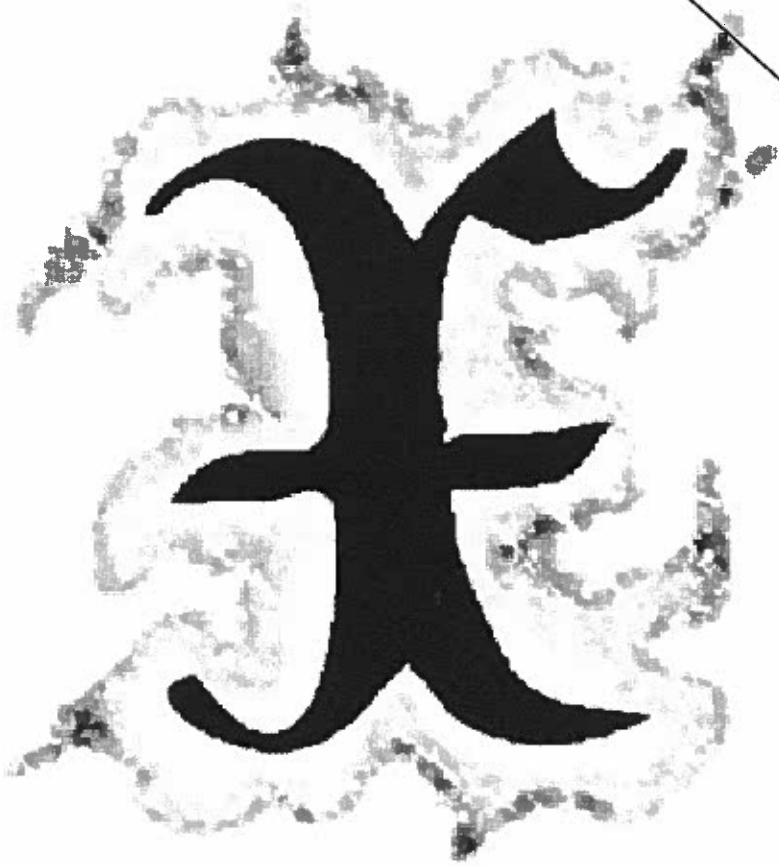


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The Truth is Out There

Important Notice! Emergency Shire Moot!

Due to the strange events that have occurred over the last fortnight, all people living within the confines of the great ~~Jardom~~, Shire of Vanished Wood are commanded by the Seneschal, to attend an important moot at the Convent of the Invisible Joy. Please attend after afternoon mass. Contact the Seneschal if you anticipate problems attending.

Due to the gravity of the events that are unfolding, please read the report below.



Field Notes: Dieter Fuchs-Mueller Sheriff, Special Investigations to His Majesty Palymar, reporting.

Based on the evidence found during our investigation, I shall, in the notes that follow, present the considered opinion that a legitimate, supernatural presence dwells within the Convent of the Invisible Joy.

Chaumburg, Vanished Woodshire, Middle Kingdom
Feast of Fools, April, Anno Societas Thirty-Two
Nones

In service to the Crown, I find myself called to Chaumburg, political center of Vanished Woodshire, in the far western reaches of the kingdom. The people of this shire have a reputation as being prosperous, but somewhat aloof, tending to their fields and flocks, and displaying little involvement, and even less interest, in the affairs of the Midrealm as a whole.

Recently, however, a series of strange, unexplained phenomena has begun to center around these quiet folk. Little more than a

year ago, a group of madmen seized power and declared their independence from the Kingdom. While treasonous, there is nothing strange in this action. What was strange was the rebels insistence that they were led by a hound from a local ale house, and that this hound was himself an infamous Norse pirate on a mission of vengeance. Before this strange Mastiff-cult could progress any further, however, loyal servants of the Crown re-established order, and brought the felons to justice. I am told that the hound in question has returned to guarding the alehouse.

Now, a new phenomena has appeared in Vanished Wood. A group of pious sisters, to wit, the nuns of the Convent of the Invisible Joy, claim that their convent is now home to a spectral, oracular manifestation, possessing preternatural cognition and prescience. Men and women of all stations and classes have begun to travel to the small convent seeking the purported "wisdom" of this Oracle. His Majesty's Inquisitors have been told that the Oracle's predictions have a nearly unprecedented accuracy, and initial reports seem to suggest the presence of a legitimate angelic, or infernal, intelligence. Once the suspected entity's predictions began to include prophecies on the future succession of the throne, it was felt that an investigation into the Oracle's legitimacy, and nature, was needed.

It is the will of His Majesty's Chief Inquisitor that I should be accompanied on this investigation by a young physician of high reputation, the Lady Diana Fiorenza di Scullini. I suspect that the Lady di Scullini's presence is in reality an attempt by the Church to cast doubt on my findings. Although Mother Rome would be hard pressed to explain a prophesising angelic entity living within a convent, especially one with a reputed penchant for strong drink; a Fallen Angel living amongst the sisters would be a matter best dealt with swiftly, and silently. I suspect that Investigator di Scullini's strong reliance upon Reason and Science will be used by the Church to discredit the veracity of this Oracle, so that Rome's priests may deal

with the matter in their own fashion, and for their own, unknown purposes.

As to Dr. di Scullini herself, I do not doubt her intelligence, although I believe she puts a mistaken amount of trust in the knowledge represented by her vaunted University degrees. For all of her learning, has she read Agrippa's "Three Books of Occult Philosophy?" Did she ever wonder what Rome really sought to hide when it issued the "Malleus Malleficarum?" Has she learned the secret of the golem from the readers of the Kabbalah? Was she there when Paracelsus turned lead into gold before the Emperor's court? For all of these reasons and more, I am forced to conclude that my companion, like most Venetians, suffers from that most deadly of sins, vanity, about her education, its ability to serve her in this investigation, even her appearance.

No one has hair that red.



Chaumburg, Central Keep
Feast of Fools, April, Anno Societas Thirty-Two
Terce

Dr. di Scullini and I began our investigation in Chaumburg proper. Before subjecting either of us to unknown forces, I felt it wise to learn what we could from the townsfolk themselves. Dr. di Scullini agreed, although I believe more because we had to pass through Chaumburg on the way to Our Lady of the Invisible Joy, than due to any concern for the safety of her soul.

Chaumburg is an amazingly clean, and orderly town...perhaps too much so. The townspeople seem to be quite taken with the arts of brewing and vintning, so much so that it seemed every third house had its own vines, or could serve as a public house, if need be. I should also note that the town had an inordinately

large graveyard, many of the graves being quite fresh. Although I at once suspected this, Dr. di Scullini, in questioning Seamus, the strange, long bearded gravedigger, suggested a simpler reason for this. It would seem that, while this love of fine drink did make the folk amiable and pleasant, it also led to quite a few townfolk dying from falling into the river, hitting their heads on rocks, falling on their knives, and so forth. For present, this explanation seems plausible.

Presently, we came to town's small round keep, and were admitted to see the seneschal. While we waited, I mentally went through my long list of questions for the man. At last the seneschal, a tall, dark, nervous looking man approached and took my hand. He appraised di Scullini frankly, and then shrugged.

The interview progressed as follows:

Fuchs-Mueller: Greetings. I am Sheriff Dieter Fuchs-Mueller, and this is Lady Diana Fiorenza di Scullini. You are the seneschal here?

Seneschal: (Nod.)

Fuchs-Mueller: Lady...
di Scullin: Doctor.

Fuchs-Mueller: Dr. di Scullini and I are here on the Crown's business to investigate the Oracle...

di Scullini: So called oracle.

Fuchs-Mueller: The purported oracle at the Convent of Our Lady of the Invisible Joy.

Seneschal: (blink. No response, then, an uncertain nod.)

Fuchs-Mueller: Can you tell us when reports of the oracle first

reached Chaumburg?

Seneschal: (silence.)

Fuchs-Mueller: How many of the townsfolk have consulted this oracle?

Seneschal: (looking confused.)

Fuchs-Mueller: Well, have YOU consulted this oracle?

Seneschal: (silence. Head slowly shook no.)

Fuchs-Mueller: Ah! Then you are saying that you yourself have never seen or heard this oracle speak?

Seneschal: (again, a negative head shake.)

Fuchs-Mueller: No? No you haven't, or no that's not what you're saying?

Seneschal: (a more emphatic head shake.)

Fuchs-Mueller: Dammit man! If what we have heard at court is true, all of the people of this shire could be having their souls exposed to the nefarious taint of an incorporeal, malefic...

di Scullini: (Interrupting, and to the Seneschal) You are from Wales, yes? Cymry?

Seneschal: (a positive head shake)

di Scullini: You don't speak anything but Welsh, do you?

Seneschal: (smiling broadly) No. Aiddloynit u iddoiwoytys.

di Scullini: (to me) Well, Fuchs-Mueller, I think we're finished here. The man doesn't understand a word we're saying.

Fuchs-Mueller: That's absurd! He just understood you, didn't he?

di Scullini: (taking on a tone of condescension) Most people, when living in a foreign land with a foreign language, quickly learn how to get across that they don't speak the language. We need a translator.

At this point, one of the scullions looked up from his work.

Scullion: I don't mean to interrupt, but there ain't none here but can understand a single word the good lord yonder says. Even them that speaks a little Welsh say his accent's too thick.

Fuchs-Mueller: But that's impossible. The man is ruling this land for the Crown. How can he possibly do that, if no one understands him?

Scullion: Oh, quite well, really. 'e just points and waves 'is hands up and down like; sometimes 'e even grunts in that strange Welsh of 'is. You gets used to it, in a while. Actually, it's better than the last seneschal. 'e lived 'ere 'is whole life, and there wasn't more than one or two who could understand a thing 'c said. Spoke too damn fast. Course, 'e is much better 'bout that, since 'e got over his fever. Speaks much more slowly.

di Scullini seemed intrigued by this and continued to question the scullion. Realizing that my first lead was a dead end, I lost interest. I turned back to the seneschal.

Fuchs-Mueller: I'm sorry to have bothered you. It seems that you can't help me after all.

Seneschal: (shrugging) Hwledlll, ai aclodulldd ftaedlwl u dtehae cowriahcllae eiis Coeahkelaely.

Fuchs-Mueller: Right. Same to you.

I told di Scullini I would wait outside, and turned and left. As I was approaching the gate, one of the guards fell into pace besides me.

Guard: You want to talk to those who have seen the Oracle, Sheriff Mueller?

Fuchs-Mueller: Yes, that's right. Have you been to see this oracle?

Guard: Oh no, not I. It's Balthazar yer wanting. Balthazar Forester. It was he what saw the Oracle first. Well, after Sister Katherine, that is. He lives in the woods, to the west of Chaumburg.

Fuchs-Mueller: I see. This Sister Katherine....I have heard that the oracle was supposed to have appeared to her first.

Guard: Oh yes, oh yes indeed. (He looked about, and then turned and whispered.) But they say that no one sees Sister Katherine anymore. Not since the Oracle started making prophecies. No, Balthazar's yer best bet. But be wary. He's a queer one, full of many strange tales.

Fuchs-Mueller: I'll keep that in mind.

I asked the guard for directions to the nearest public house — there were plenty to choose from — and asked him to let Dr. di Scullini know where to find me.



Chaumburg, Rowdy Rottweiler Inn
Feast of Fools, April, Anno Societas Thirty-Two
Compline

di Scullini joined me about half an hour later. I took the liberty of ordering beers for us both.

The doctor was quite animated. She now shared my belief that something strange was going on in the shire, but not in the same way that I did.

"You're telling me that someone has systematically reduced the Crown's authority here to a puppetshow?" I asked, somewhat incredulously.

She nodded. "Look, there have been four seneschal's in eight years. The first of those, a Norse woman, reputedly committed suicide by jumping from the keep's walls. The second, Katherine von Schlosserwald, for reasons unknown to any, suddenly felt a need to take holy orders and become a cloistered nun. The..."

"That's the same Sister Katherine who first heard this oracle speak."

"Yes," she said. "But you're getting away from my line of thought. Her successor was a Saxon, named Ethelwulf. He's the proprietor of this inn."

"All right, a step down in the world, I'll give you that. But I'd hardly say that ..."

di Scullini shook her impossibly red hair. "Would you listen to me?! Ethelwulf contracted a brain fever. His physician recommended a treatment of three drops of mercury in each meal."

I nodded. "Sound treatment. Galen speaks quite favorably of

it.”

She snorted. “Sheriff Mueller, stick to law, not medicine. It’s been well known for over a generation that ingesting mercury leads to madness. I assure you, the previous seneschal is quite mad.”

“That’s absurd! Why I’ve never heard such a thing. Besides,” I said, picking up my mug and tapping its side with my finger, “he’s fairly prosperous for a madman. Lead goblets, not wood.”

di Scullini shrugged, defeated. “True. Although, the servants at the keep attribute that wealth to his wife’s careful management, not his damaged faculties. Either way, there is something very strange going on here. Very strange. I think we’d be best served by going directly to the convent. I think the answer may be found by learning what befell Sister Katherine.”

“I agree,” I said, and she started to smile. “But, first I want to speak to this forester.” Her smile faded almost instantly. “I know you think it’s a waste of time, but I don’t. And this is MY investigation.”

The doctor sighed and took another long drink from her cup. “That it is. That it is.”



Hovel of Balthazar the Forester, West of Chaumburg
Second of April, Anno Societas Thirty-Two
Prime

Dr. di Scullini and I set out at first light for the home of Balthazar Forester. The forester's house was more a strange ramshackle of boards, twigs, and straw, with a reasonable amount of mud and dirt holding everything together. I believe the small bolt-thrower that pointed from the hut's door down the road made Dr. di Scullini rather anxious. I would have shared in her anxiousness, had the guard at the keep not warned me of Balthazar's queer, though usually harmless, ways.

After several hails to the hut, and a few threatening replies, we finally convinced the forester that we meant him no harm, and he agreed to speak with us. To my surprise, a squalid, flithy, wild looking figure stepped out from a group of trees not more than twenty yards to my left, a crossbow in his hand.

I cannot transcribe the entire conversation that took place. Balthazar Forester is indeed a strange man, given to long thoughtful silences, followed by sudden, erratic, nearly violent outbursts. More than once, I found myself fighting my urge to rest my hand on my sword's hilt.

But I held still, and for the next four hours, my companion and I listened to his strange tales of the Little People and their flying chariots, and of all those (Balthazar himself, included, of course) they had carried off for all manners of strange purposes, only to be returned either mere moments, or long years, later.

At last, I was able to make him focus on the oracle, and when he did so, we had our first description of an encounter with this being.

Fuchs-Mueller: So, how was it that you encountered the oracle?

Balthazar: Well, he just came into me hut and poured himself a drink. He loves good beer, that one does.

di Scullini: So, you're saying that this oracle is a man?

Balthazar: Nope.

di Scullini: But he must have a body, right? You said he poured himself a drink.

Balthazar: Nope, and yep. But not like that.

di Scullini: Not like that? Well, then how? How else does someone pour themselves a drink?

Balthazar: (shrug)

Fuchs-Mueller: Is he one of these "Little People" you've described?

Balthazar: Of course not! Haven't you heard what all I said? If it was THEMSELVES I was talking about, you'd know! As if they'd just come down into me house and have me pour them a drink. Although, come to think of it, about six years back or so...

Fuchs-Mueller: Right. I remember. Now you just said that YOU poured the drink.

Balthazar: Right.

di Scullini: But before you said this "oracle" poured a drink for himself. Which is it?

Balthazar: It's...both I guess. It's like I'm doing the pouring and the drinking, but it's not what's meself that DOING it, you see?

Fuchs-Mueller: (to di Scullini) Doctor, do you realize that we

may be talking about possession by a disembodied, or wholly non-corporeal incarnate being?

di Scullini: (to Fuch-Mueller) No. (to Balthazar Forester) Did this "oracle" tell you why he had singled you out to appear to.

Balthazar: I asked him that meself, I did. He said twasn't no real reason a 'tall. He was just passing through and heard that me green mead was unique in all the world. (Patting the skin at his side, from which he had been drinking steadily.) Care for some?

di Scullini: No thank you. Sheriff Fuchs-Mueller, I think one more question will satisfy me. Balthazar, if I may, how long have you had gout? (She indicated his rather swollen left foot.)

Balthazar: Oh, abouts a year now. But it's getting much better.

di Scullini: And why is that?

Balthazar: Why, because me friends at the Rottweiler gave me his secret potion. The one whats cured his brain fever. That's what make me mead green.

di Scullini: Really. Well thanks you so much. (To Fuchs-Mueller.) I think I'm done here.

Fuchs-Mueller: Well, did the Oracle make any prophecies for you?

Balthazar: Oh sure, lots, but not so much more strange then where to lay me traps, or what the day's weather was to be. Except one.

Fuchs-Mueller: And that was?

Balthazar: Well, I asked him if he could tell me a way that I could be a rich man, and he said there was one thing he could tell me.

Fuchs-Mueller: And...?

Balthazar: He just said, "Plastics, baby. Invest in Plastics."

With nothing more than cryptic mutterings for evidence, and with a growing conviction on my part that mercury might not be an effective treatment for gout, we took our leave of the forests, and set out for our last destination: The Convent of Our Lady of the Invisible Joy.

TO BE CONTINUED



Electronic Pilgrim

This months sites relate to the amazing story just told in these pages.

Weird but True:

<http://munshi.sonoma.edu/jamal/weird.html>

An extremely long website, 38 pages to be exact but full of interesting tidbits of wisdom, that would make the oracle proud. Bits of wisdom including this from Mahavira (500b.c.) "It is not possible for the universe to be limited in either space or time; therefore it is infinitely large and has no beginning or end; therefore it could not have been created; therefore there is no creator."

Ovi's World of the Bizarre:

<http://www.ovis.com/>

More weird facts and trivia, software for download, Wacky fact generators and more!

Beyond Weird2:

<http://www.beyondweird.com/>

Information on Bigfoot, Chupacabra, vampires, ghosts and lots of conspiracy stuff than you can shake a stick at

Weird Sites:

<http://www.now2000.com/bigkidnetwork/weirdsites.html>

Take a stroll among the various bizarre, funny and engrossing sites here including such wonders as the "Insane Journal", "The Web Toilet" and the horror of Squirrel Hazing.

New to the Vanished Wood Website

Many of you received "Virtual Chips" our website newsletter with new features to the Vanished Wood Website. If you would like to subscribe, just send your email address to Vanishwood@aol.com with a note asking to be added to the list.

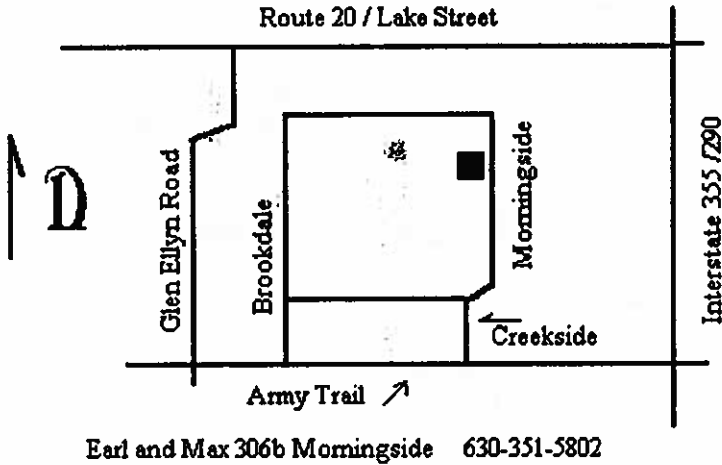
New features added recently include Talbot's article on Viking Weddings and the recipes from "The Search for Ivan Goroh". We have also added a "Chat Room" to the "Rowdy Rottweiler" alehouse. The chat room works with any JAVA capable browser including Micro Soft Internet Explorer (MSIE) and Netscape. AOL browser may or may not work, I have had the most luck with AOL 3.0 for Windows 95 with the browser updated to MSIE. I also think the Opera browser will also work.

Chats can be conducted with up to 25 people simultaneously. If you would like to host a chat I will schedule the time on the site and advertise it, if you desire, on the various SCA related news groups. Chat ideas include events on armoring, brewing, costuming or even household meetings. Contact Ethelwulf if you are interested.



Next Shire Moot:

The next shire moot (for real) will be held Sunday, April 5th at Ethelwulf's and Arwyn's, Earl and Maxine Bless, 306 B Morningside Drive, Bloomingdale. Moot starts at 6:30pm. Call them at 630-351-5802 if you have questions.



Brewers Guild Meeting:

The next brewers guild meeting will be at Earl's, same address as above, on Sunday, April 19th at 1pm. Ethelwulf will be brewing English Ales. Call if you plan on coming.

Upcoming Events:

April

18 Coronation, Flaming Gryphon, Dayton OH

25 Sunday Bloody Sunday II, Rockwall, Beloit WI

25 Rites of Spring, Illiton, Peoria IL

May

2 Midlands A/S Dark River, Quad Cities IA/IL

9 25th year celebration, Jaravellir, Madison WI

Remember: <http://www.midrealm.org> has detailed listings of all events in the PALE with links to event websites.

Notable Events:

Congratulations

To Kris and Michelle on the birth of their daughter Nichole Brittany (hope I got the spelling close)

Get Well Soons

To Adam Westburg who broke his arm recently wrestling with a killer grisly bear and Laura Cavannaugh who broke some fingers and was shook up after crashing her cart into the kings toll collecting wagon as it left the Rowdy Rottweiler. Hope the Magistrate is merciful Laura.

This is **Chips**, a publication of the Shire of Vanished Wood of the Society for Creative Anachronism Inc. **Chips** is not an official publication of the Society for Creative Anachronism, and does not delineate SCA policy, nor necessarily reflect the views of that organization at large. Subscriptions are \$5.00 for 12 issues US mail or 18 issues E-mail and may be obtained by contacting Earl Bless, 306 B. Morningside Drive, Bloomingdale, IL 60108. Ebless@aol.com

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