

Chapter 1: Concerning Sahmonvale and the Fate Thereof

Sahmonvale was not a very nice place.

This may have been for a variety of reasons – first and foremost, its location. It was located on a small peninsula which jutted out like a sore thumb (both metaphorically and literally) into the Sea of Ahntonlea. This simple fact by itself was part of the problem; there was little space, and the village was not permitted to grow very much. Originally, it had been part of an expedition from the government of Illyndusk in 787 G.R. (Galdranian Reckoning), which was considering the idea of colonization. The leader of the expedition was Juin Drebbart, and he was sent to find a place rich in resources that would be a good trade port. He was bored with the journey after several months and, spotting a peninsula, declared in a drunken stupor (the chief item brought with him and his crew on the journey was a strong ale that the Illynduskians had perfected over many centuries) that this was the place and proceeded to fall down after tripping over a rock.

A messenger from his party was sent back to King Allen, the reigning monarch of Illyndusk at the time, who immediately sent a waiting group of settlers to come and set up a village. However, when Juin regained sobriety (a rare occasion), he realized his mistake and that the peninsula was far too small. In an attempt to stop the colonization without King Allen wanting his head, he hired a band of natives to attack the settlers on their path towards the settlement. The natives misunderstood his instructions and ended up stealing a large portion of the supplies and provisions from the oncoming settlers, who later arrived, enraged, at the much too small peninsula.

Fast forward a couple of years, and the village was anything but thriving. Shabbily built from the small supply of wood from a nearby forest, buildings collapsed twice a week or so. Eventually, in a bar one night (Drebbart's first instruction to the settlers was to build a tavern), Juin let slip about his deal with the natives. Early the next morning, at the crack of dawn in fact, he was lynched by a mob of settlers. They then sent his body to the natives as an example: don't mess with the Illynduskians. The native tribe's response was to attack the village immediately.

The war had lasted centuries and was still persisting in 1039 G.R., which is where we meet our protagonist, Kallwyn.

Kallwyn lived with his brother, Ribbon, and his father, whose name was James Jameson VII. This was largely due to the lack of creativity of the settlers, whom the king had selected hundreds of years ago solely because they were the dumbest and he wanted them out. He cut off contact with them about five years after the original settling of the peninsula, and the settlers were too preoccupied with the warring natives to do anything about it. Eventually, Illyndusk was annexed by the Overking of Galdrania, and Sahmonvale was forgotten.

Kallwyn was an apprentice to a blacksmith, who used the meager amounts of metal gathered by the settlers to craft weapons. The blacksmith himself, whose name was Luke Smith, was not very good at the art which he claimed to be (and was accepted as) the expert on; however, Kallwyn showed much more promise and could make weapons and armor of much better quality than Luke had ever produced. Kallwyn, in fact, expected to one day take over the entire trade and turn the tide in the ever-present war with his quality of metalworks.

But all these dreams were cut short one fateful day when the native tribe made an attack, this time joined by a band of ruthless mercenaries who sailed the seas to the west of the peninsula – the kind of people who would do anything for money. They attacked Sahmonvale in exchange for a large amount of gold.

They – the attackers, that is – came in the night, surrounding the peninsula with their boats. The natives cut off the narrow neck of it by land, and first struck with their obsidian-tipped arrows, which, in companion with their deadly aim, pierced the shoddily crafted breastplates of the night-watchmen. Said watchmen stood in poorly erected towers that, under the weight of them falling down dead, started to collapse. They had not yet collapsed – the structure of the towers, however, began to critically fail.

The natives, their first task (removing the enemy guards) accomplished, gave a battle cry and rushed towards what could possibly be called a gate, but would take a lot of imagination to do so. As the mass of attackers crashed against the gate, the towers (and indeed the entire wall structure of the village) collapsed. The noise produced by the battle cry of the attackers and subsequent collapse of the wall had woken the better part of the inhabitants of the village. More importantly, it had woken most of the rather weak village garrison. The garrison in question was put into effect a long time before; in between the time that the king had broken off communication and the first attacks of the natives, somewhere around 788 G.R. It was originally led by a man with no military experience whatsoever, but whose mind was keen and speedily deduced the strategies of the native warriors. He passed his knowledge on to his successor, and so on and so forth. The current commander, whose name will not be given on account of his unimportance, woke the rest of the garrison and rushed to defend against the horde of attackers.

But as they rushed to defend against the natives, the mercenaries attacked from their positions on the shores of the peninsula – which had no walls – and began to attack from behind. The immediately following carnage involved a great many things, too many to mention in full. However, some of the more important events will be mentioned, beginning with the fact that a great many of the village folk were killed. This included Kallwyn's father, among other people.

Secondly, Kallwyn and his brother Ribbon were separated in the chaos and presumably would not see each other again for a great many years. Ribbon escaped by killing a mercenary commander and assuming command of his ship, then turning tail and escaping for an archipelago where he began to raid merchant ships. Kallwyn hid inside the forge, where he had been cleaning late into the night. The forge, conveniently, had a false floor. He ended up not hiding under the false floor, because when the wall collapsed it startled him and he dropped a chunk of iron onto the entrance, which broke apart. He instead resolved to hide behind one of the anvils and threw a tarpaulin over his head to conceal his bright red hair.

Lastly, the garrison was defeated and the mercenaries and natives took the village. Every man, woman, and child was either killed or taken as a slave. Not many slaves were taken.

Interestingly, however, Kallwyn was not taken as a slave, nor killed. He was one of the two people who escaped the peninsula that night. The other person, of course, was his brother Ribbon.

Kallwyn was still hiding behind the anvil, which just so happened to be the biggest piece of iron in the entire village of Sahmonvale. The tarpaulin was still over his head; however, it was getting quite stuffy.

The door creaked open. Some hours previously the sounds of violence and destruction had all but stopped, and Kallwyn had almost—almost—deigned to leave his hiding place and try to escape.

The sounds of heavy leather boots crashing against the floor told him that the intruders were mercenaries, and not natives, and he held his tongue from cursing at his bad luck—not because of a predisposition against profanity, but because it would have given away his hiding spot.

He could recognize their accents, too—thick ones, which didn't help his understanding of what they were saying at all. He tried to make out what he could of their speech:

"The Admir'l say we be sailin' in a week or so, once we have this place razed ta th' ground," one man said. At this Kallwyn clenched his fist in anger. This village might have been a horrible place, but it was all he had ever known.

"What o' th' prisoner we captured?" one asked.

"We must've captured a good two 'undred," one of the men said.

"Nah, th' one that was a—fightin us to the ship," someone replied. "He was annoyin'!"

A new, distinct voice rose out from the sound of the men chattering. "He said his name was Jameson."

Kallwyn's breath caught in his throat. His father was still alive!

The voice, however, continued. "And he's been executed, in case any of you were wondering."

Kallwyn couldn't help himself. He let out a cry of rage, and, grabbing his knife (which he'd forged during his spare time and always stayed at his side), he leapt for where he assumed the throat of the man speaking would be. He opened his eyes just in time to see a scraggly looking man who he was almost certain was the speaker who had proclaimed his father's death. A fresh yell arose from his throat as he stabbed the man through the chest.

The other mercenaries, at first very confused, were now causing quite a din as they leapt to attack him. Soon he was pinned to the floor by a burly-looking man, his knife falling out of his hand and clattering to the floor, just out of reach. Kallwyn heard one of the men say something that sounded like, "E got Sammy!" before a swinging fist turned his world into a vast expanse of blackness.

Kallwyn awoke a few moments later to the sight of an extremely sharp knife being held at the bottom of his peripheral vision, pressed against the skin of his neck.

"Wait a minute, Tim," said one of the men, enraged, "don' just *kill* 'im, make it *hurt*."

Kallwyn's eyes barely registered the man above him, Tim, grin evilly. "Oh, don' worry. I'll make it hurt."

Tim lifted the knife from its dangerous position on Kallwyn's neck, and then, without warning, plunged it into his right eye socket.

Kallwyn screamed as Tim cut out his eye, and as Tim was preparing to do the same to the left eye, self-preservation kicked in and Kallwyn spit in Tim's face. This in of itself probably wouldn't have done a lot of good for Kallwyn, but Tim was so surprised at the resistance that he dropped the knife and loosened his hold on Kallwyn. Seizing the moment of opportunity, though still in massive pain and anger from losing his eye, Kallwyn leapt up and, in the same fluid motion, grabbed his knife from its resting place on the floor.

With huge amounts of adrenaline surging through him, he stabbed Tim through the chest and sprinted out of the forge. He frantically looked around for any sort of escape from his rather unfortunate predicament.

With only one eye, he was all but blind. Thus, when he thought he saw a bulky mass of driftwood down on the nearby shore that could easily be hidden under, he inadvertently saved himself – for the driftwood was really a dinghy that had been beached by the mercenaries during the attack. Crouching low, Kallwyn made his way down to it and saw it for what it was. Now completely exhausted, he hid.

About a half hour later, the shouts had died down. A patrol of mercenaries had passed him by, mere meters from his hiding spot, and he had heard someone say that they would look more for him and any other survivors in the morning. After regaining his bearings and senses a little more, he kept track of when the patrols would come by and, as soon as one had left earshot, he dragged the dinghy down to the ocean's edge. Kallwyn's luck held; it had an oar, and within a few minutes he had left the coastline behind.

It was only in the morning, when he was a far from shore, that he realized he had forgotten to bring any provisions.