sturdy enough to bear the weight of the carts in the supply train, but it was not intended to. This bridge served as a construction platform.

While the builders checked that the river bottom was sound and that the best location had been found, others unloaded things from the carts. Gradually built as the army camped during the night, these were numerous sturdy sections of bridge, all of a uniform size and design. Pilings were sunk at the edge of the river, then 10' further out. A foot further, another pair of pilings. The first section of bridge was fastened over the first four pilings; an advance ramp hinged to it, and the pilings for the next section brought out. Workers on the floating mats sank the next quartet of pilings, and the next section of bridge was moved out and secured.

In this fashion, the bridge was built across the Osel. In just over a day, the bridge was made solid enough for troops to begin crossing. Work continued throughout the night; by morning, the bridge was secure for soldier-drawn carts and what few mounts were present.

By noon, the supply train and all the rest of the army had crossed. The initial advance ramp was taken up, and the various sections of the bridge removed in turn. Each set of pilings was in turn removed with the help of a rude crane mounted on the bridge sections not yet removed.

By sunset, the workers were able to pull free the last of the pilings, and the supports for the ropes; they were pulled across on the final raft, leaving behind nothing of the bridge. The entire crossing was completed in two days and the army moved on after leaving a small contingent to guard the ford.

The first opposition occurred three days later, near the Oselbridge ford. Early in the morning, the far advance scouts, mostly Jarin, were ambushed by Lythian archers. The scouts withdrew with only light casualties and sent word back to the main force. That same afternoon, the Sindarin scouts led a picked contingent which swept through the area with grim efficiency. It was feared that survivors would report the army's movements to Tharek's men before the Alliance was ready.

The fear was well-grounded. Several of the best Lythian scouts had indeed escaped to the south to warn Tharek of the advancing army. By the time the Alliance troops had found their trails, it was too late to catch the scouts. The Alliance had to assume that Tharek knew they were on the way.

The senior officers of the Alliance increased the advance range of the scouts, from a half-day to two full days along the pre-arranged route. This spread the scouts thin, but it was felt that the improved advance notice of trouble was worth the risk. In addition, fast couriers were sent back to tell the Lower Osel rear guard to advance up to Oselbridge.

A small contingent was left at Oselbridge to hold it, sending the contingent from the Osel crossing on up to the main force when they arrived.

In addition, many of the Jarin forces were spread out in small groups on parallel routes, in order to provide a better screen for the main army. The Jarin were better able to blend into the region and had a far better chance of passing as locals if caught. It was felt that this would provide a better chance for the main army to approach closer before warnings were given.

The Alliance marching plan might not be clear to humans. Rather than traveling as a single huge body with outriders and scouts, the Alliance moved in the Sindarin style -- as numerous smaller bands along parallel paths, with frequent messengers between them. This was far less destructive to the surroundings, left the land able to recover faster -- and left less of a trail behind. It also raised less dust and made it much harder to sight the force from a far-off hill.

On the same day, Tharek gathered together his war-horde and sent them north to find a place for battle. They stopped only two days later, some ten leagues north of present-day Burzyn. Here they found the site they wanted; a flat plain with hills on three sides, and plenty of cover on the far side to mask not only the main encampment, but also the reserve camp another quarter-league away. Tharek approved, and the building of the compound began. The next task was to find the enemy, and bring them to this place.

For the Alliance army, the next stop was the fork in the Osel River; there they were to rendezvous with the Azadmere troops. Word had still not been received regarding the troops from Kiraz. The trip might have been four days, but the distance was covered in three. There were frequent skirmishes with small groups of barbarians, giving the Alliance command reason to order a forced march late into the evening. None of the skirmishes were serious battles, and were handled by the scouts. Nonetheless, it was clear that the Lythians were testing the Alliance and that the main battle would be soon.

The rendezvous went well, and the Khuzan troops settled into their assigned place in the traveling order. Largely, the Alliance army seemed Khuzan and Jarin, for most of the Sindarin were ahead as scouts, between two days and half a day's travel ahead of the main body. They already knew the lay of the land; it had been theirs for thousands of years. They were there to ensure that the barbarians spring no further surprises, and to gather supplies before the game had a chance to flee. Further, there were a limited number of places where the terrain itself would have helped the Lythians; scouts were detailed to check each of them in turn.

Alliance forces:

Scouts / bowmen	650 Sindarin, 150 Jarin
Light foot	300 Jarin (+300 more as defensive cover as noted above)
Light horse	50 Jarin
Medium foot	300 Khuzdul, 200 Sindarin
Heavy foot	200 Khuzdul
<u>Superheavy foot</u>	<u>300 Khuzdul</u>
Total	2750

## **The Battle of Sorrows**

### 23 Savor 683BT

The furthest of the Alliance scouts sees sign of the Lythian force; the water shows sign of many humans densely packed, and there are disturbances among the wildlife. Soon after, from atop hills, the marks of massed cookfires can be seen up ahead. Leaving coded messages in rock piles and plaited branches, they move ahead at their best speed. A few hours later, other scouts find the messages and report back to the main body of the Alliance army.

### 24 Savor 683BT.

Alliance scouts find the main body of Tharek's force. Following plans were made long since, many of the scouts reconnoiter, begin developing the main campsite, and establish communications routes throughout the area. The rest of the scouts report back to the main Alliance force. Combat is avoided, lest the barbarians learn too early that the Alliance has arrived.

The Lythians do not have the long experience of the Alliance, but they are not fools. The scouts need little time to see that. Having learned the Alliance is on the way, the Lythians have moved towards the enemy and selected the best available battlefield.

It has several interconnected hills, an easily-accessible plain, and a place for a staging encampment. They have command of the high ground and nearly fifty good scouts out; some afoot, some on horseback (mostly Chelni riders), and some in screened locations they believe well-hidden. They also have built a high perimeter wall of brush around their staging encampment. The cleared land outside the brush makes a good killing field, a hundred yards wide. They are confident their position is secure. They have made plans to deploy rapidly as Tharek's battle plan indicates, and they are merely waiting for word from their scouts that the elves are in the area. Within the walls, they hone their weapons, tell each other of the victory to come, and wait for the word to come.

As good as their scouts are, they are no match for the woodcraft of the elves. Unseen, the elves slip around the barbarians and keep watch. Lythian leaders and sub-leaders, all Solori, are noted and pointed out to others. The care with which the camp is

organized had already suggested Solori leadership, but it is now confirmed. Important craftsmen are also noted, and the location of foodstores. The location of every enemy scout is carefully noted, and someone assigned to watch him. Tharek himself, a sought-after target, remains inside and unseen.

The barbarian scouts grow restless as the day wears on; they should have heard word of the Alliance troops by now.

Lythian forces:

Light foot	4100
Medium foot	900 (mostly the Solori)
Archers	100
<u>Light horse</u>	<u>100</u>
Total	5200

(non-combatants not counted)

The first phase of the battle has already begun, but the Lythians still do not know the enemy has arrived.

Over the course of the afternoon and evening, the majority of the Jarin outriders arrive. There were some casualties due to scattered skirmishes. This causes concern but is not felt important enough to change the current strategy.

The leader of the Alliance scouts is Aranath, the cousin of the king. He smiles coldly as he receives reports of the barbarian forces. Thus far, all goes as it should. The intent of this battle is not to annihilate the barbarian force, but rather to prove to the Lythians that colonizing Harn will cost them more blood and lives than they will want to pay. Daelda's hope is that a clear display of the overwhelming force the Alliance can bring to bear will convince the Lythians, and Tharek in particular, that they cannot win this campaign. Rather than a long, drawn-out war of attrition, he hopes to shatter the military power of the Lythians in a single battle. It is a gamble, but he is confident.

Just before sunset, word arrives from returning scouts that the main force will arrive in two days, around sunset. Shortly after sunset, scouts arrive with unsettling news; the enemy has a second encampment of nearly five hundred, a half-mile away on the other side of the hill. This is clearly a reserve force. Aranath is not cheered by this; they Alliance battle plan will have to become more complex; perhaps too complex. More scouts are detailed for check for any more troops within a league.

The scouts also report that the Lythians in their encampment are clearly ready to fight and are waiting for the enemy so the battle can start. At that, Aranath and most of the senior officers smile.

Aranath looks over his charts of the area and the enemy's force disposition. The Solori are bred mercenaries, and Tharek is one of their best leaders; with them in command, the battle will only get more difficult. Still, they cannot fight an enemy they cannot find;

Aranath orders the second phase to proceed. Scout leaders nod and leave; the scouts are out of camp well before first light.

The second encampment is troublesome. After consulting with unit commanders, Aranath gives further orders. Most of the medium foot and a portion of the archers are sent by a wide route towards the Lythian reserve camp.

Even with their legendary woodcraft, the Alliance scouts have missed a small group of men shrouded by craft and magic. From their post high on a bluff, they can see much of the area. It would be a wonderful lookout point for the Alliance, if it were climbable. The men there made sure it was not climbable, after they moved in.

### 25 Savor.

The elvish scouts separate into dozens of groups, each with selected targets, and melt into the woods for miles around. They move like ghosts and begin targeting the outermost pickets around the barbarian encampment. Few indeed of the barbarian scouts see their attackers; most die silently. By mid-morning, all the high ground belongs to the Alliance, and the scouts' horses are in elvish hands. The barbarians know that some of the reports from their scouts are late, but are not yet much concerned.

At high noon, the hoot of an owl sounds outside Tharek's encampment. Several Lythians, particularly alert, shout a warning that something is wrong. It is too late; Sindarin arrows are already in the air by the hundreds. The subsequent rain of death is devastating to morale but does not decimate the barbarians; the tall wall of brush has done its' work by blocking the archers' view, forcing the archers to fire blind. Even those few observers high in the trees outside the encampment are unable to see many of the Lythians among the close-packed welter of tents and brush.

As soon as the rain of arrows ceases, Tharek orders his men out to kill the attackers. It is too late; the elves have already withdrawn, having nearly emptied their quivers. Behind them, the wailing of camp followers mixes with the cries of the wounded and screamed oaths of vengeance. Nearly a hundred people will die from this attack, and another fifty scouts are dead or captured; in a force of five thousand that is not much. The importance of the attack is in its' effect on morale, and the confusion it has created.

Most of Tharek's men return within the hour, finding themselves too vulnerable to frequent anonymous arrows among the trees. They have come for glory, but find none in the thought of dying alone, never seeing your slayer. Although some search until full nightfall, Tharek's men find no elves, no Jarin, no dwarves. What they DO find is that the high ground is denied them; when they try to climb hills to look for the Alliance camp, they are picked off. Back at the camp, Tharek shouts at length about the cowardly ways of the enemy, who are afraid to meet his men for a proper fight. It does help the morale of his men, but he hears no answer from the trees. He orders the roofs of the compound to be reinforced with shields, planks, anything solid. Many of the roofs are thickly layered with grass and dirt. No one ventures into the open unprotected.

Tharek has lost three men out of every hundred, but still has yet to see the enemy or count their numbers.

At the same time this attack was begun, an assault is launched against the much smaller reserve base, a half-mile away. There are some similarities between the two attacks; both commence with a hail of arrows, both are made against an enemy caught off-guard and unawares inside a compound. This attack, however, is deliberately deadlier.

The primary goal of the attack on the main compound is to sow confusion and reduce morale, by demonstrating the superiority of the Alliance. The primary goal of the attack on the reserve compound is much simpler; to kill or disable as many of the enemy as possible while minimizing Alliance casualties. The odds are nearly even, and the Alliance has clear superiority of weapons, skill, and missile-fire. The five hundred barbarians in reserve are no match for the Khuzan and Sindarin medium foot, one-on-one. The casualties are severe; nearly three hundred in the compound die. The rest are brought back, under heavy guard, to the prisoner area the Alliance has built. This removes many of the Alliance troops from an active combat role; they will be acting as prison guards instead. It also virtually eliminates the entire Lythian reserve before their commander knows the battle has begun.

Counting these casualties and prisoners, Tharek has actually lost twelve men out of every hundred – but doesn't know it yet.

### 26 Savor

Before first light, Aranath gives orders to a group of elvish magicians. They spend the rest of the day chanting and dancing, performing a lengthy ritual spell.

Periodically through the day, Tharek's encampment is peppered with flights of arrows. Little damage is done and casualties are light, but it does keep the Lythians cautious. On the far side of the encampment, several small groups are able to slip out and head away from the battlefield. Careful observation shows they are armed only with light weapons suitable for defense against natural threats. Few indeed have missile weapons; none seem prepared as a military force. Convinced they are true deserters and not an attempt at creating a second reserve, the watchers in the trees let them go with only token harassment.

The sky is clear in the morning. By late in the afternoon, clouds gather and darken. Two leagues away, the Alliance forces note the change in the weather ahead of them. Over their heads, the sky is still clear.

Not long after sunset, the clouds open to rain. At first only a light sprinkle, as the evening wears on it becomes a fair rainstorm. Morale in Tharek's troops plummets; it is difficult enough to move about within their camp, the prospect of having to fight on muddy ground is not appealing. Moreover, the utter lack of messengers from the

reserve camp suggests that the Alliance has been more active than they thought. This is the most severe blow to morale.

Surprisingly, Tharek himself smiles as the rain opens up. He had been growing concerned about fire-arrows. With all his buildings soaked, the risk of losing his men to fire is virtually gone. He has been making morale-boosting speeches much of the day.

Hundreds more leave the encampment during the night. They have a sodden and defeated look to them, and carry few weapons of military consequence against the Sindarin bows. They are not fired upon. Unseen watchers pace them for several miles, conclude that they are indeed deserters, and return.

### 27 Savor

The Lythian encampment is unmolested during the morning. Morale begins to pick up, roughly matching the drying of the mud.

Mid-afternoon brings another full-scale assault of arrows.

At first it is a hard deadly shower of sharp arrows, many of the barbarians look at their sun-baked mud-covered roofs and smile; the sharp arrowheads are not likely to penetrate. Their smiles turn to panic when the sound of arrows on their roofs changes; many of the shafts seem to be much heavier. Quick looks at the arrows landing in the open brings terror; they are not arrows, but rocks. How are they being thrown so high?

The Lythians are not familiar with stonebows – a pocket fitted on the string allows the same bow to launch a quarter-pound rock. The rocks do not have the same range and accuracy as an arrow, but they don't need it; fired in a high arc, they are doing a good job of breaking up the Lythians' protective cover. The weapon is not commonly used, even among the Sindarin of 720 TR. The effect on morale is more devastating than the effect on the buildings. An open question on many minds is -- just how many missiles do these unseen forest demons have?

The assault lightens but continues for several hours, much longer than the barbarians are prepared for. Their nerves are growing tense; morale drops further. By sunset most of the tents are shredded and many of the roofs of brush and mud are in tatters. Questions arise; how are so many missiles being fired with such accuracy when their camp is spread out to minimize damage from blind shooting? Most of them have never seen Sindarin master archers at work, who can tell by the sound what their shaft landed upon, and concentrate their fire where they know they are not hitting open ground. More groups of Lythians leave, a dozen or a score at a time. As before, unseen watchers pace them for several miles through the mud.

High up on the bluff, the watchers nod and sign to each other. Warned by spells, they have not spoken since the first elves arrived.

The rest of the Alliance force arrived just after sunset after a hard day's forced march. The encampment is heavily guarded, divided into three groups: those who are on

watch (about a hundred), those who are sleeping (nearly a thousand), and the remainder working on the fortifications. In four hours, the groups will rotate. As is typical of the Khuzdul, they have laid out the compound with a great deal of open space, and there are numerous large fires laid throughout the encampment for light and heat. In the quarters area, there is a separate campfire for every two or three men. Buckets and piles of loose earth are placed liberally throughout the compound in case there is fire. On the far side of the compound, a good-sized stream has been diverted; a shallow arm of it flows under the compound wall and is filling a newly-dug pond. It will be largely dammed off to provide a defensible but renewable source of clean water.

Much of the compound is of Khuzan design; the Sindarin would prefer to rest under trees and open sky, but recognize military necessity.

The elvish scouts are superb under difficult conditions, but not perfect; they do miss a few of the best Lythian scouts. Well after midnight, two injured barbarians make their way back to the compound with the location of the Alliance campsite. They are not sure of the Alliance numbers; there were a great many campfires, and the compound seemed as large as Tharek's own.

Still enraged after the repeated attacks, most of the Lythian leadership calls for an immediate night-time attack before the Alliance can organize. Tharek shouts this down with difficulty, pointing out that the elves are already in the area and that leaving the compound at night in a body would only make them more vulnerable to missile fire, with no good way to return fire. The impressive width of their killing field now works against them; few of the Lythians have missiles with the range of the Sindarin hartbow.

The Alliance encampment is only one league away; Tharek suddenly feels as though it might as well be a hundred times that. Between casualties and deserters, his force has lost over a thousand men, more than one in five. He still has not seen the enemy, still has not engaged anyone. This is not why his troops came; they seek glory in battle, and booty, and tales to tell their children – not rain and mud, and showers of deadly missiles all over their camp, and huddling behind walls. The Solori are a proud people, and their military tradition in Lythia is long and distinguished; this fight is not going at all the way Tharek would like. He is looking for a single mistake he can exploit. Just one mistake --

## 28 Savor

In the pre-dawn hours, King Daelda, head of the Alliance force, confers with Aranath and the other ranking officers. The strategy of harassment has worked well thus far, but it is time for a change -- before low morale turns to desperate courage. The Alliance has shown that they can act with great subtlety, and with decisive force; they have shown that they can trap the Lythians within their own walls; that they possess superior tactics and knowledge; now they have suggested that they control the weather itself. Perhaps this is enough; the loss of the reserve is a loss of 10% of the total force, certainly enough to make military leaders reconsider. He orders a parley, to give his terms to the Lythians. The Alliance force is already beginning to disperse around the

encampment on all sides, occupying the high ground and preparing for a long campaign of attrition.

An hour after sunrise, Tharek's observers report that a party of men has appeared on the far side of the killing field and appear to be asking to talk. He climbs the scaffolding to see, and then sends out a small party. After a brief meeting in the middle of the clear zone, the Lythians return to report that it is indeed a parley and that they wish to discuss the terms of the Lythian surrender. The response from most of the ranking officers is brutal, even for Solori. But Tharek smiles and sends his second-in-command out to hear their terms and report back.

The Alliance terms are simple: The Lythians retreat from the field and swear to the King of Harn that they will remove their people to the coast in the spring. By the end of a year, they are to have evacuated of all their people to the mainland. The Alliance grants them an hour to decide.

The Lythians don't need that long. Moments after their parley team passes back into the camp, they come exploding out of the gates, carrying shields high over their heads and weapons in their hands. In retrospect, it is clear that they were far more enraged and frustrated than Daelda had thought. Several witnesses report a glimpse of Tharek atop the wall, shouting his warriors on. Caught off-guard, the Alliance fails to react quite as fast as they should. It takes only a few seconds for the rampaging Lythians to cross half the killing field. It takes less time than that for the Alliance troops to recover their poise and begin firing, but they cannot drop shafts on enemies so close to the parley party for fear of harming their own. Tharek's men have no such restriction and slam into the Alliance parley officers full-tilt. The attack is brutal and short. In seconds, the parley party has fallen and the stream of mainlanders continues past. In later years, Sindarin witnesses will refer to this as "a river of hornets".

Hundreds of the Lythians will die trying to cross that killing field, but their rage and frustration after the last several days makes them very close to berserkers; the survivors hardly notice the fallen as they disperse into the woods. In several places, they manage to spy observing archers high in the trees. Each such tree is promptly surrounded by a dozen angry men with swords and axes; while protecting each other with their shields, they quickly fell the tree. Unable to slay the barbarians in time, the archers fall among the branches and die horribly. Several dozen other archers are caught seeking cover on the ground; all are slain. Their woodcraft means little with so many eyes and so many bodies; dodging one, they are seen by another. Only minutes later, the Solori officers and mounted warriors ride out; the few remaining Alliance troops in the area are in no position to oppose them.

Using the communications routes already scouted out, word gets to Daelda in short order. He bows his head in sorrow for the troops he has already lost, and those he is about to lose; then he orders the Lythians killed or captured.

The orders are scarcely necessary. Outnumbered three-to-one and in close terrain, the Alliance forces are busy trying to get to high ground from which they can regain their advantage. In minutes, the Lythians have changed from an enemy bottled up which the Alliance could decimate at their leisure, to a rampaging mass of killers who hardly seem to notice casualties. This is not an enemy the Sindarin understand, and they need some time to adjust. The barbarians are not about to grant them that time.

Tharek has well exploited the Alliance's overconfidence. Instead of a single field battle, this has almost instantly become scores of small battlegrounds, merging and splitting apart almost at random as groups charge any enemy nearby. It is impossible for the Alliance officers to maintain a solid tactical command. The Solori do not even try; they have unleashed the Lythian's fury and lust for vengeance. For them now, there will be only death or victory.

What saves the retreating archers are the Khuzdul archers up in the hills. Steady and implacable, they provide cover fire from a position of advantage. One of the Khuzan officers orders his men to fire flaming arrows into a dry-looking meadow, right behind retreating Sindarin. The meadow is still damp from the rain but catches fitfully. The threat of wildfire is enough to break the barbarian charge, but the flames burn out soon.

Over the next hour, the confusion settles and the order of the battle becomes clearer. The Alliance holds all of the high ground and has superior firepower. The Lythians have far superior numbers and seem heedless of their casualties. The archers and the Khuzan Superheavy Foot are working together well; the archers drive groups of enemies against the waiting dwarvish formation in a hammer-and-anvil movement. Many of the Khuzdul are massed with polearms; battleswords are for later, after the large formations have been shattered into individuals. The Lythians fight very well, but are no match for such a combination as the Sindarin and the Khuzdul. On the other hand, the Alliance is well aware that they are taking casualties they cannot afford.

Up on the bluff, the watchers smile coldly at the Alliance losses. As good as that is, the fight is going badly for the Lythians – and they have orders to prevent that. Additional steps must be taken, and quickly. The watchers nod at each other, then light misshapen black candles, laid out hours before. Whispering the chant they have practiced, they begin to weave a spell. In their small cave, the air has been close and thick after days of poor ventilation; now it grows cold.

By midday, Daelda has had to commit most of his horse scouts to combat, rather than using them to maintain communications as he had been. The last of the Khuzan Heavy Foot reserves are in the field. The forces on prison-guard duty have been pulled away, after binding their prisoners with stout rope and care. Whoever wins the battle will be back to untie them. The only Alliance forces in the encampment are the wounded and those treating them, and an absolute minimum of guards.

The superiority of Alliance troops and weapons is proving out, but slowly; perhaps too slowly. For every Alliance soldier that falls, three and then four Lythians fall. Even

though many of the injuries are not mortal, they are enough to remove troops from battle, and the Alliance can ill-afford that. The Jarin are becoming exhausted. The Sindarin are fighting on reflex and willpower. Only the Khuzan seem as fresh and unstoppable as when the day began. Some of the archers are running out of shafts and turning to personal combat, using their longknives. Daelda himself and his personal guard are in the field of battle, helping to mop up areas of heavy resistance.

By mid-afternoon, the battle seems to have been decided; small groups of Lythians are being eliminated and herded together. The roles of the various Alliance members have become clear. The Sindarin and the Jarin, superior scouts, seek out and harry the barbarians; killing some and herding the rest to where the Khuzdul wait. As ever, the Khuzdul are the rock against which the enemy's rage shatters. Lythian casualties far outnumber the Khuzan fallen, but the loss of each dwarf is keenly felt. Faced with clearly overwhelming firepower, the surviving barbarians begin to surrender; a few here, a few there. Daelda's officers are hard-pressed to keep from their captives just how close the fight has been; it is difficult simply to spare the troops to guard the prisoners.

As more and more Lythians surrender, the crisis eases and the Alliance officers begin to smile among themselves. Alliance scouts and archers are concentrated near the low plain where the threat is, and miss movement behind them. It is a devastating error.

Focused on the battle before them, they do not realize until too late that there are enemies behind them. Cries of alarm are raised, but the mass of barbarians sweeps through. Many of those who left Tharek's encampment regrouped only a few hours' travel away. The Sindarin, confident that such warriors' morale had truly broken, had miscalculated and failed to keep them under guard. Returning, these "deserters" have effectively become a reserve force – and a second battlefield.

Even though they are armed only with daggers and makeshift spears, their mere presence demands attention and splits the Alliance force; again, the odds of battle change to favor the Lythians. In later analyses, the Sindarin will recognize several things about this moment: first, that Tharek's command of unconventional tactics was far better than they had thought; and second, that the psychology of the Jarin they have lived with for centuries is not the same as the psychology of these new Lythian mainlanders. But for now, the appearance of all these fresh warriors is a shock, and their appearance without having been seen by the Alliance scouts is a fatal tactical error based on over-confidence.

Daelda and his honor guard turn the day, charging into the side of this new mass of enemies with renewed force. The sight of his battle standard raises cheers among Sindarin, Jarin and Khuzdul alike.

The sun is setting by the time some order is regained. Daelda and his guard tour the field, finding only scattered pockets of resistance and many prisoners. They also see bodies, too many bodies. Most of them are Lythians, but too many of them are Khuzan, and Sindarin, and Jarin. The battle is essentially over; those who can are slumped by

their weapons, breathing heavily and tending wounds. Cooking fires are started here and there. The healers are out in force, binding injuries and tending the wounded of both sides. Somehow, a feeling of peace begins to descend.

It does not last. The chanting up on the bluff has ended; something descends from the cave and strides across the battlefield. The Alliance soldiers nearest stand in shock for a moment, then rush over to the figure of their King, striding in arrogant splendor through casualties. He seizes the nearest and tears him limb from limb with his bare hands, hardly slowing. A cry goes up and more soldiers rush over while others signal frantically at Daelda's battle standard, far across the field.

In minutes, this not-Daelda with the strangely glowing eyes has killed dozens, Alliance troops and Lythians alike; whoever was in his way is slain. Always he moves towards Daelda's standard. The King of Harn has remounted and is heading to meet him. In later years, witnesses will mention how the air seemed to shimmer around those two as they met in battle; it was a fight waged on many levels, it seems. The fight goes on for a long time; no one else seems able to intervene.

Scouts near the edge of the plain backtrack the trail of this not-Daelda and sense the magic up on the bluff. Gathering tired allies, they begin another assault.

The battle of the Kings seemed to last into the night; it may have lasted only minutes, but it lasted long enough that troops came up with torches to light the battle. At long last, Daelda had his opponent down on his back, pinned and bloody from a dozen wounds. He asked his opponent to surrender. The strange one with the glowing eyes smiled and something lashed out, something shining and sharp. The wound was high on the chest, and bloody, and lethal. Daelda fell that day, in the moment of his victory. Something changed; the air stopped shimmering around them. Instantly, missiles by the score slammed into the not-Daelda and he fell still. But something was wrong; the bodies of the two seemed to merge. Wherever the two touched, their flesh flowed together and became one. Though they tried, the Alliance troops were unable to pull Daelda free from this dark magic. As the two bodies became fully one, the only answer was to bind the body and carry it away. If the power of a single mage were not enough, perhaps the power of many would do. And so the mages of the Alliance combined their power and bound both Daelda and not-Daelda with far more than rope and chain, and carried away the body.

### **Aftermath**

Thus ended the Battle that changed Harn. It was not the end of the activity on that plain; healers worked for days to save as many as they could, and there were many fights between the Alliance troops and their captives. In honor of those already dead, and those yet to die, there was still the grim work of tending the wounded, and the bodies.

The Solori nation never recovered. Most of the best and strongest warriors had been at the Battle. Nearly all of them were now dead, including Tharek; his body was identified with utmost care and certainty. Without them, the military might of the Solori was shattered. Without teachers, the young men could not learn all the secret arts of warfare that had been handed down for so long. Even now, nearly 1400 years later, the Solori are a people largely degenerate and dying.

But taking the twin Daelda's bodies away in chains marked the end of the Battle of Sorrows. The loss of the elven King can rightly be marked as but one casualty among many; it is a thing to mourn, but the field was held by the Alliance. Even as the chained bodies were carried away, it was clear that the Kingship had to continue. Several of Daelda's kin had been present; the field was searched for them. Eventually, all were accounted for; all were dead. The lines of succession were known, and there was one more who held strong claim by right of blood. Senior officers brought the amulet and the circlet of Daelda – the emblems of royal authority – to Aranath and bade him accept them.

To his credit, he made clear that he did not want the office under such conditions and would have willingly held his post as one of Daelda's officers for many centuries to come. But it was equally clear that his was the responsibility to accept the office. With a heavy heart and firm resolve, he accepted the amulet and placed it around his neck, then bowed his head to receive the circlet. Rising, he recited the Oath of Office, written so many centuries before when Daelda became Sovereign of Harn.

Thus did Aranath become the King of Harn.

The Prince of Azadmere saw to his fallen, and his grief was terrible to behold. When he had done all he could and eased the pain of those he could still help, he climbed the highest hill and stood for a long time, watching. From there, the smoke of the few cookfires of the people living in the area could be seen. The marks of the Lythian encampment could be seen, though the walls were still below the trees. Turning, he could see the glow from the Alliance fires. And in all directions, he could see Harn; the land of his ancestors and his kin.

Descending, he sought out Aranath and was directed to a bluff on the same hill. Soon, he was at Aranath's side. "Majesty, our fallen cry out for vengeance and retribution. We have dealt the invaders a terrible blow this day, but they will return. They have made this clear. It is time to pursue those who escaped us, and to make clear that their time on our lands is done. You need but give the orders. My people will be ready to move before Nolomar rises."

Aranath gave this matter his full attention, and did not answer immediately. When he did, his speech was slow and hesitant. "It is true that we have won this battle. Harpers will sing of this day, and heralds will speak of its' glory. But I see no glory here. I see friends lying cold and dead, and I see subjects who will be forever crippled. I see the

bodies of our opponents, and they are not so different from our Jarin. In face and figure, in hair and eyes, I could not tell them apart, Jarin from mainlander. They are of one breed, divided by some few years of time living apart. One people by blood, made several people by the opinions of their leaders. The Jarin came here, it is only natural that these folk should come. We have fought these folk for many years, and yet they come.”

The Prince’s eyes were narrow and his rage was plain. “Majesty, we have a chance to sweep them from our lands. We have slain their leaders; it will be simple to drive the rest to the sea and into their ships. Let them return to the other shore and tell everyone that our lands are to be left alone. Let them have the rest of Kethira; we will never have a better time to tell them that this land is ours and ours alone. This is why my people died, to keep Harn our land. That is why your people died. That is why so many of the Jarin died. Give the order and we will gather our forces.”

The Sindarin King looked out at the hills, and the stars in the sky. His words were soft and full of pain. “I agree that we will never have a better chance to kill them. We can drive women and children before us. We can send them off in their ships. *But they will return.* In twenty years, you and I will have hardly changed. Our children will still be scarce more than babes. Warriors out there who fought today will remember, and practice, but we will have so few of them. And so few new warriors. Neither your people nor mine were ever numerous; we will not quickly grow. In twenty years, we will still have holes in our ranks, still have units short-handed.

“But *they* will return. In twenty years, an entire new generation will have grown up, heard the tales of this land from their mothers, and learned to fight. In twenty years, they will be ready to wage this battle all over again. Our lands will seem empty and inviting to them; they will be back.

“And what will we do then? We cannot keep fighting them. Today, we triumphed. Tomorrow, it is clear that they will win. They do not understand our ways, nor do they wish to. They will grow, and expand, and seek lands they do not own. *They will return.*”

He picked up his battlesword in his gloved hands. It was fine Khuzan make, of plain design and did not show its’ centuries. He kept turning it over and over, wiping it clean of blood over and over. “How many times must we kill them? How many times must we show them no quarter? We showed them our power and our might; they ran. We showed them our skill and our aim, our woodcraft and our speed. We showed them your might and your endurance, your skill and your power; they ran. *But they returned!*

“I cannot do this thing. They are not evil, they are a force of nature, existing as it must. We do not understand their ways. We cannot compete with their growth. Though we win the battle now, they will be ready to fight again all too soon. We must win every battle, every skirmish, every campaign. If we do not, the deaths of your troops and mine will mean we have not slain enough of them to hold them in check.

“They need only win one battle, one campaign. Any time we meet in battle, they need only slay a few more of us than we need slay of them. If they do that, then it will not be long before we are too few to oppose them. In order to have a hope of defeating them, we must take every chance to kill them, especially the women who can bear children.

“This is not the way of my people. I cannot do this thing you ask.” He held up the blade, looked at it closely in the light. “This is a beautiful blade. I believe one of your kin made it for me. It has served me well. “ With one hand, he slammed the flat of the blade across a large nearby stone; with his other hand, he broke it in two, let the pieces drop to the ground.

“I will not fight the humans again. I must keep my people safe.”

The dwarven Prince shook his head and looked down at the encampment. “There, below us, are your people. Some of them are my people as well. I have spoken with them. They are injured, and have lost kinfolk here. They cry out for blood and vengeance. They cry out to pursue these invaders and put an end to their plans forever. Then, when others arrive, they will come without knowledge of this land. We will keep watch for their ships, and destroy them before they gain a foothold. These unending wars will not happen again.”

Aranath smiled and shook his head. “No, my friend. They will not. I will not fight the humans. I must safeguard my people, but allow the humans to grow as they must. I have decided, and your words have helped me. I shall renounce my rule over Harn, and withdraw the Sindarin to our most sacred place. We shall gather in Shava and protect our borders, so much smaller than all the shores of Harn. From within Shava we will await our travels to the Blessed Realm and our reunion with Siem. I will give your people back their independence, and end their obligations to the Sindarin Crown.”

The Prince was without words for a moment. “Majesty, these are your lands, and ours as well! They have belonged to the Sindarin and the Khuzdul for these many centuries. We share them with the Jarin, but the long tradition is with your folk and mine. It is without reason to yield the territory we hold. Defend it, instead!”

“I will not. On this, my mind is set. We have the skill to defend Harn; we have only the numbers to defend Shava. Your folk have the skill and numbers to defend both Kiraz and Azadmere. Even together, we are not enough to defend all of Harn. We never will be enough. If we cannot defend it, we should not claim to hold it. Tell your people they are released from their oaths to the Sindarin Crown. If you seek to pursue the mainland survivors, then do so, but you do so under the Khuzdul banner alone, without my support.”

The dwarf’s face was grim and set. “You know full well that without the scouts of your people we will never move with enough speed and certainty to catch those we seek. With your words, you deny the folk of Azadmere their righteous vengeance.

“I will indeed tell my people of your decision. And then we will leave this place, and trouble your so-precious peace no more. Stay within the Shava Forest if you choose. While you hide, the foreigners will take over the waterfalls you love, and the plains in whose flowers you delight. They will cut down the trees in your Sacred Groves, and make war-camps where your children used to play.

“We will fight. As we return to Azadmere, we will deal just punishment to those who remain and those who helped. Know this – beware our wrath, and do not interfere.”

And it happened much as the Azadmere prince had said. He and his folk gathered their equipment and left the encampment before Nolomar rose, those who could carrying or helping the wounded. On stretchers they bore all the Khuzan dead. A day’s travel away, they stopped and carved chambers from a hill and entombed the dead, away from Sindarin eyes.

The warriors of Kiraz did arrive, two days later while the wounded were still being tended and captives interrogated. They were given the same news, and reacted in much the same fashion. In stone silence, they marched out of the compound, looking neither to left nor right, marching until they were out of sight.

The remaining troops of the Alliance tried to honor the dead in native fashion. Solori bodies were hoisted on large elevated biers and burned in the open air. The Lythian bodies, and those of the fallen Jarin, were buried. The Sindarin dead were brought together and mourned, protected by elvish spells until the 15<sup>th</sup> of Ilvin, when they were sent to the Blessed Realm under the fullest light of Yael. Eventually, most of the Lythian prisoners were taken to the coast and released. The Chelni were allowed to care for their own dead before they left. They vowed not to threaten the Sindarin again, and were permitted to establish their own lands just north of Shava in recognition of their spirit, kindred to the Sindarin. They were – and are – considered a good folk who joined the wrong side.

And so Harn was opened to human expansion.