

## “The Journal of Montessor de Vallario Martín”

“Every man that can read and write should keep an account of his life.” My family’s old magician once said that. He said he had kept his own ledger since his eighth year. Twenty-three dust covered tomes were piled in the man’s quarters inside the inner sanctum of Castle Deltora. I asked him why and he claimed that a man can learn much from his own past. The way he used to be; look back on the thoughts of a past chapter in his older life and remember how you felt.

I remember the conversation quite vividly. It was well past dusk and my eight year self had left his own set of rooms to sneak about the keep at night. I remember how the golden light emanated from the magician's study through the slightly ajar door. I shouldn't have been surprised to hear his voice, but the scared boy outside the door always assumed that the old man was already asleep and had left the candles burning again.

"Might as well come in, young master Montessor." The mage was seated at an overly large desk, his back was to me. As I entered, he was draping a cloth of deep purple over a glass sphere of sorts. He pushed it aside and withdrew the freshest of his tomes, already more than a third spent. I stood solemnly in the threshold as he dipped a quill began to scratch more ink into the vellum. He seemed not to care why I came creeping past his quarters and was content to leave me perplexed in the doorway.

“What are you writing, Vargas?” I asked him. The man remained silent. “Vargas,” I pestered. He held up one finger and continued to scribble into his book.

Finally finishing his thought, he answered, “Everything.”

It was an infuriating answer to a boy who has seen the wizard do miraculous things. As a boy, I had always wanted just a taste of the magics that he seemed to possess. “You can’t possibly be writing everything. That’s impossible!”

“If you say so, young master.” The wizard dipped his quill again and it hovered in his hand, dripping ink in splotches on his journal.

“Teach me how to breathe underwater, Vargas. No, teach me

how to throw lightning!”

The wizard raised one of his thick eyebrows. “How about I show you something even more useful?”

My heart pounded so hard. I crept closer to his desk and he handed me the quill. He turned a few pages of his book and pushed the blank page towards me. “Write this down: five hundred thirty-six sum eight hundred sum three hundred sum sixteen hundred less two fifty-three less two hundred less eighty less six hundred .”

I complied and awaited further instructions. “What now?”  
“Now equated the sums and differences.”

I stared back at the man. I saw nothing special about the arithmetic he dictated. I frowned at the man. “There’s nothing magical about a bunch of numbers!”

“I said useful, not magical. The two aren’t mutually inclusive. But I must say, there are few things less magical than being able to deduce the combined strength of a kingdom in the need of war by subtracting from the populations from the last census the estimate of non-combatants and the strength your father’s lords bannermen need to defend their own keeps....”

I remember being so angry at the mage. “I command you to stop with this foolishness and teach me real magic!” I paged back a few sheets and read the last thing he wrote:

*Young master Montessor is outside my door. He will be wanting me to teach him magic.*

“What are you—how’d you know I....” I angrily tore the page and a few more for good measure out of the book, crumpled them into a ball and threw it at the magician. He allowed them to

bounce harmlessly off of his robe.

“Every man that can read and write should keep an account of his life.” Vargas bent over and retrieved his writings and smoothed them out on his big desk. He pulled a fresh ledger from a shelf and placed one of the crumpled pages inside its cover and handed it to me.

I opened the volume and flipped through it. Everything was blank. “Why?”

“A man can learn much from his own past. I suggest you try it.”

I let the fresh pages fall through my fingers until only the cover and the wrinkled leaflet remained. I unfolded it and written in a splotchy red under my sums:

*Lord Vallario can raise two hundred eighty-three men at arms, his bannermen can raise another fifteen hundred twenty if needed.*

I looked from my paper back to man Vargas who was already drawing back the quilt on his sleeping pallet. I never saw him write the total. "When will you teach me magic?"

"Right after you can blow out that candle for me. I fear it is late even for me." I paced over to the bit of tallow and huffed a great deal of air at it, but succeeded only in smearing wax across the wood. Vargas smiled and pinched out the flame on his side of the room. Seeing his success, I tried to imitate his action. The flame was hotter than it ever should be and after hold the wick as long as I could, I pulled my fingers away and stuck them in my mouth to nurse them. Vargas walked over to me and inspected

my hand.

“That really hurt, Vargas!”

“Of course it did. The trick is not minding that it hurts.”



I admit I was stupid not to start this ledger early. Vargas urged me on but, I told him that I lost the book and so I couldn't write. He gave me another the next day and another a year later when the topic resurfaced again. He knew I hadn't lost the book, but one never really appreciates the lessons one is taught at a young age until he is older. Then he is glad for the knowledge. That was half a life ago. Before a man of six and ten was sent off to lead a war in his father's stead.

Father was a strong man so his lords claim. Sharp minded and sharp bladed, the kind of lord that would be on the field with his own men as they died. But that was another's half-life ago. The old man could now barely lift his seal to the wax that made this invasion legal in his own eyes. "Expanding your birthright" he called this newest war. By Vargas' count, my birth right has been expanding since the day Lord Vallario learned he had an

heir. There are few things more flattering than the knowledge that thousands of lives were lost because you were born male and lived long enough for the priests to grant you a name.

Actually, leading the war is hardly the right term for this. The Baron Lord Taklyn had the honor of field command. I am around to gain experience. Probably best that way. Less people dying because I have no idea what I am doing here. Father says that it is important nonetheless that the men see me on the battlefield. Get used to my voice giving commands.

I do have a sort of command. Nothing special; very safe. Ser Kyle Baldwin of the Northwood Baldwins hold command of a light brigade of pikemen and a few dozen lesser knights on heavy horse. I have the great most honor of shouting "Loose!" at a hundred archers before Baldwin's knights charge the line. I sit on top of my dustier baking under the sun in my undented plate and wool surcoat. I almost envy my archers, nice and cool in mismatched jerkins and hide clothing.

I do not like this. Hundreds of smelly men camped out in a scoured field. No battles yet. Every day I get to shout "Loose!" as four archers practiced feathering a hog from ten feet away. The impatient cook would watch as his butchering job became more complicated when a man lost a broadhead inside the corpse. Every night I followed the procession of lords, knights, and officers to Taklyn's tent where he points to arrows and curvy lines on a map and argues with the other men. I do not like this. I would much rather remember the curves on that farm girl that I saw as our war party left the outlying plantations of the Deltora Basin just a few leagues away from the castle. When I am king I must make note to have a few dozen such girls around the castle. If the wife my father arranges for me doesn't satisfy, I may have to plant a few bastards in the local fields.

I must make special mention about Ser Kyle. The man is no more than two years older than I am, but an excellent leader. His men claim that they would follow their black knight to hell and back if he only led the charge. I hope that it doesn't come to that. I hear hell is rather hot this time of year. I wouldn't last a minute there with all this armor on.

Ser Kyle spent two years in Castle Deltora as my father's ward. He thought it'd be good for me to have a nobleborn boy around my own age around. The Kyle I remember was the boy of ten and two. He liked to stand on one end of the castle wall and yell messages to me while I tried not to fall off of the other end of the wall. Kyle said his father's own knights told him the importance of being heard in battle. He called our little shouting matches "practice". The practice did little to help me block the frenzy of blows he would hail on me whenever we played with wooden swords in the courtyard. Yelling "I yield" never seemed to penetrate that thick skull of his.

Everyone at the war council seemed to know why I was there. It didn't pay giving my opinions on the strategy. Taklyn knows what he's doing in this regard. Never put that past him. Open and close the meetings with "gods protect King Vallario". Formalities even in this sort of state. Not going to bore future self with the details. Going to go see if any of the rangers brought back a deer. I should be able to demand the lord's portion of the venison. Whether or not I can get someone to cook it for me is something else entirely. Seems to me that my father's men forget their place when they are in the field. It is exciting though. Not the council, mind you; I had more entertainment getting a haircut. We plan on engaging the Fel Spire tomorrow.




I never really appreciated the size of our army until we were all lined up in full regalia; banners of the minor houses flying underneath the Vallario lion head standard. Taklyn and a few of his lieutenants went down the sloping hills of the battlefield in order to deliver my father's terms to our enemy. I watched from my vantage point on top of the hill as Lord Taklyn, Ser Kyle, and another half-dozen knights of various houses rode down to meet the Fel Spire dignitaries.

There was something odd about the meeting. I shifted in my saddle as the men presented “yield or die” to a single figure with a walking stick rather than a command council. Odd, there was no obvious opposing army. Either the Fel Spire were very smart or extremely stupid. I figured the main force was probably concealed behind a tree line. Taklyn rode back with his council and announced there would be no yielding, rather gleefully I must admit. The man really lived for battle.

Never seeing a battle before, I really had no idea what to expect. Less than a hundred soldiers stood between us and the tower that pierced the sky at the Fel Spire capital city. So few! And no heavy horse! My army will slaughter them. Annotating the battle mid-fight would be quite dangerous for one in a more dangerous position, but I am really quite safe here. Kyle's standard bearers raised the archer flag and I brought my men to stance.0

“READY? NOTCH! DRAW! LOOSE!” I repeated the commands for six volleys of arrows before the signal flag dropped. Lord Taklyn led the charge with his cavalry right up the middle of the field. Fifty or so pikemen marched down the hill and Ser Kyle brought his mounted knights in to flank on the left.

It was well they did not tar the field or make any noticeable obstacles. As the horsemen charged down, the archer flag went up and immediately down again. I sent a last volley of arrows safely over the heads of the horsemen and watched them rain down upon the Fel Spire. It was hard to see at this distance whether or not the-



That did not go very well. Taklyn's heavy horse charge broke on the Fel Spire like waves on a seawall. I spoke to Ser Kyle about it, considering he had a much better perception of the fiasco than me. I'll have to talk to him about that in a bit. We still have no idea where Lord Taklyn has gone to.

Still haven't had any word on Lord Taklyn. Ser Kyle is running the war council in his absence. He seems to think that I take a greater part in this from now on. In fact, he folded all the remaining archer units into mine. After Taklyn's failure, the bows seem to be the least damaged unit. He says that we will need them more than anything from now on and it will be good for them to see their future king taking a direct command. I probably won't have the time to be making many more of these entries. Duty calls.

New plans for the next encounter. Ser Kyle means to take the fight to the Fel Spire doorstep; we plan to lay siege to that big tower of theirs. We march at first light. Vanguard and my archers leave first.

I can scarcely believe what is happening. We were about a half a day's ride in on our way to the spire when a courier bearing the royal standard came galloping up behind the column. I called a halt and turned my head to see what the trouble was when the rider dismounted and took a knee at my horse's legs.

I looked down upon him for quite some time, trying to figure out what was expected; I really wasn't used to this sort of thing happening. "Well what is it, good man?" I asked.

"Long live House Vallario. Long live the king." He held out a wooden box to me and I took it. Inside was the family crown and my father's chain of office. I knew what it meant. I raised the crown from its bed of satin and those not on horseback took a knee.

"Long live House Vallario. Long live King Montessor!"



There was very little talking the way back. It wasn't expected, but it wasn't far off either. Three score is twice the life expectancy of any man-at-arms and a long life for a king still. I had the archers make camp, instructing them to link up with Ser Kyle when he passed through and took an honor guard of most of the riders. The assault would continue.

I'm a little disarrayed. There is a lot of work in running a kingdom. Vargas better know more than sums.

We passed that hamlet again on the back. That girl was out front leading a cow into the barn from pasture with a hemp lead in one hand and an iron pail in the other. She did not see us right away so I took the time to conceal my crown and have the royal standard changed for a less shocking one. One could never be one's self in the presence of the king. I noted how beautiful the field of purple wildflowers was that carpeted the front of the estate.

She greeted us and I introduced myself as "Martín". "Montessor" might send the wrong signal. Her name was Myran. My cohorts and I were invited in and she poured the warm milk from her pail into as many clay mugs as she had, apologizing over again how there was so little. The conversation was dull and we could scarcely be ourselves or seek what I wanted. I took the initiative to be the last one to leave and ran

my fingers through her auburn hair and place a flower from her estate within a wave of the silky strands.

She did not object, but neither did she succumb. “I thank you, mi’lord” was her only response.

Vargas was looking over the latest sums in another one of his tomes. He really did record everything. Why he chose to keep kingdom ledgers in the same place as his personal records were beyond me. As king, I maintained the right to check them whenever I wanted. Although this was rare enough, it forced me to sift through the man's babblings.

"A king's funeral ought to cost nearly eight thousand pieces of gold. We simply do not have this. You must choose to abandon one of our projects, sire."

Vargas always knew how to put me in a bad mood. "Eight thousand? What in the nine hells does the man need eight thousand pieces of gold for when he's dead?"

"The people expect a proper moratorium for their deceased ruler. We could cancel the order for the new galley or suspend

construction of the new wing of the castle.” The mage looked to me for an answer.

“Heavens no! We need the galley to defend our coast against that pirate clan that keeps sinking our merchant vessels. And a half-completed castle is an eyesore. My subjects will think the kingdom weak!”

“We could suspend the sieges on the Fel Spire,” the mage suggested.

“That,” I asserted, “is my birth right. I want those lands.”

“Well that—“ Vargas began.

“Raise taxes. Put father in an older crypt. An older one perhaps. The common folk wouldn’t know the difference. Have a sculptor remove the old name and put my father’s in its

place. Then have his tongue so he couldn't tell anyone who we displaced.”

Vargas looked blankly at me, unable to question my command. Feebly, he stated: “It-tt shall be done, my king.” The mage bowed low and exited my council chambers.

“Vargas,” I added before he could completely leave. “Find me a new master of coin. You are far too useful to me to be wasting your time pinching pennies.”

The mage nodded solemnly and left me be.

Sometimes I amaze even myself. I have found a way to solve all my problems in a most elegant fashion. First, the funeral went off with all expected regalia and no one was the wiser. The sculptor suffered a most dreadful accident before the crown was able to pay him for his efforts. How unfortunate! I also took the liberty of purchasing a certain estate; purple wildflowers adorned my father's tomb. The new galley shall be named *Vallario's Might* in his honor.

Ser Kyle sends word that the siege is going well. I sent him a band of mercenaries hired from those pesky pirates to aid the raids on the Fel Spire villages surrounding their tower. Kyle has orders to use these raids to pay for the war and more subtle orders to have the pirates executed after their use is spent.

Speaking of wildflowers, my auburn flower will find she has nowhere to return to but my own hall. My hands have seen to that!



It seems my auburn flower has already been wed. it would be well within my rights as king to take her anyway, but to take a heart captive does not make it yours if its keeper is ought to seek it. My eyes and ears will find the man and discover an unfortunate accident.

I must do something about these peasants. They continuously whine about the taxes and no nothing about what I do for them.

The tower has been taken! Ser Kyle's courier arrived this morning with the news and a large chest of tribute. Gold, gems, scripts; I fear I will accomplish little else today than admiring my gift!

My new attendant (who had suddenly lost her husband's estate to a vile creditor) found her way into my study today. When she recognized me, she averted her eyes and mumbled apologies about not having enough milk for all of my guard that one fateful day. It was adorable.

I have been very interested in this certain book that I found amongst the plunder of the Fel Spire. Upon reading it, I felt different. Like I was able to recognize things for what they really were. I developed a sort of hunger for the unknown. I must speak with Vargas about such matters.

My eyes and ears afar have found a certain keeper and reported a list of casualties from the latest raids. Myran might be a little upset. I'll send an attendant with my condolences and an invitation to my table (and possibly my chambers!).

I tried for weeks to do any of the things that the book described with no avail. My father always said there as merit in doing things for yourself. Apparently he never tried to teach himself magic. I found myself wandering the halls last night and was drawn to the warm glow of gold coming from Vargas' quarters.

My auburn flower was asleep in my bed when I left her. She told me I was too kind to her, but felt she betrayed her late husband's memory when she would repay me with the only coin she had left. There is something very distressing about watching a girl cry wearing only your bed sheets.

I opened the door and Vargas was already waiting for me. He didn't even try to cover the crystal seeing glass this time. "Come to practice your sums, Montessoro?"

I almost choked at his readiness. “That’s *Your Majesty* to you, old man.” The old man responded by dipping his quill and sat ready to record. He seemed to know what I wanted of him, but felt it necessary to make me command him anyways.

“Vargas, I command you to teach me magic.” I waited for his response, but received none. I continued, “I tried to do it myself, but I am unable to do even the basics. Something about facing east and drawing pentagrams...”

Finally the mage spoke. “It will take a long time. And it’ll be painful.”

I nodded my head and confessed, “The trick is not minding that it hurts.”



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Lots of missing pages.

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In short, the war is going well. We win despite the laziness of our soldier and the incompetence of our peasants' farms. Fel Spire has all but fallen, but those pesky pirates continue to harry our shores. Weren't they supposed to be fighting Fel Spire too?

Myran thinks I should worry less about things beyond my control. Spend more time with our son; maybe show the boy more of my magic. There are few things more satisfying than a child's sheer joy over a few colored sparks or a levitating plate.

The peasants are restless. They mull about the yard daily asking for this or that, complaining about taxes, whining about the wars. The fishermen are sending reports of the pirate clan blockading our ports.

In other news, I have acquired a few new spell books. I was able to discern the pentagram ritual as well. I was able to draw power forth from the elements and trap it in a vessel. For my first attempt I used a few stones. After a bit of practice, I would like to use a more powerful vessel....

This is amazing! All the power! It was a little risky, but it was something I needed to try. I have found a more powerful vessel: my own body! Using runestones is safe, but simply storing elemental power is not enough. I shall put this power to use. This new power will turn the tides of war. Just in time too, the pirates have been raiding our border towns. Northwood is in flames. The Baldwins have been threatening succession from the kingdom. Ser Kyle has been pressing me more and more to end the Fel Spire raids. As loyal as a subject as he is, my field commander must learn his place. The raids will continue.

The new wings of Castle Deltora have been finished. We had another ceremony with all the due pomp and circumstance. Myran and I were in attendance with our little lord as well. Oh how the small folk love my family. Everything I do, I do for them. If that means allowing the peasants to hate me to allow my son to reign supreme, let it be so; as my father did for me.

I have an idea for the new wings. The stones are laced with gravel from hundreds of runestones that I have been imbuing. I will put some sort of enchantment on the castle itself. A vanishing one, I think. Something that allows the castle to shift in and out of this plane of existence.

Those damn Baldwins! Ser Kyle can rot in all of the nine hells for all I care. I wanted those lands and the idiots feel it better to defend their homes than finish off the Fel Spire. I would have had him executed if he hadn't already deserted.

The pirate clan has moved closer now and it seems the city may yet be besieged. I have activated the castle's invisibility power so we will be quite safe. Vargas disagrees with my strategy. He called me a coward for protecting my family during this impending danger and has asked to be dismissed from my service. If it weren't for his prior service to my house I would have hung him alongside Baldwin if I ever find him, but I owe Vargas a lot. So if he wants to go get himself killed with the peasants, so be it.



It seems that this might be my last entry for a while. Supplies are low, ink and parchment included, with the castle under siege by both the pirates and the Fel Spire (damn them!).

There is an illness going through the castle. Both my auburn flower and our little lord are taken ill. Damn you, Vargas. The food is spoiling and our wells have been corrupted. This may not end well.

It almost feels like someone opened me up and took out an organ, put it on a table, and I watched it die. I know that I will keep living without it, but this will always feel differently. I can't make the claims that I used to make and I won't have the plan that I used to have. I lost my compass and must guess at the direction and hope for an unwavering beacon to come. I am the patient and the surgeon; the lost man needs aid. Fare thee well, fellow travelers for ours is a sad path.

My thoughts turn now only to the well being of the kingdom. I have no heir and no way of producing another. In this case, who is better suited to be my heir than myself? If I were to live eternal, I would rule eternal.

“Nothing good will come of this.” But yet I’m sure this is the way. The ritual involved with becoming a lich doesn’t sound dark and evil. Except for the self suicide and infant killing, but it is for the greater good that I do this. My eyes and ears have found me a proper sacrifice and I have found an appropriate vessel for my phylactery. There is no turning back now.

My death caused quite a stir about the castle. The mortician was at work applying frankincense when I just sat up and went back to ruling my kingdom. It was a hoot! I think I might take a dive off the top of the tallest tower just because I can!

The siege still holds, but now only on the castle itself. The peasants are allowed to go about their daily lives as long as they do nothing to aid me. I am a prisoner in my own kingdom.

The pirate clan has all but stopped its war with the Fel Spire and is under completely new leadership. Even the Baldwins have brought Northwood under their control. They are calling themselves "Owlinn's People" now. Owlinn the foolhardy! They will all rue the day they practiced such insolence! Tomorrow I shall exit my keep, sword in hand, and slay anyone who does not yield to my rule!

They tried to burn me! Those fools! I have to laugh at them; laugh like I did when they watched horrified as my body, after being consumed by flame, reappeared not an hour later, ready as ever to continue ruling. They have no idea what they have done. I am their king by divine right! It is their duty to serve me! I shall do so for as long as the stars shine and the sun burns their backs! I shall forever curse them. They shall serve me forever on, as my subjects or my thralls. They shall share whatever fate I do. If my soul should rot, these Deltorans shall become a race of Necrons, ever undead. Forever in life, forever in the oblivion following. Life, but not for you! Death, but not for you!

