

## Archons of Belltros

### **The Fall of Belltros**

“Kassandra! The Gates are breached and towers are falling, there’s no more time! Bring the children, it is time to go!”

A thunderous explosion resounds through the air and the tower shakes again. Dust falls from the ceiling and High Lord Melityte staggers to his knees. *Twilight’s Gail! Those siege weapons are getting accurate*, he cursed to himself. The newly-made circlet atop his head, adorned with Sardack’s scales flanked by two steel towers, the ancient proud symbol of the now free city, slipped uncomfortably. *Not for the first time*, he thought ruefully of the things he would do to the metal smith who made the crown too big: no doubt a Tirmordane sympathizer at heart.

Trivial thoughts in time of real danger. Wife, children, there still must be time enough. Most of the fastest ships had already sailed for Kal, but the owls could range for hundreds of miles, and were trained for this very mission. He ran into the hallway from his private quarters, stumbling past panicked servants carrying whatever wasn’t nailed down. *It seems they serve themselves now. Let it be, they are trifles*. He raced as fast as he could through the hallways, staggering occasionally as another ballista thundered into the lower levels of the sky tower. He found his wife’s rooms, found Kassandra within with their six children, still packing. Melityte stood agog, “Your mother’s linens?!”

“I’ll not have them ravaged by bloodthirsty, looting soldiers. They are very dear.”

“Kass, love, there is no more time. The enemy is bringing the tower down with us in it! I must get you to the owls. You must be safely aboard the ships.”

Kassandra looked to her husband in silent consternation, “Then the city is truly lost?”

Melityte adorned his face with as convincing a smile as he could, knowing within himself that she would look right through it, “The Republic Army is on its way, love, but the city is besieged. I will not see my children or my wife in danger. Come, your provisions and escape have been arranged already. Do not worry over your mother’s linens, there’s no time.”

Kassandra resisted her husband’s pull towards the door, but eventually gave way. The Danans promised, after all, surely they would come. Melityte led his family from their apartments to the outer ring, where only a few discs remained. He led them onto one and sent it spiraling upward with all speed, towards the aviary. The owls cooed nervously in their cages, and the handful of owl marshals that remained in the tower had their hands full keeping them calm. Melityte ordered them to prepare owls for his family, and brought them together in a place away from the noise and confusion. Far below them, the deep rumble of the blows from siege weapons was far less audible, but the exaggerated swaying of the tower gave them a sickening sense of vertigo. Melityte turned solemn and turned to his children. Hematite, the oldest, was nearing 13 and already growing proud and strong. Quartz, at 11, already had the high cheekbones and fair complexion of her mother. Dear Malachite was a mystery: always pensive and solitary, yet already reading the texts of Sardack at age 6. And the triplets, Basalt, Amber and Sandstone, were yet infants. Yet each one must carry a heavy burden if the dream of Belltros were to survive. He spoke to them, “Now listen to me very carefully, children. I must remain here to defend the city and await the Danan army,” tears began to form in the older children’s eyes, “Do not weep. This is not goodbye. But I must ask each of you to carry something very precious for me. The city depends on each of you to hold this treasure for as long as it is yours to hold. The Greyhelm must not have it.” He took each child in his arms and sang to them a song of great power and beauty. Each song was different, one melancholy, another joyful, but each one carried with it an inner strength that seemed to flow from the father to the child. Kassandra wept as she watched her husband, as the realization came to her that he was passing to them the Keys of the Towers. She knew then that she would never see her husband again. That perhaps she would never see the shimmering opalescence of the tower spires call her home from a long flight at sea. But she held it in. The children had to be strong, and they had to get that strength from her.

After each song Melityte commanded each child to remember what he had given them, and to pass it along to the next one. He sang even to the infant triplets, though they did not yet know their letters, and it seemed that they understood nonetheless. Melityte loaded his family onto the owls, embracing his wife one last time and hiding her tears from the children, then waved them off to the sea. The birds took flight on the warm coastal air, dashing through smoke and billowing clouds of embers, past the city to the ships already bound for Kal, the distant land across the sea.

## A New Home

*We'll all be together again soon.* The shallow words and the fake smile faded in Hematite's mind as he watched another tower crumble and fall, leveling a large portion of the city underneath. How could he leave us like this? Under the shelter of the Owl's wing, he watched the grandest city of Tharstelding burn in the unquenchable wrath of the Greyhelm. From horizon to horizon, not a single banner of the shining new republic could be seen, not a single ship laden with spears and fire to lift the siege. No help would come from afar to save his home. *How could father lie like that? How could he betray us?*

Aboard the *Sealion*, Hematite thought not for the first time how remarkable this strange, cat-like captain must be. To offer refuge to shipwrecked refugees when so many of his kind had hunted them for sport, or driven them from "their waters". His family remained, but only a handful of the former crew of the *Star Sprite*. He looked to his mother and wondered at the look of fear in her eyes every time she saw one of the crew walk by. *These cat people are safe*, he thought, *they're not going to hurt us*. But visions of his father came back to him. Parents do lie, after all. Is there something about this captain and his crew he doesn't know? Is there some other purpose they have?

Life on the lizardmens farm was not so bad, thought Hematite. Certainly better than the slave port of Hissinfiel where that damned cat captain had sold them, where they had lost mother. The three triplets were growing strong, though knew little of the world that had given them birth. He felt a pang of guilt. Eight long years since the terrible day, and he had not yet told them the full story, had not told them why they hum those songs to themselves when they're not thinking about it. Still, Hangrom's plan was solid. He would have plenty of time to tell them the truth on the road to freedom after tonight.

CM 506, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revel of Browngrass: Honoria, the dear sweet woman, insists I should keep a journal for posterity. I think perhaps she sees much more in me than there really is. Nevertheless, refugees of Belltros keep finding us, even though the lizardmen cannot. It makes me laugh, how simple it seems to elude them, for they seem to fear the cold. And still these refugees keep following me, for some reason. Though he denies it, I have a feeling Basalt keeps telling them I'm the heir apparent. Heir of what, I'd like to know: a kingdom that never was, crowned by broken towers and shattered gates, where crows feast on the bones of our forebears? Belltros is lost.

CM 552, 3<sup>rd</sup> Drawing of The Great Burning: Last night we held the ceremony where we imparted the tower keys to our children. I think now, at long last, that I understand what my father was doing on that last day. Even though the shining sky towers are gone and the gates broken, even though the name of Belltros will never again be spoken amongst its remaining people, the keys remain. Perhaps that is what is most important. So long as they remain, Belltros might live again, even in these mountains where these few hundred have found a home. Though my son will not be a king when I pass, he will nevertheless carry on the tradition of the tower scions, and hold the secret key ready for the day when the towers may again glimmer in the sunlight.

Allan wiped his brow with his shirt and looked up smiling at the skeleton of the barn. They were making good time. At this rate they would be finished in time for a good evening meal. Again he blessed the providence of the Five, for finding this sheltered valley. Though the air was thin and work could be difficult at times, his people had known peace for long years beneath the snow-capped shoulders of these peaks. So much, in fact, that stories of cats and lizards were told more to scare children than warn men. The watch towers were overgrown and falling apart, and there were none left alive that could remember what a lizardman or catfolk looked like. Still, he did not want complacency to dull their skills. The songs were still sung, and the promise still kept to hold the keys until Belltros could be rebuilt again. *We're well on our way, I think*, he thought. Six thousand people called him Lord now, and their community had settled into a rustic life. Perhaps it would not be long before he could broach the subject with the council about naming this community New Belltros.

Luran's anxiety would not abate. Josun left the valley almost a month past, only to return last night with fantastic stories about lizardmen and catfolk, and a wide world of wonders that no one could possibly imagine. Already the children were giggling excitedly that the old stories were true. This would bode naught but ill amongst the council. Still, she could not help but be relieved at the same time. She tried to tell herself that it was only because of his importance as a scion, but her conscious kept reminding her of her annoying feelings. Their parents, no doubt, had planned that the two would be married, but Jousn was always so wild—always talking about the truth behind the legends. Luran smiled to herself as she remembered his claim about the children songs. Tower keys is what they called them? Heh, well, Josun always had crazy ideas.

The watchman moved silently through the throng, checking harnesses here, giving encouraging words there. What buildings had been destroyed during the earthquake had been rebuilt, and the town had a new look to it, but they knew it could not last. Not enough land existed anymore to sustain all the lives of this island, and much of the timber that remained had been used to build the ships. It had been a labor, quelling the idea that the earthquake was sent by Sardack to punish the cat and lizard people, but thankfully the exodus had distracted the people enough that the notion would die quickly. Home would have to be found across the sea, somewhere.

When the boats had been loaded, each of the captains waved one parting goodbye. People leaned over bows and sterns to bid farewell to loved ones. Nine ships, three paths. Hopefully each would be successful. Hopefully word could be sent to the others so that everyone would meet again soon. Hopes were so fragile, though. Archon Chelus had no illusions about their fate. Should they survive, they would be the only ones to make a new home. He would never see the other six ships again.

The legends spoke true. Who could have thought that a child's child could hold the key to a long-dead legend, now reawakened? Chelus looked with awe at the sheer height of the six towers that stabbed into the sky from the wilderness before him. A broken gate, covered in lichen and vines and no doubt centuries upon centuries old, still bore the name in easily recognizable letters: Belltros. It was as though the memory of his ancestors had been preserved in the songs of children. Only five days exploring these ruins and already many of the men had found weapons, tools, and other such items, some in remarkable repair. Once the women and the children arrived, Chelus thought to himself, we could see to checking some of these items for magical properties. The swords, especially: it seemed unlikely such weapons, cold to the touch as they were, could not be magical. Chelus ordered three of his men into the tower door, and followed closely behind them. Time to see what was at the top.

Four years since first coming here, and still Chelus and his men had not explored all the ruins. Some had been blocked off, marked by signs of danger and caution. Others were marked as places to explore when time permitted. Now Chelus wore the winged helmet of his station as Archon, an honor afforded only after that seemingly miraculous day when he awoke the first of the towers with that child's lullaby. It was a song his father had sung to him when he was a child, sung idly while he waited for his watch relief to make the long climb. Well, flashy lights and sparkling magic, Fanny's your Aunt, Bob's your Uncle and he's got a winged helmet which *identify* spells call a Helmet of the Skydanes. It's just a shame the song didn't work on any of the other towers.

First Hearth of Last Bloom, Present Day: The fourth tower, so called the Cloud Spire for the décor within, opened up yesterday. A woman that came in with Gragor Tallbeard's group last month apparently had the key. We're no closer to learning the mystery behind these towers, except for the power they possess. But why they respond to song; more specifically, why they respond to a specific person singing a specific song, remains a mystery. Josun went exploring three days ago down the Holdrum mine, though I expressly forbade him; nevertheless, if anyone is going to find anything of value to us, it'll be Josun. A wild one him. His mother insists it runs in the family.

The most important find thus far has come from unlocking the fourth tower. It is by far the most intact of all of them, and the only one we've been able to unlock that still keeps its roof. We found an aviary at the top—an aviary designed to house very large birds. Could our ancestors have tamed the giant owls that roam these lands? Though riding owls would most certainly overexpose us to High Lord Beldish Dervarn, it is very tempting to consider. Our reconnaissance could extend well beyond watch towers and winged helmets. We could spy on the Greyhelm himself!

The Archons of Belltros currently protect a little more than seven thousand men, women and children living amongst cleared ruins in simple homes. Some live in the lower levels of the towers. Every day they work to keep themselves secret from the lord of Dervarn, High Lord Beldish Dervarn, who of course is a little upset that he's not collecting taxes on these trespassing ne'er-do-wells; they also concentrate on uncovering the city, making dangerous avenues that now exist only underground or as part of a terrible monster's lair safe. They seek to unlock the mysteries of what they believe is the original city of their ancestors, and hopefully bring back the glory of Belltros. The power unlocked in the towers keeps them warm, lit, and operates permanent floating disks, which act as elevators along the inside perimeter of the towers.

**Symbol:** The Archons of Belltros have no official symbol.

**Background, Goals, and Dreams:** In 489 CM Belltros was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in all of Tharstelding, with a population of nearly 48,000. At that time they were a marvel of modern society, known across the land for their art, song, philosophy, and sky towers, some of which still stand today. It was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Oathday of Feastmoons, 489 CM, that the High Lord Melityte Von Ilmanth, through public desire, proclaimed Belltros a free city, independent of Tirmordane. Throughout the remaining counts of that month joyous celebration flooded the streets of Belltros, while anger swelled in the heart of king Corminon Greyhelm. Word quickly reached Melityte, now ruler of the fledgling city state, that king Corminon was gathering his western armies and pointing them to Belltros. Melityte immediately sought aid from the Republic of Xar Zanth, citing their similar struggle for independence not so long ago. The senate of Dana replied with little delay that they would send an army to bolster the garrison at Belltros.

Before the army of republic soldiers from Dana could reach Belltros the city was sacked. The western army of Tirmordane razed the city in less than a count, tearing down many of the fabled sky towers, looting the priceless art, and burning some of the largest libraries in western Tharstelding in the process. By the time that the republic army crossed the Golden Hills via the Eldross Ocean coast they were set upon by both the western army and the eastern army of Tirmordane. The war however was not over. Over the course of the next four years republic soldiers bolstered by the shattered remains of Belltros' army fought hard against the combined might of Tirmordane, until at last the republic army was defeated and pushed back across the Golden Hills in what was the worst defeat that Xar Zanth has endured.

The group as it is today protects a small population of Belltros survivors that decided to stay within the ruined city, they operate under the radar as they have since the destruction of their home. Their goals are simple, keep the people safe, keep the soldiers of Tirmordane at bay, and fight the war until victory is obtained and Belltros is free of tyranny. The people within Belltros today were not alive when the city was sacked, it is nonetheless their home, they have been bred and raised to hate the Kingdom of Tirmordane, a breeding that runs strong in their veins.

**Members:** To first join the group one must find the group, no simple task as the ruins of Belltros are among the largest on the face of Draconspire. Membership is only extended to those that advance the cause of the Archons of Belltros. Not Surprisingly the group is comprised mostly of fighters, strikers, hedge mages, and guardians. However the occasional wizard, rouge, ranger, barbarian or druid sometimes joins their ranks.

**Type:** Freedom Fighters

**Affiliation Score Criteria:** Members must prove themselves through deeds loyal to the citizens of Belltros. This can manifest itself in many ways as noted in the criterion below. There is no alignment or class restriction to joining the Archons of Belltros, however chaotic or neutral characters may find advancement easier. Evil characters, once discovered, are usually asked politely to leave (politeness in Belltros usually comes at crossbow point).

**Criterion:** **Affiliation Score Modifier:**

***One Time***

Character Level	+½ character levels
Has Leadership Feat	+1
Can prove they have Belltros ancestors	+2
Has 5 ranks in a craft	+1
Has 10 ranks in a craft	+2
Has 10 ranks in perform ( singing )	+2
Has deserted the Tirmordane army	+2
Charisma 8 or lower	-2
Marries a native from Belltros	+2
Possesses an item that can make food Or water	+2
Gives out the location of the Archons	-3
Lacks ranks in diplomacy	-2
Adventures with nonmembers	-2
Evil alignment	-2
Lawful alignment	-1

***Multiple Times***

Fails in an assigned mission	-2, per mission
Humiliates a soldier of Tirmordane	+1
Succeeds on an assigned mission	+2, per mission
Humiliates a noble of Tirmordane	+5
Recruits a new member	+1, per new member
Spends a month in Belltros on duty	+1, per month
Assaults a citizen of Belltros	-1

**Titles, Benefits, and Duties:** More chaotic than lawful due to the nature of Belltros, the members of this organization are expected at all times to assist and protect the population that lives within the ruins. That includes cleaning out monster dens that work their way into the city and scouting the nearby land and water for signs of trouble. When assigned a mission by a superior members are expected to follow through.

**Affiliation Score**

**Title: Benefits and Duties**

**3 or lower**

**Citizen of Belltros:** no benefit awarded.

**4-10**

**Soldier of Belltros:** Awarded a *Cloak of the Watchman*. This well made cloak offers a +1 resistance bonus to all saving throws and a +1 bonus to all initiative checks.

**11-15**

**Defender of Belltros:** You gain a +4 bonus to all stealth and perception checks when within 50 miles of Belltros. You are expected to perform recon and report outside activity to your superiors in Belltros.

**16-22**

**Champion of Belltros:** Awarded a *Blade of the Sky*, this longsword functions as a +3 *icy burst* weapon while within 10 miles of a Sky Tower. Otherwise it functions as a +1 *frost longsword*.

**23-29**

**Hero of Belltros:** Awarded a *Cuirass of the Four Gates*. This +1 adamantine breastplate functions as a +3 moderate fortification adamantine breastplate when worn within 10 miles of one of the four shattered gates of Belltros.

**30 or Higher**

**Archon of Belltros:** Awarded a *Winged Helm of the Skydanes*. This helmet provides a +4 enhancement bonus to the wearers charisma score, in addition the wearer can communicate telepathically over any distance (except another plane) to another wearer of a *Winged Helm of the Skydanes*. Finally, the wearer may use *Word of Recall* once per day as a spell like ability to return to any remaining Sky Tower in the ruins of Belltros. The Archon is charged with the duty to return to Belltros immediately if summoned.