

Twenty-six years have passed in Falnorian; it is now year one hundred of the third age, second era (100.3.2).

Civil War and Secession: Ardel

Ardel, long the center of trade and particularly the sea trade in Falnorian, has in recent times experienced a great deal of unrest as workers have protested unsafe conditions and long working hours. This struggle has played out politically for many decades, and is not new to the people of Ardel; however, in 74.3.2, this conflict took a violent turn as workers took to the streets in massive protests against many of the established guilds and the merchant and noble classes. Despite Ardel's attempts to calm the situation down, within days of workers taking to the streets, many districts of the city were in flames.

The mass uprisings in the city of Ardel soon spread to the rest of the province, inflamed further by the combined work of the Resistance - a group comprised primarily of rebelling workers - and the Bandit King, a notorious figure notable for employing



banditry to significantly hinder the income of the upper classes. With Ardel's law enforcement and military unable to take hold of the situation, Falnin sent in several of its own military divisions to supplement efforts to restore control to Ardel. It took several months for the combined efforts of Ardel and Falnin to retake the city, but by winter the city itself was back in order. The conflict continued to play across the rest of the Ardel province, however, and it was only by 78.3.2 that a

tenuous calm was achieved. Given periodic flare-ups and outbursts from the population, kindled by the Resistance and the ever-elusive Bandit King, Falnin maintained a military presence in Ardel even after the fighting was over.

Negotiations began as Falnin sent a unit of high-ranking diplomats to assist in the mediation between merchants, workers, and the guilds. Much to the dismay of the other parties involved, the Bandit King stepped in to negotiate on behalf of the workers, who refused the help of official diplomats on suspicion that they would naturally favor the upper classes. This stalled negotiations for some time as it was debated at great length the legality of negotiating terms with a terrorist, but eventually officials gave in and debate about what to do regarding Ardel at large was able to begin. This resolved in 85.3.2 strongly in favor of the lower classes, pushed in this direction once the politically influential bard schools pulled their weight in favor of workers, on account of Decency for Sentient Species. Strict regulations and laws were placed on trade and conditions in

Ardel, and a Falnin military force remained present to ensure these laws were being adhered to in the coming years.

Though Ardel bounced back from this turmoil gracefully, returning to an economic height comparable to its status before the civil war, many - merchants, nobility, and common civilians alike - resented the continued presence of Falnin in Ardelian affairs at all levels of society. Despite receiving repeated requests to withdraw, Falnin refused to take leave of the province, citing the need to maintain stability in the region; this sparked another rebellion in 90.3.2, which quickly turned into an ugly civil war with all of Ardel against Falnin. The war lasted for six years, during which Ardel attempted to secede from Falnorian entirely - an event unprecedented in Falnorian's history. By the time the war dwindled to a close, many of Ardel's resources had been spent, and the province was left further in disarray as Falnin seized and sold off large portions of Ardellian territory to help pay for the war and to punish Ardel for its rebellion. There continues to be much discontented murmuring throughout Ardel to this day, and a strong secessionist streak persists throughout all levels of society.

Reclaiming the Wildlands: Gildmar

The Wildlands - the deserted, inhospitable remnants of the old Halimin province - have for the last three centuries been untamable, as attempts to repopulate it have failed due to the inherent wildness of the place. It was especially due to the aggressive, dangerous mutant animals that populated the region that reinhabitation was impossible; ants that explode with burning acid, hyenas capable of ripping a human's head off with ease, and warthogs that snort flames were among the creatures that settlers soon found themselves running from. The latter half of this century has seen a mysterious die-off of these creatures, however, which are becoming much more rare and less aggressive as time goes on - allowing an opportunity to begin resettling the Wildlands much more successfully than before.

Gildmar, which has been cut off from the rest of Falnorian by the Wildlands for many years, was the first to discover this and the primary reclaiming force involved. Initially their interest was in hunting for resources in the form



of ore and gems - an aim perhaps fueled by Dennond's sudden silence where for many years before it had been a steadfast ally and trading affiliate - but later became a fully-fledged move to colonize the Wildlands where the landscape would allow. Unlike many

preceding attempts, Gildmar's work to colonize the Wildlands has been highly organized, working especially to build a functional infrastructure through which supplementary supplies can be easily transported. This has extended Gildmarian territory massively, and allows access between it and other provinces that has not existed before. Many, knowing Gildmar's heavily militant culture, feared this would mean armed conflicts and fighting; but for the moment, Gildmar seems content to work at establishing its colonies and search for more resources in the long-unexplored wastes of the Wildlands.

New Ties: Eldspel

For many years, Falnorian has been working towards establishing solid diplomatic relations with its southern neighbor, Xucu'an. Xucu'an is the home of the enigmatic Ku elves, or Wood elves, and has only very rarely taken any interest in Falnorian, preferring to keep to its own secretive affairs. In the last half-century, Falnorian's work to establish a connection with Xucu'an has been met with some success; but, finding the culture and politics of the Ku elves near-unfathomably intricate and complicated and often contradictory, progress towards seeding relations has been slow.



At last, a substantial diplomatic connection has been made; but not, as had been worked for, with Falnorian as a whole, but rather with Eldspel directly. This has incensed the Falnorian High Council, who have made their displeasure clear to Eldspel; but to those who have lived in Eldspel, it does not come as a surprise. As Xucu'an shares a border directly with Eldspel, there has often been a trickle of shared understanding and trade between them. Indeed, this mutual understanding seems to reach back very far - Huitzilocali, the primary diplomat from Xucu'an, stated on one of his many visits to the Eldspel mage school, "Sisters, we are: twins, reflected through cycles of the spinning wheel, between which much made was

destroyed." Archmage Whendle Ahwuë elaborated on Huitzilocali's statement by explaining the presence of a shared ley line between a mage school in Xucu'an and the Eldspel mage school - no accident, he said, but part of an ancient understanding of magic.

Some criticize Eldspel for the way it has handled these negotiations, as in its extensive work to establish a connection with Xucu'an, it has neglected many of its own affairs and its duties to the rest of Falnorian. The High Council is not the only entity that

harbors resentment towards the Eldspel rulers and mage school, for its people as well have become impatient with being more often than not left to fend for themselves. Yet few can deny that collaboration between Eldspel and Xucu'an mages have produced a plethora of curious items and advances in metaphysics over the last decade - but many are left wondering, for whose benefit?

Backlash Towards the High Council: Falnin

Many provinces are now harboring a great deal of hostility towards the Falnorian High Council for what many call its "persistent meddling" in affairs under the jurisdiction of the various provincial rulers.

Over the last twenty six years it has sought to create greater unity and cooperation between all of Falnorian's provinces, and to strengthen the structure beneath inter-provincial works. Though at face its intentions have been good, its methods have been heavy-handed and questionably ethical, leading some to wonder if there isn't a secondary motive behind the meddling. From a forced military presence in Ardel, to

direct sanctions on Syenon's trade with Illionor, to attempts to determine Oldmin's successor to the throne, many a maneuver has garnered the High Council little but distrust and outrage from the rulers and people of Falnorian's provinces.



Now, though the provinces are more prone to cooperation in some respects than they were, it is not as the High Council has intended - rather, many of the provinces are now working together to block further unwanted interference from the High Council in one another's affairs. The diplomatic and military forces of many provinces has grown significantly in the last few years, as each province looks to find ways to avoid calling in aid from Falnin whenever possible. Even Falnin's own military and mage school have become somewhat exasperated with the Council's use of them, though for the moment they remain steadfast as ever.

War Drums: Oldmin

These past years have seen the beloved Kaizath Kingsburn retire from the throne of Oldmin, and at last passing away a mere year ago in 99.3.2. Rulership was passed to the new Rachel Kingsvey, his eldest granddaughter, who took the throne in 76.3.2. This caused something of an uproar in Falnin, which had been attempting to pressure Kaizath into passing the throne down to her sister Rebekah Kingsvey instead. As Rebekah had been fostered in the city of Falnin for a time and immersed in the capital's political landscape, the High Council cited her as the option best for interests of Falnorian as a whole. Kaizath, in his typically gruff manner, responded that if pandering

to capital bickering was what concerned him most, he would have sent his advisors rather than his daughter to be fostered there.

Since taking the throne, Queen Rachel Kingsvey has been faced with the task of

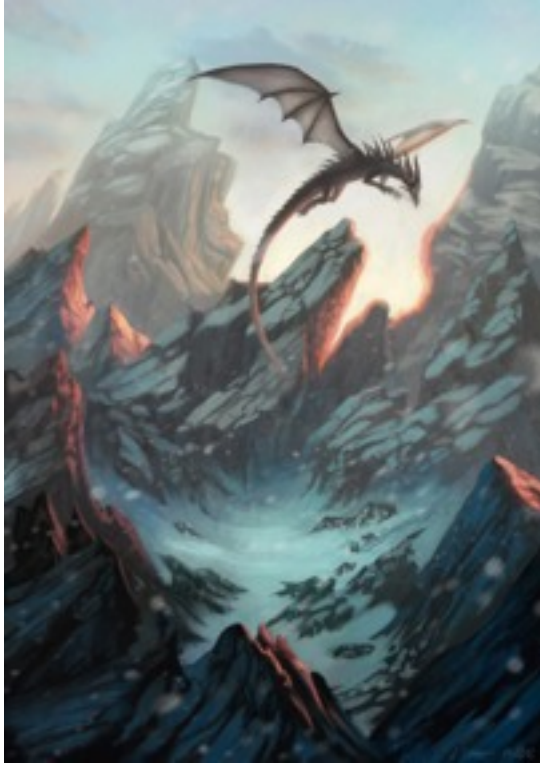


ensuring the defense of the city wall as it is constantly barraged and beat upon by an assortment of giants, gremlins, gnomes, and other beings. This has been understood as a subtle sort of warfare - though the groups seem to be unrelated to one another,

and certainly don't work together in any capacity, intelligence forces put together by the new Queen revealed that these groups were nevertheless being coordinated by the same source. Spies from Torkord, the dwarven nation across the Halhar Mountains, was discovered to be paying off or otherwise persuading many of these groups to attack Oldmin. For what reason, it is not known; this is the first contact from the isolationist Torkord to Falnorian in centuries, and its implications do not bode well. With the source of this up-stirring identified, the Queen ordered the spies captured; many chose death instead, returning (it is assumed) to Torkord. For the meantime, the attacks have ceased; yet many wonder at Torkord's motives, and anticipate a more direct attack in the coming years.

Open Passage: The Halhar Mountains

The Halhar Mountains have been a regular source of both curiosity and terror for generations of explorers and adventurers, to say nothing of the Oldminers who have lived in their shadow. Sightings of strange beasts, rumors of odd magical fields, and the massive scale of the mountains themselves have been the foundation for many a bard's tavern tale or children's story before bed - imaginings only inspired further by the lack of proven information about what the mountains are really like. All that is really known is that they are extraordinarily dangerous: few serious expeditions ever return, and many bodies have been found over the centuries bearing strange wounds - some of them morganti. The only thing known for sure is that the mountains belong to the dragons, and that the dragons don't appreciate meddlers.



For as long as they have guarded the mountains, the dragons have protected them fiercely; they have allowed none to venture into the deepest vales, and ward off most explorers long before then. Other than these brief encounters, dragons were rarely seen, and almost nothing was known about them or their habits. In 90.3.2, dragon sightings for a time became much more frequent and much closer to civilization, causing a great deal of worry amongst folk who feared for their families and their livelihoods. But it became clear later that this was not a preparation to attack, but rather an invitation: investigators and then explorers found that they were able to venture into the mountains with much more success, and began to traverse it eagerly.

Most delighted by this turn of events have been historians and dungeoneers, who have led many expeditions to study the abundance of ruins in the mountains that have been untouchable until now. Many of these ruins are ancient - some even dating back to the first era - and the wealth of information and artifacts that they have revealed has shed much light on periods of history that were lost to the Fall. It is not known how long this access has been granted for, or why; but many historians are hopeful that the mountains will remain open for further study for as much time as is needed to recover what has been lost to Falnorian's memory for so long.

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