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MERCY IN VOND

Merigall stretched an arm into the darkness, but the other half of the bed lay empty. The Rust Brothers must have taken the bedfellow away at least a couple of hours ago, as the sheets that met the fingers were damp and coolly dead.



The youngling must not have resisted nor tried to wake Merigall, in all likelihood due to the priests whispering of how every action of disobedience would bring harm to his village. The Rust Brothers feared Merigall, but they feared ravenous Krasylla even more, to whom the boy had now been taken for a final tryst.

The demon rose to correct its face in a small, silver mirror. The features had slid as they were wont to do during deep slumber, but Merigall willfully stretched them to conventional beauty, choosing a strict, dark and androgynous face above colorless clothes that was in keeping with the day's mood. The eyes remained yellow as a cat's, as always.

Outside the stuffiness of the bed chamber, the cold stone corridors of the holdfast of Vond lay deserted. None dared stand guard outside Merigall's chambers and no guard was needed anyway. The demon had taken the former quarters of the dwarven lord, high on the

mountainside, for its own use after the human king, Alvagard, had conquered Vond three hundred and fifty years ago before leaving the region to march to new wars. The clan sign of the Crombe dwarves was still carved into each door, but it had long since lost its meaning.



The Nightwalker's fog still embedded the rising sun. Even so, the day promised clarity in cold as well as in view, and beautiful vistas of the scorched valleys of Harga opened up to the eye where the demon passed. The passage down the mountain ran along the balustrade above one of the goddess Hemes's places of anguish. A couple of priests garbed in rusty masks over capes draped in ochre bowed in silence when Merigall passed, but the demon neither recognized them behind the iron nor responded to their greetings. A glance down towards the courtyard revealed that the church's supply



of sacrificial prisoners was running low, for a lonely old man stood fettered to the poles, thin as a barren goat. Maybe he was already dead, as there was no reaction as white-painted shadows of death clawed out stripes of blood over his wretched body in their dance. The twisted tree trunk representing the goddess Heme looked quite jaded as well.

The only doors to Krasylla's chamber were set into rotating drums tied to a mechanical delaying device. The one who was pushed or chose to enter of their own volition was trapped for several minutes, moments that belonged to Krasylla, and let him deal with his guests however he pleased. Merigall didn't hesitate, however, but forced the door forward until from within the walls the sound of dripping mercury started counting down the time for the audience. The hall was warm and reeked like a slaughterhouse in comparison to the cool, clean air outside. The room was spacious, but Krasylla's semi-liquid form still occupied half of it. Merigall immediately saw its premonitions confirmed, for the body that had experienced fingers that caressed it only hours earlier was half embedded in Krasylla, whose large, clawed hand squeezed the torso, neither lovingly nor to keep it trapped, but like the milk maiden squeezing the cow's teat to empty it of its contents.

"You've stolen my playmate," said Merigall. "I wasn't done with him."

Krasylla's grotesque face turned towards his guest in the twilight. It already bore the features of the devoured youngling, albeit twisted, enlarged and deformed. The larger demon usually borrowed the face of his food, saving him the trouble of keeping track of where

noses, mouths and eyes were supposed to be placed to achieve a passable human likeness.

"How was I to know?" Krasylla's voice answered, cracked dull. "I can scarcely tell one from the other. I was hungry."

"You are always hungry."

"The body still lives," said the demon and smacked the boy's sweaty, vaulted back, causing it to convulse beneath his touch. "You can make use of it as I eat."

Merigall had a vision of the praying mantis' habit of eating its spouse while mating, but the offer held no appeal. A dark mood had gripped its thoughts, as if the night itself lingered beneath the skin.

"You feel repulsion," the fiend noted. "Do you then, as the Rust Brothers, believe mighty Krasylla to have become an aimlessly glutting swine, wallowing in its own lard?"

"You have previously told me that you are eating yourself towards sarmog. Nothing else has ever occurred to me. The only accusation I have against you is that you ate someone I still desired."

Krasylla found no retort that hadn't already been spoken. As he snorted, a torrent of bodily noises thundered from within the mountain of flesh.

"Do you plan to return home when you've reached sarmog?" Merigall continued. "Do you mean to slaughter the soulless in the pass of Mistra to reach nexus and maybe challenge Goder himself in Churmog?"

"Not at all," Krasylla grunted in his closest approximation of laughter. "I enjoy this world. It is full of colors and delicious flesh. Let Goder keep Churmog, while I make mog of the Forbidden Lands!"



He squeezed the youngling's body until it turned blue and writhed in his grip.

"You don't have to be alarmed, Merigall," he added. "I prefer you as the other, even if your contribution would strengthen my sarmog. You have traveled far and gotten to know the world. I appreciate our talks."

"Very generous of you, Krasylla," Merigall answered without signaling either fear, gratitude or irony.

Peripheral throats, stretched like nets of veins across Krasylla's surface, transported the dissolved tissue from the body to the melted mass of the demon through peristaltic motions. Merigall waited patiently while the body of the youngling convulsed in powerful spasms before returning to stillness, broken only by a persistent tremor, before answering.

"Zytera stored my essence in a statue when he remade me. I couldn't leave the Forbidden Lands even if I wanted to. Besides, I too enjoy this world – some days more than others. Aren't you bound to obedience by a blood covenant with the wizard as well?"

"Zytera is old. He would already be dead if the daughter fragment wasn't keeping him alive," Krasylla answered with a disgusted look on his face, constructed with no sense of proportion. "My time will come!"

"We are mog!" Merigall said in parting, suddenly overcome with disgust and despair.

"We are mog!" Krasylla answered, lost in thought.



From the chamber of its kin, Merigall continued down through the lower levels of the hold-

fast of Vond and steered its steps to the dungeons on a whim. Some wardens from the Iron Guard moved to intercept, but the demon gave them the eye and pressed onwards. All members of the Church of Rust in Vond appeared equally nervous and when Merigall reached the cells the reason as to why became abundantly clear. The dungeons lay empty, doors gaping like the maws of nestlings. The demon sauntered along the rows of spaces where only ingrained anguish wailed from the walls. At long last, in the furthest reaches of the darkest and dankest vault, Merigall found a lone woman fettered to a wall by rusty chains. The cuffs were grossly oversized, probably to cause discomfort and at the same time hinder the prisoner's movements. She was battered and bruised, neither young nor old, and her black clothes were torn to filthy rags. Burnt into her right cheek the mark of the god Rust glowed with such heat and pain that Merigall could sense it from the door. In addition, there was a tattoo of a raven above the brand. That the Rust Brothers had kept a Raven Sister as a sacrificial lamb instead of immediately tearing her limb from limb showed more than anything how dangerously low their supply of prisoners was running. Rites had to be performed and Krasylla took the sustenance he needed – if there were no prisoners to be had, a Brother would have to be sacrificed, already a reality on several occasions. That was why the Raven Sister had been saved, as an emergency cache for the gods. The wall behind the woman was messy with fresh blood. Maybe she had tried to pound the life out of her skull against the stone, or maybe the Rust Brothers had mutilated her wings while she was still in the guise of the raven.



Merigall opened the barred door and stepped into the cell. The woman had appeared to be sleeping, but one of her eyes became visible at once where that coal black, lank hair parted. The gaze was odd: defiant, filled with distaste and empty all at once.

"You wear no iron mask. Who are you?" she said, her voice bright and unexpectedly steady.

Merigall pushed a bowl of dirty water to the side and squatted in front of her.

"Who do you want me to be?"

"Be the quick death, if I am allowed to choose," the woman answered immediately. "Kill me! Kill as many as you can and then kill yourself. Then the world will be better."

The demon had not expected such a response.

"So, you don't want to escape and continue the battle against Rust and Heme? You praise the Raven God as a champion of life, yet you speak to me of death and murder."

The woman shook in what Merigall assumed to be a fit of coughing, but then her hoarse laughter broke through.

"When I became a novice with the Raven Sisters, my uncle mocked me," she said. "Last we met, he tried to strangle me. My cousins chased him off."

"He was possessed?" Merigall asked, intrigued by the woman's incomprehensible mood.

"Maybe possessed by faith. My uncle worshipped Corax – the scavenger aspect of the Raven God. My sisters may love the farmers of the forest, but the Blackwings claim that the humans defied the God by coming to Ravenland. They say that Corax won't lift his curse until the land has been rid of humankind. Uncle didn't hate me any more than anyone else, but he found it fitting to kill me first, since man was led to

Ravenland by the Raven Sisters in the Old Age."

Her tongue clung to the words, so Merigall offered her diluted wine from the wineskin in its belt. The demon reached out its hand and brushed the woman's hair from her face while she drank greedily. The Raven Sister stiffened but allowed it to happen. Past the wounds, the dirt and the festering brand on her cheek, Merigall found her beautiful, but then again saw beauty in almost everyone.

"Now at the end of life and torment, I understand my uncle," the woman continued and dropped the empty wineskin in the dirt. "The Reapenters are right! Everyone might as well die – especially me, who has believed in the folly of hope!"

"The Reapenters don't kill everyone, only humans."

"Everyone!" the Raven Sister insisted and held Merigall's gaze, unwavering. "Consciousness always breeds evil and never deserves its existence. Try to convince me otherwise."

Her words urged contemplation.

"I find your dejection unbecoming. I have seen dead worlds and they are all excruciatingly dull," Merigall mumbled. "You are right that all thinking beings show cruelty, but also compassion. Would you prize sweetness so highly if it was never tempered by venom or brine?"

Then the demon had an idea.

"Let us make a bet! If I can show you that mercy exists in the Forbidden Lands, you will renounce the teachings of the Reapenters and face death with defiance instead of listlessness."

"What is my faith to you, Yellow Eye?"

"Nothing. But challenges are the essence of my life," Merigall replied, smiling. "Come!"

"Perhaps you haven't noticed, but I'm



bound to the wall," the woman said, laboriously lifting her chains towards the demon.

"Give me a kiss and we will stride beyond the iron!"

"I have given a vow of chastity," the Raven Sister answered, but she still contemplated Merigall's softly inviting lips with tired curiosity.

"I give no kiss of either love or even lust. Regard our touch as duty and faith, as a passage towards fairer climes," the demon answered and let the hand slip under the woman's hair, at the neck where it lay stiff with blood.

"My name is Rimenda. The village of Karnevera witnessed my birth," she mumbled and closed her eyes to the world as Merigall's golden eyes gleamed like twin suns as they came near.



The two occupied space once more in a small, vaulted room where a boy woke with a start, sat up, and watched his unexpected guests with eyes as yellow as Merigall's.

"Sleep unto the morning, my child!" the demon said and gently pushed the small body back against the bed. The boy let it happen without making a fuss and appeared to go back to sleep in an instant.

After days on the cold prison floor, Rimenda was so weak and stiff that Merigall had to support her as they proceeded into the great hall of the dwelling. There, the hosts had already woken to first breakfast with their visiting relatives.

"No one can see or hear us." Merigall calmed the Raven Sister who drew her black rags tighter around her body.

"I have brought you here because the halflings are the most good-natured kin in the Forbidden Lands. See how they start the day in joviality in spite of their still growling bellies and let that bring you hope for the good things in life!"

"Dear Medulda, don't you want some stewed butter with that nut bread?" the hostess offered, then traced her index finger through the yellow fat to show how creamy the flowing mass was.

"Thank you for asking, fine Hulvia!" the in-law answered. She accepted the bowl, so greasy around the arch that it almost slipped from her grasp.

Before anything more could transpire, the women were interrupted by a circular door that crashed open, revealing a path towards the inwards of the house. Out stormed a very small, grey-black child, bare-assed and wildly squawking with glee over its freedom. In its wake lurched an elderly halfling thing, crashing on the doorstep with a bang, vomiting where he lay. Immediately behind him a younger, fair-skinned halfling woman appeared with yet another child pressed to her chest.

"Grandpa is drunk again and dropped him. I'm terribly sorry, mother!"

The runaway didn't get very far, however. The master of the dwelling unfolded a leg, grabbing the child after it had fallen on its snout, and carried it, face white-hot with rage and with a grip around the offspring's neck as steady as it was relentless, back to the den's secret cubbyholes. The child's nosebleed dripped in his tracks, but any continued screams were smothered with a steady hand. The wife of the house, for her part, hid her face in her hands



and wept in abundance. The wild child was apparently not of halfling kin, but when Rimenda questioningly looked at Merigall, the demon muttered that they must be going and kissed the Raven Sister's lips again, before she found the presence of mind to defend herself.



The world immediately stood colder and bleaker. Ragged clouds, lopsidedly lit by the sun rising towards a cold morning sky, replaced the vaulted ceiling of the den as if in a dream. The walls of a castle ruin surrounded Rimenda and Merigall, as well as a handful of armored orcs. None of them seemed to have noticed their guests, however, but leaned against their spears, obviously bored after a long night's watch. Someone snored audibly where he stood, while a yellow-eyed giant hummed a hunting tune and clicked the beat with his lips. The Raven Sister saw several orcs sleeping around the embers of a fire that must have roared high during the hours of the night.

"We are located in the remains of the castle Eye of the Rose, where Emperor Hroka, the first and the greatest, holds court," Merigall announced formally.

"Eye of the Rose? Are you implying that these orcs appreciate the fragrance of flowers? Every orc I've met so far has preferred its own bodily odors." Rimenda's words were calm, even if her expression had the look of surprise on her face.

"The castle received its name a long time ago when the Meromannian Dwarves built it as a gift of friendship for the elves," the demon answered. "I have brought you here to witness how beautifully respect can be preserved across

the boundaries of kin."

As if summoned on cue, a human walked through the group of brutish warriors, a lanky man, dressed in an exorbitant number of trinkets on top of his filthy rags and with a superior demeanor. The orcs grunted in greeting without the slightest show of pride, even continuing to rummage around inside their nasal cavities and scratch at their minge as he passed. Merigall led Rimenda in the man's wake to an inner courtyard, across which coarse fabric had been hoisted as a canopy. Emperor Hroka himself sat on a throne, dressed in clothes that most likely would have been worn by children or women among humans, although in this case tailored in grotesque sizes. The orc ruler snapped a marrowbone with his teeth and loudly slurped its contents for breakfast.

"Your Majesty," the visitor said and bowed with large, exaggerated gestures. "The Canidian messenger still awaits an audience."

"You can see that I'm eating," the orc muttered. "The midget can wait."

"The dwarf has been waiting all night, Your Majesty."

"Don't you think I've been up all night as well?" the regent roared, menacingly waving a thigh bone about before breaking it off against the log table.

"If I may make a suggestion, Your Highness?" the man interjected with an unpleasant smile.

"What?"

"The dwarf claims to be a blacksmith by profession. He appears old and weak, but in all likelihood, he possesses valuable knowledge. Why not ask him to teach our own smiths for a time, as a show of good faith from his kin?"



"Agreed! As long as I don't have to see him before I've gotten some sleep."

"A delegation from the human settlement of Karalend is rumored to also be heading this way," the man added. "If it amuses Your Majesty, we could let the two ambassadors battle each other when they are both in attendance to see who represents a kin worthy of Your Majesty's ear."

"Hrang Gala, you are as flimsy as catgut and ugly as few, but you have your moments!" the emperor grinned, and threw the empty bone shaft over his shoulder to a couple of waiting dogs who instantly flew at each other over the scraps. "So, pack yourself away from here and put the midget to work! We'll speak again this evening."

"At once, Your Majesty," the man answered with another bow, turned on his heel and left the area in such a manner that he passed between Rimenda and Merigall without seeing them.

"It seems we won't be seeing any respect across the boundaries of kin this day," the Raven Sister noted.

"Let us journey on instead," the demon answered in a huff and pulled the woman towards it.

"Is this incessant kissing really necessary?" she queried coldly. "Your mouth is certainly beautiful, but it is already bitter as bile to the palate."

"Technically, they aren't a necessity," Merigall confessed. "We need only touch one another to travel, but I happen to like kisses."

"Then you will receive my touch," Rimenda said and gave the demon a slap so loud that the emperor raised an eyebrow as the visitors faded from the Eye of the Rose castle.

Through the morning Merigall led the Raven Sister across the Forbidden Lands in pursuit of the kindness that would grant the woman faith in life once more. They visited negotiations being grunted between goblins and reptile folk on a barge in the fetid Gargan Marshes, walked among growth warpers in the alleyways of Alderstone and saw ogres set fire to a deer just to bet on how far it would get before succumbing to the flames. By noon, it seemed to Merigall as if even the winds howled in opposition no matter where they set their sights. The druids of the elfin tribals nurtured the wildlife in the forests of the Shroud by attracting fox cubs through magic and then snapping their necks to cull this year's rich litter. The wolfkin trapped live rabbits and broke a single hind leg on each one to let the young practice their hunting skills. Everywhere blood ran in garish streams to the screams and wails of the ones being emptied. When the afternoon sun hung lethargic above the mountains beyond Vivend, the demon was in a very foul mood. Rimenda, for her part, opined that Merigall had lost the bet and that before darkness fell it should bring her back to the holdfast in Vond or drop her off at Karnevera, the village of her birth, where she intended to find her uncle among the Reapenters and gain entry to the murderous fellowship of the Blackwings.

"Let us visit one last location. If we do not find mercy there, I will do as you wish," the guide answered, and the yellow eyes glistened when it grabbed the Raven Sister's hand so firmly that her fingers faded instantaneously. After a short bout of vertigo, the grey haze in front of Rimenda's eyes coalesced into stone. She found them to be standing in a ravine below a gigantic bulwark. With difficulty the



sunlight fell betwixt the mountain walls, down a slope littered with bones. A vulture with golden eyes screeched from its perch, furious at being disturbed in its feast.

"Where have you brought us now? Rimenda demanded. "Is there really room for mercy in such a dismal place?"

"We are at the end of the world", the demon answered and glanced at the Raven Sister with a gaze as tender as it was expectant.

"Haven't the dwarves constructed the world in the form of a sphere? How is it possible for a sphere to end?"

"This is just where the Forbidden Lands end, but also where your world ends," Merigall explained.

"Are you saying that we stand before the bulwark of the Iron Lock?" the woman whispered, having heard of the place but still unable to grasp it.

She raised her hand to shade the merlons and the bright sky above at the same time as a hissing sound gave birth to an arrow. It pierced her palm and nailed the fingers against her shoulder, where they twitched like the legs of a dying spider. Surprise preceded the pain that didn't have time to arrive before another arrow from the mute soldiers on the crenellation split the right side of the Raven Sister's chest with a weight that threw her to the ground. Merigall caught the woman as she fell and held her gently in its arms, as if shielding a child.

Additional arrows from the guardians struck the demon's back, but mog suffered no injuries from arrowheads.

Merigall let the shafts remain, focusing its amber gaze on the faltering light of the woman's soul.

MERIGALL



"Only evil. You lose ... our bet," she sputtered. Blood trickled from the corner of her mouth.

"No," Merigall answered, "here is my mercy: you escape being devoured by Krasylla as you were destined to. Now fight to your death as per our agreement!"

Rimenda's mouth moved a couple of instants yet, but red foam forced its way out instead of words.

Merigall couldn't tell if the Raven Sister wanted to thank or curse her guide.

The suspense was titillating.



INTRODUCTION

The Stillmist breathed and beckoned behind Kalman Rodenfell. Yet other matters held him back.

“The Whisperer has opened a boil in Vond. The infection spreads, but our ancestors can heal the land. Forget your conflicts and your discord. Find those who seek life among all kin and search for the ancients!”

The elf regarded the motley crowd before him with some concern.



Welcome to the Raven's Purge campaign for Forbidden Lands.

The Raven has every reason to purge the Forbidden Lands. The land that the Raven God allowed men to share with dwarves, elves and other kin for hundreds of years in ancient times has been ravaged by war and also invaded by otherworldly demons. Most of the inhabitants of the Forbidden Lands believe the humans and their sorcerous offspring with elves to be the cause of their current misery, a belief that has sown distrust and hatred among the kin. Now, when the Blood Mist has lifted, the time has come to purge the land – or to decisively claim it for their own.

The legend tells of how six elves in ancient times oversaw and protected life on the

stone orb that the dwarves had built for the god Huge. Even before the humans came to Ravenland, the elves deemed that the creation was complete and withdrew so as not to disturb it. They shed their flesh and had their six rubies set into the crown Stanengist, which is said to have been worn by the first kings of the land. During the wars, several elf stones were stolen from the crown, however, and later it disappeared completely.

Now that the Forbidden Lands are accessible once again, the legend of Stanengist has begun to stir. The power, knowledge and value of the elven crown is the key to the Forbidden Lands, be it to save the land or to assume control over it.



OVERVIEW

Raven's Purge is an extensive campaign and lacks a linear plot, but is still not particularly difficult to run. This campaign is a smorgasbord of factions, locations and events that you can weave into your campaign in Forbidden Lands. Below is a summary of the contents of the book:

THE ELVEN CROWN STANENGIST

The next chapter deals with the crown, Stanengist, and the three other powerful artifacts set with elven rubies. Their history and their abilities are described in detail, as well as offering suggestions on where they can be found.

KEY PLAYERS

Next is a description of all the key players who in one way or another seek Stanengist or who in other ways seek to alter the balance of power in the Forbidden Lands. These key players all have their own agendas and will act to reach their goals during the course of the campaign.

ADVENTURE SITES

Following that are eight complete adventure sites, described according to the same format as the three in the *Gamemaster's Guide*. These adventure sites are in one way or another connected to the legend of Stanengist or the key players of the campaign, but they can be played in any order you choose.

Note that two of the adventure sites in the *Gamemaster's Guide* – Weatherstone and Vale of the Dead – also are connected to *Raven's Purge*. If you haven't already played these, your campaign may benefit from adding them in to the mix.

THE SHOWDOWN IN VOND

The book concludes with a chapter on the grand campaign finale – the showdown in Vond. Vond is an expanded adventure site which also describes different ways to resolve the struggle over Stanengist. There is no "right" ending to the story – instead, the decisions of the players will determine who falls and who stands vic-

LOCATIONS OF THE ARTIFACTS

Before you begin *Raven's Purge*, it is wise to decide where the Stanengist crown, the Maligarn longsword, the Nekhaka scepter and the Blood Star cloak clasp are located in your own campaign. There are suggestions in the descriptions of each artifact in the next chapter, but there is nothing stopping you from choosing locations as you please. You may have to change these locations during the game, depending on where the adventurers actually go.