

ROARSHOCK PAGE

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The winter of 2000 slips into history with the coming of spring. This issue of the **ROARSHOCK PAGE** takes us to a small tavern room in a golden land not so very far away...

IN THE QUARTER GALLON INN

Dornjo of Grantor and Prince Nogust of the Vineyard Valley were seated comfortably in large sturdy chairs behind a round table. There was a pitcher on the table full of a rich red ale and each had a tankard also brimming with ale. They were in a small private parlor adjacent the common room in the Quarter Gallon Inn. From behind the heavy oaken door and walls of darkly polished wood came sounds of merriment as Nogust's guards and the other patrons of the Inn enjoyed their food and wine and beer. Nogust was tall and handsome and of a serious disposition. His hair and beard were black, and matched the garb that he wore. Dornjo was smaller, but powerfully sturdy. His hair and pointed beard, once as dark as Nogust's, were now shot-throw with whiter shades of grey, and his visage was wise and extremely weather-worn. He was dressed for the road. Nogust spoke, his voice deep and melodious: "So, Dornjo, since you intend to press on tomorrow up the Redwood Road, you should know that there have been many problems this year with brigand bands on the road between the Vineyard Valley and the Emerald Land. Out-Castes newly arrived in the Golden Land, but just the sort that we *don't* need: out and out rascals, villains, killers and thieves. According to natives they are coming out of the west, near the land of Albion." "A land that I would *not* believe in," Dornjo interjected, his voice was old as the hills, deep as the mighty ocean, "had I not once visited it myself - as you know - in the company of your father and others: that's over thirty years ago." "I wouldn't believe in it either," Nogust replied, "if any witnesses less credible than my father and you were to affirm its existence." He continued: "The new brigands have been so bold as to attack our own northern marches. This hot dry weather seems to be driving them to extremes of desperation and viciousness. Several remote homesteads have been burned,

the inhabitants murdered, even near here on the very outskirts of Charlsdale. Some two months ago a band of three score ruffians attacked a hamlet in the environs of Clear Lake, inflicting great harm before being driven off. Alas, we captured not a one of them to question. They are mostly white men, evil and crude in appearance, and their language is a heavily slanged form of Drake's Speech. We have greatly strengthened our forces in the north, and all merchants on the Redwood Road are heavily armed. So journey with the greatest caution, Dornjo You won't be safe once you leave the Vineyard Valley." Nogust paused. He and Dornjo each took long pulls from their tankards, and sat for a moment in silent thought, while the cacophony from the boisterous public room continued to seep in through the wall. "This is grim news." Dornjo said. "Indeed, I had heard nothing of these new brigands when I left Grantor in the early spring. I traveled south by the eastern route, along the boundaries of the Weird Land. Your story, Nogust, has heightened my wish to get home quickly. The Redwood Road is the most direct route. I could go east to Big Valley then north, but that would mean going through Shast, which I would rather avoid." Nogust nodded his concurrence. "The tolls the people of Shast charge to cross their lands are outrageously exorbitant." said he. "They charge those tolls under duress." Dornjo replied. "There is a tribe of dark elves that dwell within Shast Mountain who rule the natives thereabouts. I can confirm that old tale. Some years back I deliberately trespassed in Shast to learn the truth, and did. I paid no toll. I'd as soon not pass that way now, not with a heavily laden pony. I believe they are anxious to see me!" He laughed heartily and Nogust also laughed. "No. I'm bound to travel north up the Redwood Road. I will just have to avoid these troublesome bandits." "Well." Nogust stared deeply into his cup, "If anyone can travel safely through, it's you. I fully expect your return soon to visit us at Charlshold... To move the conversation to other matters, Dornjo, you were last night in Drake's Town... Have you any news of the metropolis that my agents may have missed?" "I doubt it." Dornjo answered dryly. "I'm sure you have heard of the recent arrival

there of the Jupiters, Jules and Juliet. That has put fear into some of the more unscrupulous merchants. I was in Mythington some weeks back, from whence the Jupiters hail, days after their departure for the Coast. There was an ugly scramble to fill the void. I got caught in the middle and was thus involved in the outcome. Things had settled down quite a bit by the time I left." "Hmmm, interesting." Nogust mused. "the Jupiters were our best customers in Mythington, moving our goods to the more remote locals south and east. We have already received several - hardly credible - communications from among the remaining merchants, offering to pick up the slack. So we have heard about the move of the Jupiter's to Drake's Town, though they have not yet contacted our representatives there. Jules and Juliet Jupiter truly are ambitious. What other news of Drake's Town?" "Ah." Dornjo quaffed his ale. "The place is as beautiful and wild as ever, full of beautiful women and every conceivable human oddity! You should visit down there some time. Apparently, there have been very few arrivals from parts unknown in recent times, but you know how that goes, "It never rains, but it pours," as they say. Life goes on in Drake's Town. Perhaps it is the calm before a storm. You have heard the stories out of the south?" "Goings on in the Land of the Savages?" Nogust poured more ale into each of their cups. "Yes, I've heard those stories. Many raids on the southern borders of El Dorado, more ferocious than any for hundreds of years, and better organized than ever before. They're having a tough time down there... And those other stories, about a new and powerful chief, one who is unifying many of the tribes. A stranger character by all rumor; there is considerable disagreement and doubt as to whether or not he's human." "Sir Laugh-A-Lot they call him, but they are never laughing." Dornjo spoke with grim humor. "I have heard from certain shaken Southerners - drinking on the Coast to calm their nerves. They were close to the rumors, but none of them had seen him. The name is from his ferocious battle yell." "Anyone who can organize the southern barbarians is no laughing matter at all." Nogust said. "The distance between the Vineyard Valley and the Land of the Savages only seems great. Should El Dorado ever fall... that would open up all of the Golden Land. The Free Trade Towns would be at great risk... we would possibly be threatened." "That's something to think about." Dornjo said, giving Nogust a hard stare from beneath his bushy brows. "You know that I've traveled all over this Golden Land... and, perhaps, beyond its borders..." "Aye!" Nogust nearly shouted. "I've heard you make allusions to such travels before! Now, some details, Dornjo, some details!" Dornjo smiled enigmatically, then continued...

– D. A. Wilson, from a work in progress.

MARCH ALMANAC

- 3/2 1904 Theodore "Dr. Seuss" Geisel was born.
 3/5 1770 The Boston Massacre occurred.
 1982 John Belushi died.
 3/6 1475 Michelangelo was born in Caprese, Italy.
 3/9 1958 Alan K. Lipton was born.
 1836 Fort Alamo in Texas fell to Mexican troops.
 3/10 1862 The first U.S. government paper money was issued into circulation (\$5, \$10 and \$20 bills).
 3/14 1879 Albert Einstein was born in Ulm, Germany.
 3/15 IDES OF MARCH
 44 Julius Caesar was assassinated in Rome.
 1767 Andrew Jackson was born.
 1912 Lightning Hopkins was born.
 1940 Phil Lesh was born.
 3/17 ST. PATRICK'S DAY
 1938 John O. Wilson was born in San Francisco.
 1948 Bruce Henderson was born.
 3/20 SPRING EQUINOX
 3/22 1887 Leonard "Chico" Marx was born.
 1962 Neal Attinson was born.
 3/23 1910 Akira Kurosawa was born.
 3/24 1874 Harry Houdini born in Budapest, Hungary.
 1983 Brenna Rose Wilson was born.
 3/26 1911 Tennessee Williams was born in Mississippi.
 3/28 1905 Marlin Perkins was born.
 1979 Three Mile Island nuclear accident occurred.
 3/30 1853 Vincent Van Gogh was born.
 3/31 1927 Cesar Chavez was born.

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