

## Chapter 4: Captain of the Vigilance

### Waiting for Repairs:

Needless to say, I was delighted to find myself now not only Captain of a goodly ship, the Vigilant, but also a part owner! This was possible only due to the generous support and financing provided by my good friend Logan. With good fortune, we should be able to all profit greatly from this enterprise. As well, the Vigilance provided a home for any of us, Logan, Nahum, Clethara, Hesia and myself, reducing our needs for expensive lodging ashore. We were bound for new adventures! Necessarily, nautical adventures.

The primary purpose of a ship is to earn money from transporting goods and people. During the month wait for the Vigilance to be made ready, I became acquainted with numerous merchants in Daila, seeking cargos. I also sought a crew, starting with a competent master. Others of our party helped in these matters, and by the time repairs and alterations were completed, we were ready to go.

One of the other events during that month was a summons from the Earl Marak of the Northern Reaches. Both Logan and I were called before him. We went. After all, if we were going to be sailing from Daila, we would need a cordial relationship with the Earl. Earl Marak met us in his drawing room. He was wearing a very nice giant weasel pelt that I thought I recognized from that dwarf adventure. His deputy Miank was present. The Earl stated that he was pleased to have the hulk gone from the harbor; he avoided having to pay to have it towed, and the thing was considered a bringer of ill luck. On the other hand, he didn't like it taking up space now, and wanted us gone as soon as possible. We told him we would be happy to oblige.

We hired a ships master, named Grisham. He seemed competent enough, and was as well a fairly competent fighter. Helpfully, one of his skills was carpentry. In addition, we hired eight seamen and a cook. The master would receive a 5% share of the profits (prior to shares being given to the shareholders), but no less than 100 gold per month while the ship was operating. The crewmen would be paid two gold per month, and the cook three gold per month. I also had to figure financing with a share of the revenue earned going into a maintenance fund and all that. I won't bore you with all of those details. If you want to find those details, look in the Log. It's all there.

It was going to be a month before we'd be able to depart, and in that month my remaining money would not be able to last. I proposed to Clethara that we share a room to save us both expense. She reluctantly agreed, as long as I slept on the floor. It was agreed.

During that month, we managed to sell the silver service from the Vigilance, yielding 120 gold, so that helped our finances a little bit. Eventually as the ship reached completion we were able to move into staterooms there and just come to the inn for meals, saving a bit more. Clethara and I spent a fair amount of time studying the ship logs, revealing some interesting background for the Vigilance.

The previous captain's name was Scrope Blankenshak. The Vigilance originally had a flush deck except for a captain's cabin and poop deck at the rear, and carried five ballistas. Later the ship was modified to what we found. Vigilance also operated with a smaller sloop, "Slipstream," that was lost on the rocks around Dale somewhere.

Also during that month, Stark showed up looking for a position as Navigator. Well, we already have that covered (by both Grisham and I). Too bad he wasn't along on the salvage of

the vessel. I told him that he's welcome to come on adventures, but I can't afford to hire a navigator.

Dendrum also came by Daila during our wait. He had been in Kimbombo. I inquired about trade from that city. The place is primarily a trading post with the nomads, some of which have settled down in town. Black dwarves are found in the area too. They produce gems which are traded for stuff like lumber (few trees in the area). Since Kimbombo is well inland, their trade goes through Daila if by sea, primarily lumber imports originating in Tolbi, but not much of that. Dendrum later departed, returning to Kimbombo.

### **Something is Still Mysterious About the Vigilance:**

A week and a half to commissioning, the crewmen were allowed to stay aboard. The remaining work primarily concerned masts and spars; the hull work forward was finished. Grisham stayed aboard as well, sleeping in the wardroom. He came the next day and reported to me that the crew complained of hearing strange noises during the night. Some ill spirit seemed to be present.

I suppose I had dismissed the "ghost ship" curse idea too easily. This needed investigation. I asked Hesia to help, and he brought with him a "Sister Sue" from the Daila church. During the next night, she would stay in Logan's room.

Now, I hadn't met Sister Sue before. You might think about female clerics being frumpy and ordinary. Not Sister Sue. She was a beauty, enough to lead a man's heart to sin, and she knew it, too. While her costume may have met certain minimum decency requirements, she exploited every loophole, or more, to present herself as attractively as possible, and succeeded in that endeavor. Her voice was smooth as silk, and, well, he had potential to be a distraction. But, Hesia vowed that she was skilled, and could help us. With the mystery and odd noises of the "ghost ship," I mean.

My quarters were incomplete so I joined Grisham in the wardroom. Clethara and Hesia stayed in their own quarters, and Stark stayed in the crew quarters. While we were waiting for nightfall, I made a point of procuring a ship's cat. The dockmaster got one from the stables, white with black spots, named Deefour. Deefour was given free run of the ship and instructed to institute a rat patrol. (I think Deefour was intending to do that anyway.) Not long after I also hired a cabin boy, Shrunken, of about 9 years of age.

That night we stayed, well, vigilant. Most of us did. Stark started singing. Grisham marched forward and gave him instructions to quiet down, "Shut up!" Stark didn't. Grisham cut loose one end of his hammock with a knife, dumping Stark onto the floor. Stark resumed singing, as Grisham disgustedly returned aft. (In hindsight, I think Stark may have been invoking a "wake the dead" spell.)

Sister Sue cast a "detect magic" spell and thought she could sense something. Hesia tried a "detect evil" and got nothing. Stark, who had come aft to the wardroom to further serenade Grisham, took a moment from that torment to try "detect evil" himself, also detected nothing. Sister Sue, though, was sure she had sensed something. She and Hesia, he sensing evil (none) and she sensing magic, worked their way forward and asked to enter the hold. There were ladders and scaffolding there from the construction, so they went down, followed by Stark and I. "Getting closer!" Sister Sue said, approaching the mainmast (where it was stepped on the keep). Hesia cast a "protect from evil" and I did a "shield". But, nothing else happened. We ultimately returned to where each of us was spending the night.

We then heard some creaking at the stern. We returned to the hold, and I checked the ship structures there without finding anything. Sister Sue said that the sense of magic was now stronger there near the stern. After failing to discover anything, we each went back to our own bed again. Well, that's what we were about to do, but Sister sue decided to stay there in the hold. She seemed to be ready to draw her shortsword and hammer at a moment's notice. I stayed with her. Hesia and Stark went back up.

So, the two of us waited there in the dark in the hold. I told Sister Sue about what we had found, the skeletons and the chained skeleton and all the rats. Sister Sue dismissed all that; she said whatever it was, it wasn't a spirit that died on the ship. She continually faced about, this way and that, and finally came to focus on the base of the mainmast. She thought something was there. I checked it as best as I could. No, there wasn't any sort of secret door or anything. The mast did ring a bit as if hollow. That would make sense though; masts and spars are sometimes hollow to reduce weight while retaining strength.

Curiously enough, the mainmast was still the original spar from when we had claimed the ship. The mizzenmast had to be entirely replaced. The foremast had lost its top and was removed as part of the repairs. The mainmast had not been moved. Sister Sue was sure that whatever the effect was she was detecting was emanating from that area. There wasn't any more we could do. We returned to the main deck and each retired to the previously mentioned sleeping spaces.

Morning came. Both Hesia and Sister Sue reported feeling queezy, as if seasick. I couldn't imagine what that was about, tied up firmly to the pier. I arranged with the shipwright to have the mainmast raised. It didn't need to be completely removed, only raised from its step several feet. He didn't see the point, but agreed at a cost of 20 gold extra expense. Under the mast, we found a gold piece, and a shell. I asked Stark to go find and bring Sister Sue. Logan examined the shell and tried blowing into it. I looked at the base of the mast. Sure enough, it was hollow, and there was a small "door" into the mast that I had not been able to see before.

What to make of this? I didn't know. Logan pulled out another gold piece to place under the mast when it was replaced. While we waited for Sister Sue, we took a look at the other masts without finding anything odd or similar. (You'll recall both had been moved earlier anyway, presumably with nothing special found.)

Eventually Sister Sue came, and examined the coin. She remarked that it was heavier than a normal gold coin. (Maybe it contained actual gold?) She detected magic on it. Sister Sue thought to take both the shell and coin to the church, but then decided to leave the coin with me and took only the shell to the church.

### **The Spirit of Scrope Blankenshak:**

We spent another night on the ship. This time Logan camped in the hold. My cabin was mostly complete so I stayed there, and Sister Sue in Logan's owner's cabin below me. Late during the night, I opened the secret trap door from my cabin down to Sister Sue's and started to climb down. She was about to send me scurrying back up but then she sensed something, from there at the stern, from down below. We used the secret trapdoor from Logan's cabin to the hold. We came down in the stern near the rudderpost.

"I feel cold," Sister Sue stated. I knew she wasn't looking for warmth, but sensed something like undead. Logan and Stark joined us from farther forward in the hold. Our cat Defour started to follow them, but then shied away.

Hmm, what was up with the cat? I picked the animal up, but he struggled and I finally let him go.

“It’s moving” Sister Sue announced. She followed the cold sense to the base of the mainmast, which still remained suspended above its step.

I was baffled. We had removed the shell, and we had removed the gold piece.

Sister Sue wasn’t sure what was going on either. “It wants to find some similar sort of spirit,” she stated. What did that mean? I didn’t know. There was nothing more to do. We all went back to our stations.

In the morning, Sister Sue went to bring Brother Bartholomew down to consider the situation. He didn’t have much of an answer either.

I did have an idea. What I needed was an identify spell. The magic shop owner happened to have one for sale. I had to borrow from Logan to buy it, but that’s what I did. We needed to solve this problem. Logan bought the pearl I’d need for the spell. (You gotta like Logan. While he was there he paid 75 gold for a mattress stuffed with cockatrice feathers for his stateroom! How’s that for living in style?)

I spent the day on learning the identify spell and copying it into my spellbook. Then, after taking time to memorize it, I cast the spell on the shell. Aha! The shell harbored the spirit of the old captain, Scrope Blankenshak!

That night, we prepared for another round of mysterious happenings. A bit after sundown we all mustered in the main hold near the mainmast. Sister Sue detected a sense of cold, and cast her “detect magic.” Yep. Something was happening.

I called out, “Captain Scrope Blankenshak, I ask that you come visit us.”

Immediately, we all heard a “thump” from the back near the stern of the ship. We all went to look. There on the planks over the bilge was a small box, charred as if recently burned. I picked it up and passed it to Father Bartholomew. He took it, but then set it down again where it had been before I picked it up. Then he backed away.

“I wouldn’t touch that box,” he said. Obviously ignoring the fact that he had just done so.

“Shouldn’t we open it?” I asked.

He replied, “All my teachings say, ‘Don’t touch the box!’”

Logan asked, “Scrope Blankenshak, knock if you are here.”

Stark began a detect evil spell. Hesia too, and then, his eyes widening, he said, “Don’t open it!”

I asked Brother Bartholomew, “What should we do?”

“Take it to the church,” he replied. He then took out holy water and did some sort of bless on the object. Or a protect maybe. That would have made more sense.

Brother Bartholomew picked up the box with a piece of fabric, and started off for the church, followed by Sister Sue, Logan and I. Bishop Bishington was roused and brought out to see the box. He did something, probably some further sort of protection, then opened the box. (I cast a shield hastily, just in case!) The other clerics were doing protections from evil.

Inside the box were burned pages. Well, the edges were burned. Were these pages the same size as those in the log? Yes. I could see the writing. They were in a different hand.

The bishop stood there speechless for a few moments. Finally, he explained, “Most likely, the ship discovered something. A spell was cast on it. And the shell put in the mast. Discovered that shell?”

Logan asked, “And the words on the papers?”

“I suggest you not read those words!” the bishop said with emphasis.

“I’d like to talk to Scrope Blankenshak,” Logan said.

“The pages need to be destroyed,” stated the Bishop, ignoring Logan’s request.

“There’s the presence, here,” Sister Sue said.

“I have to agree with the bishop,” Clethara said.

I accepted that, and I guess Logan did too. The bishop ritually burned the pages.

“Can I keep the box?” I asked.

“It’s just an ordinary box,” the Bishop stated. “Yes, of course.”

We kept the box and the shell. The shell seemed lighter, perhaps now relieved of Captain Scrope Blankenshak’s spirit, though I can’t explain how a spirit would have made it heavier. We didn’t have any more of the mysterious happenings or magic effects after that. Brother Hesia explained that the former captain’s spirit had been released. I suppose that was a good thing. It certainly made keeping a crew aboard the ship more likely!

All that delayed things a bit. But soon we were ready to put the Vigilance into commission for a new life.

### **Maiden Voyage:**

For our initial voyage, we took on a cargo of stone ashlar from Kalay that would earn 250 gold, and a cargo of tobacco that would pay 550 gold, both for delivery to Tolbi. This was an excellent opportunity for a couple of reasons. First, the anticipated gross payment of 800 gold was good money. Second, the trip would take us around Lumeria to the west rather than the east, as a trip to Madra would. You may recall that a war with Oceana was going on, though no action had reached this corner of the kingdom. Peril from Oceana vessels would likely be much more of a hazard to the east. Going West we would not have to double the Injuma Peninsula into a northern wind. Finally, you may recall that I had no particular desire to go to Madra anyway.

Stark decided to come along, and Hesia decided not to, so Stark occupied Brother Hesia’s stateroom. Logan, Nahum, and Clethara all came on this, our maiden voyage. We sailed out of Daila under a southerly wind, but after we cleared the Northwest Cape, we picked up a northerly wind and made Tolbi handily with just three days of sailing, with no complications at all. The ashlar and tobacco was delivered, with the merchants responsible for unloading.

A distribution of pay and profits was made so that the crew, and the rest of us, had some money in our pockets with which to enjoy Tolbi. Not that Tolbi is as exciting to visit as Madra for a seaman with some money. It’s the closest port to Lunpal woods, and so is a transshipment point for timber. Good stone is harder to find around Tolbi and Dale, hence the shipment from Kalay. In the couple of days that we were in port, I found a shipment of general goods to Daila. It was far from the capacity of the hold, so I purchased 35 gold pieces worth of fine wood (furniture grade) in Tolbi on speculation from the ship’s fund to sell in Daila. We also took on a passenger, our first, a man named Okran. As a first-class passenger, he took Brother Hesia’s stateroom. We also found Lickben wanting passage back to Daila, and welcomed him (as well as Stark) to travel with us at no charge in consideration for past association, though without assigned quarters.

On our return trip to Daila, we came upon a naval vessel named Alliance that was hove to in sinking condition after a fight with a squadron of Ocienan vessels, then suffered through a storm. We rendered assistance, but Alliance was ultimately consigned to the deep. We gave Captain Sarka and his crew, a total of 28 of them, passage. This gave us quite a crowd, and we

did have to use space in the mostly-empty hold. Captain Sarka wouldn't tell me anything more about the war, the threat from the enemy, or any other such information I hoped he'd share.

The remainder of the trip to Daila was uneventful, and we landed the survivors from Alliance and the cargo of general goods. One of the first things I did when we landed was to pay a call on Admiral Costanza, the local naval commander. Actually, someone was waiting for us to demand that visit, to the admiral on his flagship Justinian. I told him of the Alliance encounter. He asked that I remain on hand to be a witness at a court-marshal for Captain Sarka of Alliance. Of course, I agreed. I understood this was necessary, but it had appeared to me that Captain Sarka had done all within his power to save his ship. The several day delay wasn't a problem since, as it happened, no good cargoes were available in Daila at the time.

The fine wood was sold for a profit of 25 gold, a bit of extra revenue from a rather low paying trip. Pay was distributed, leave to crew members was granted, since we would be in port for a week anyway. I started looking for cargoes. Meanwhile, I had the shipwright make some modifications to the vessel to provide for a more adequate galley forward.

We had made a successful and profitable round trip to the far end of Lumeria, and we all had a right to be pleased. On the other hand, it was clear that there were perils of war, as seen in the case of Alliance. That ship, with almost 30 in the crew, had a difficult fight. Apparently quite a few merchant vessels, as well as naval sorts, sport catapults. I hoped that our trim lines, good sailing characteristics, and lesser burden, would give us the speed needed to evade enemies should we encounter hostile ships.

Crew hired (Logan): Ship master, cook (0 lev) 3gp/mo ,  
8 crewmen (0 lev) at 2gp/mo

Gresham (master) F2 S15,I12,W11,D10,C12,Ch10, armed with cutlass

Proficiencies: swimming, rope use, seamanship, navigation, carpentry, fishing

Pay: 100gp / mo + 5% of profit

Expected monthly expenses: about 300gp / month (?) + 5% profit to Gresham

Cargo for first voyage: Tobacco (550gp), Stone (250gp) for Tolbi

Cargo for 2<sup>nd</sup> voyage: General goods 230gp. Passenger Okran 15gp, wood (speculation) +25gp

Thumper: +246xp.

## Further Travels:

I turned down a cargo of 200 filthy sheep (to avoid the mess!), and Grisham recommended I turn down a cargo of Daila ale to Tolbi. He said spies would learn of it, and that would make Vigilance a particular target. Eventually a cargo of fine old wine for Tolbi offered 525 gold payment on delivery, careful handling required. That was worth taking! I don't know why that wouldn't also attract attention, but it certainly pays better!

Nahum decided to do other things, so of our adventuring party Logan, Clethara and I remained. Stark came too, again occupying Hesia's stateroom. Clethara had become interested in navigation and sailing skills, so I started giving her training in those arts. Having another skilled potential captain would be very helpful!

Logan, Gresham and I talked about tactics. We were in peril of encounters with enemy or pirate vessels. We had a small crew, and no ballista. What I could do (and Clethara too) is cast effective "sleep" spells, but we'd have to be at very close range for that. So, if we couldn't avoid an encounter, we'd want to let the enemy close to grappling range then hit them with sleep. And then Logan. Logan did try to find a couple of crossbowmen that we could add to the crew, but was unsuccessful. Grisham seemed to know a lot about pirates. He said that the one we needed to worry about was "Briggs," who is being paid by Ociena. Mikisalla, and Ociena port well south of Tolbi, is a pirate haven.

It didn't seem that we would have an eventful trip. As we neared Southwest cape, we passed another vessel, "Flame", hove to for no obvious reason. We offered help but were told that none was needed. That night, it seemed that a ship astern was following us. In the morning, it was obvious that "Flame" was in pursuit! We made port in Tolbi with Flame not gaining significantly, and that ship bore off and did not enter the harbor right away, but came in that afternoon. By that time, we had unloaded the wine. Pelyou, the merchant taking delivery, was very anxious about it and was in a hurry to get it away from the waterfront. (He gave us three bottles. One I passed to the crew, and one was set aside for the evening meal in the wardroom.

Needless to say, I was very, very curious about this other vessel Flame. Why were they hove to? Why were they pursuing us? Why did they delay to enter harbor? There could, of course, be innocent explanations. What sailing master does not want to see how well his ship sails against another? But, in the midst of a war, I had to be concerned. The fact that Flame came on into Tolbi told me that she was not an Ociena naval vessel. But, what was she? A pirate vessel hoping to capture our shipment of wine?

No approach like a direct approach! Logan and I walked over to where Flame was berthed to pay a call on the captain. I took the third bottle of wine as a gift. The captain's name was Akee. He didn't seem to have much he wanted to say. I asked if he'd had trouble with pirates, and he said they were only a problem for "smaller vessels". I never did give him the wine. I also tried to pay a call to the Lydia, the Tolbi guard vessel that had come out to meet Vigilance and then Flame as they approached the port. The captain was unavailable, "indisposed," though. I did note that there was a ram equipped galley in the harbor. Logan and I finally returned to our ship.

It seemed that we might be in Tolbi for a while. No cargoes were found. After arranging to stay in port for a week and granting leave, Logan, Stark and I traveled to Dale to see if we might find cargoes there. On the way, we had a fight with a bunch of orcs. (Maybe we should have gone as a larger party!) When they started firing crossbows from the woods, we ran, and soon outdistanced them. Then we set up an ambush. As a score of them ran along the road

looking to attack us, I cast a couple of sleeps, and Logan jumped out and went to work. Have you ever seen Logan in action? Neither had the orcs. They should have run first. As he was mowing down those still awake, and a bunch that came up later, Stark and I killed the sleepers. By the time Logan ran out of orcs to kill there were something like 30 dead orcs.

We took the time to loot them. These orcs had some broadswords and crossbows that were worth collecting to sell, as well as pretty decent coins and even a few small gems. By the time we sold the weapons in Dale, I had 39 gold, a gem worth 10g, and a smattering of gold and silver coins. I could finally pay back Logan the rest of the debt that I owed him. He, in turn, invested in a nice suit of +1 magic leather armor.

That night he happened upon our friends Crakum, Lifaen, and Chaklow from the Dekatur Plateau adventure. They were in company with a Halfling. Was that Gatler? Yes! I hadn't recognized him at first. We shared an enjoyable evening in the tavern talking about Dekatur Plateau, its endless supply of kobolds, and their equally endless supply of almost worthless copper pieces.

It seems Crackum has taken up blacksmithing here in Dale. In the morning, he showed us around his forge. It turns out he's not just a blacksmith, but a weaponsmith. He showed me a very nice cutlass he had crafted, very nice indeed. I asked what he was asking for it, and he offered it to me at 20 gold, plus my old sword. I jumped at that opportunity like a rabbit! After all, it is fitting that a captain of a ship should have a fine cutlass. (Maybe I could even learn to wield it well.) I also offered him free passage to wherever he might want to go.

On the other hand, I found no cargoes at all in Dale. So, we didn't linger long, and set out for Tolbi later in the morning. We met nothing other than some pilgrims that day and camped peacefully that night.

As we got to the last bridge to be crossed on the way to Tolbi, we were accosted by a big beefy guy named "Big Jake" who required a toll payment. He hadn't been there going the other way.

I asked, "Jake, did you just take possession of this bridge a few days ago?" Then I offered 82 copper pieces to let us all pass.

Logan, I think it was, asked if he worked for the king.

"Yes," he answered.

When I offered to throw in two more copper pieces, he accepted that, and we passed safely over "Big Jake's Bridge."

Back in Daila, Logan recruited two crossbowmen, Kredo and Temek. One was already skilled with the heavy crossbow. The other was skilled with the light crossbow, but was willing to learn the heavy weapon as well. So, that filled the two empty bunks remaining in the crew's quarters forward.

Our biggest problem was the lack of cargo. There was still no outbound cargo to be had in Tolbi. So, somewhat in desperation, I purchased 120 gold pieces' worth of fine wood and another 30 of ordinary timber on speculation. We would return to Daila, rather light in the water, but hopefully with at least some revenue to cover costs on the return.

When we departed Tolbi, Lifaen and Crackum sailed with us. They had come to Tolbi a day later. Brother Hessia and Nahum were not aboard, so they enjoyed those staterooms.

The wind being from the southwest, we had to tack frequently to claw our way up enough to eventually round Southwest Cape. That was an opportunity for Clethara to practice her sailing skills, and the crew was well exercised. Eventually a ship was sighted ahead. I went up to the crow's nest to use my spyglass. Wouldn't you know it, it was the Flame. They were either

anchored or hove to. I called for a tack toward open water, and before the fog set in sighted a sail toward where the Flame might be.

The wind slacked off and circled south. We ran north staying well out from the coast where the fog bank lingered. Occasionally we saw lights due East. That had to be the Flame, following us on a parallel course. Was this a race to Daila? Daylight answered the question. Yes. He was either going to Daila or to wherever we might be.

As it happened, the wind had shifted more toward the west, so we had the weather gauge. But then the wind started to fail. We had managed to trade heading for speed and gradually pulled ahead, leading by a mile or so, and eventually we led by about two miles with Flame dead astern. We were approaching Northwest Point as the wind continued to veer. By this time, I was more than certain Flame was deliberately seeking to attack us. We all had our weapons prepared. But Vigilance was faster, and were gradually pulling away. On my orders, the cook emptied the garbage off the stern for the Flame to pass through.

We fell off to the East as the wind continued around, and found ourselves heading directly towards Daila, with Flame continuing in futile pursuit, perhaps a tad faster on this point of sail. When it became clear that we would reach Daila well ahead, Flame slacked her sails and gave up the chase. I called, as best I could, "Do you need help?"

Flame's captain was downwind, and apparently heard, giving some sort of rude reply, which Logan answered in kind. We all whooped it up a bit as we headed on into port. I congratulated the crew on their fine sailing. I also gave thanks for the fine sailing qualities of Vigilance herself.

Maybe this is the right place to mention a few things about Flame. The ship clearly had a much larger crew than we did, many more than a merchantman would need. They also had at least one ballista that had been covered, but they were preparing, in case they might close within range. Thankfully that didn't happen. Why were they chasing us? We were no longer carrying wine. Indeed, I had no cargo at all except for the wood purchased on speculation. Why would that be worth seizing? Was it the Vigilance itself they wanted? Were they personally hostile to either Logan or myself? I could think of no reason why. It's not like there were dwarves in the crew that would be out to get Logan, and I didn't think I had made any particular enemies. I didn't have any answers, and neither did anyone else.

Sale of the wood brought 315 gold (250 for the fine wood, 65 for the lumber). That was a nice net of 165 gold, not enough for all expenses, but enough to, with the wine cargo profits, make the trip to Tolbi at least somewhat profitable.

Thumper: +112xp = 3387 (Thumper is 2<sup>nd</sup> level.)

## **A Detour to the Mountains:**

You have by now seen the outline of what it means to be a merchantman carrying cargos back and forth. I'll be briefer on the dull parts. Our next commission was a consignment of stone to Tolbi. Interestingly, we had three passengers, all dwarves, named Baneful, Lori, and Thori. They were an interesting lot. They tended to drink and sing together and tell stories among themselves (in dwarvish) about some long-lost home in the mountains. Logan didn't make this trip with us, so the three of them used his cabin. I also hired on an experienced crossbowman named Kleg for the journey, just in case we met Flame again. We didn't.

When we first got to Tolbi there was no obvious cargo needing transport right away. Word got out that three dwarves were looking for "help". We investigated. It was "our" dwarves, Baneful, Lori, and Thori. They were wanting to visit the old home place they had been singing about. The place supposedly had not been visited for 300 years since some unspoken terror appeared there. Hmmmm. This would have been a good time to have Logan with us. But, we did have a party, and remarkably enough, Hesia was in town and agreed to go with us, as well as Stark, Kreg, and a dwarf named Fori. That was seven of us. Surely we could handle some random unspoken terror. (That was supposed to be funny.) Clethara chose to stay with the Vigilance to represent the ownership since I would be away, and seek for cargos.

It took a few days to travel north past Lunpul. The dwarves would here and there notice small signs carved into rocks that they took as directions. I wouldn't have noticed. The signs looked a bit like flowers. Eventually we reached the Equatorial Range of mountains, and we ascended a winding but not particularly steep path. In time, we came to a completely blank stone wall, a cliff really, where the mountains rose ahead of us pretty much vertically.

Baneful knew there was a door there. He uttered some sort of chant and felt around. Sure enough, a door appeared, on it that same flower symbol. There was a keyhole in the middle of the flower, and Baneful happened to have the key. Double doors, about 10 feet wide altogether, opened inward.

Just past the door were steps ascending, also about 10 feet wide. I carried a torch for Kleg so that he would have some light; the dwarves didn't seem to need illumination. After we had gone in about twenty feet, the steps ended and 10 feet further there was a room. I thought I heard something stirring up ahead. Monsters? A voice from ahead of us shouted, in dwarvish, "Get Out!"

Baneful stopped. He called out, "We will not! Declare yourselves!"

The voice replied, "We are dwarves who reside here. You?"

Baneful then answered, "We Reclaim for the Order."

"We don't recognize any Order." This was followed by a crossbow bolt flying out of the darkness ahead, which hit Baneful.

Uh oh. It looked like a fight. I cast a "shield" spell. Baneful then, to my surprise, cast a spell himself: a command "Drop!" I heard a clatter. Baneful ordered Lori and Fori forward. Kleg moved forward with those dwarves as well, and the rest of us followed. Two more bolts were fired but missed. As Lori and Fori got to the top of the stairs, there were the three hostile dwarves.

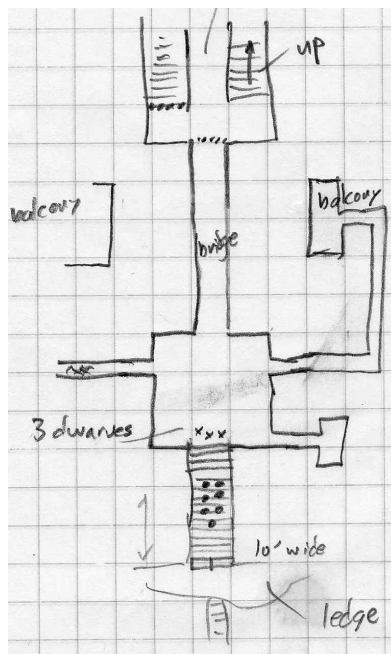
"Surrender, or Else!" commanded Baneful.

They didn't. Kleg shot one, which went down, Baneful hit the mouthy one and hurt him badly, and Lori took out the last one. The one still up, the leader it seemed, dropped his crossbow and surrendered. Baneful took his weapons, and Thori, I think it was, tied him up.

Baneful had the leader take us to where the three of them had been staying in a nearby room. I gave some first aid to one of the other two and Hesia did some healing. Baneful interrogated them all. It seems they had been living here four years as renegades. They were fighters by training. I noticed they had shield devices similar to, but not identical with, the black dwarves from around Daila. The three of them reported that orcs and goblins were living in the dungeon “higher up.” This level was about in the middle. Originally there had been six of them. Finally Baneful asked, “Would you join Baneful?”

I don’t know what the consequences of saying “No” would have been. They said “Yes.”

Baneful then announced, “We will report back to the order, and take these three with us.” However, first we took a look deeper into the dungeons. A walkway led over a bridge to an iron gate barring the way. To either side was something of a balcony. Beneath was a vast pit; I don’t know how deep. Beyond the gate the corridor seemed to go straight a bit, then up steps.



Dwarf Hold in Mountains

Rather than attempt to do more at the time, we rested for the night. The renegade dwarves seemed content, and were happy to partake of the abundant rations. The next morning, we went to the gate and opened it. There was a brief fight with a goblin. But, then Baneful decided not to press further in for some reason. Instead, we all retreated back out the big stone doors in the side of the mountain and down to Lunpul.

Lunpul seems to be a lawless town recently taken over by bandits. The dwarves seemed not to be bothered by this. But the rest of us felt uncomfortable, to say the least. We were lucky. There was a party of about a dozen religious pilgrims in Lunpul, and they were just leaving for Tolbi. Kreg, Stark and I joined them for the journey and eventually got back to Tolbi.

### **The End of the Season:**

The trip back from Tolbi was uneventful. For the return to Daila, we carried a cargo of furniture, wood, and a custom-made tapestry for the Earl Markak. That paid well, and we'd now made three successful and profitable round trips to Tolbi.

It was now starting to get colder and the weather more violent. Also, ice would be a hazard in the harbors. It was about time for the sailing season to end. With no good cargos to tempt us into one last trip, it was decided to put the ship up "in ordinary" for the winter. A certain cost would be required, but we had made enough money to cover that. The crew was released on "leave" (unpaid) for the winter, with expectations of reporting in the spring. Temek and Kredo left to do guard work over the winter. Grisham had some sort of work lined up, and so did most of the crewmen. I won't bore you with the financial details. So, for now we would be ship-less, but could look forward to another sailing season several months hence. Those of us who had taken shares in the Vigilance had a worthwhile profit from that initial partial season of operations.

#### Crew of the Vigilance

Grisham, Master pay 100gp / month + 5% share of profit  
F2 Str. 15 Int. 12 Wis. 11 Dex. 10 Con. 12 Cha. 10 14hp Cutlass (dsp)  
Swimming, Rope Use, Seamanship, Navigation, Carpentry, Fishing

Brack: S17 I15 W11 D9 CO11 CH 7 (Carpentry) 2gp/mo

Vinkant: S14 I11 W12 D11 CO14 CH8 2gp/mo

Lydian: S12 I15 W11 D11 CO11 CH8 2gp/mo

Gerarn: S7 I14 W12 D18 CO11 CH11 2gp/mo

Tarn: S14 I13 W10 D15 CO7 CH10 2gp/mo

Bolton: S9 I13 W18 D13 CO10 CH13 (Carpentry) 2gp/mo

Husher: S14 I9 W14 D14 CO12 CH11 2gp/mo

Polweal: S14 I13 W12 D16 CO14 CH15 (Cook) 3gp/mo

#### Crossbowmen:

Kredro F3 S16 I13 W14 D16 C11 Ch9 19hp leather+sh, lsword, hyxbow(dsp)

Direction sense, hunting, weather sense, rope use 20gp/mo

Temek F2 S16 I12 W12 D16 C15 Ch12 17hp leather+sh, lsword, lt xbow(sp), hy xbow

Riding, Running, Cooking 20gp/mo

Cabin boy: Shruken: (no stats) 5sp/mo

Ship's cat: Deefour