

The Battle for Stonekeep Epilogue

Sir Mishler stared blankly at the battered walls of Stonekeep castle, watching his remaining troops pull back in retreat from the ancient Elven castle. Behind him, the setting, bloody sun was almost behind the Rivvenheim peaks, filling the entire mountain ravine with long shadows.

Retreat. The word stuck like a dagger in his mind. High Elves didn't retreat. The Knights Immortal didn't know defeat. Not on this scale. Not, he reflected with bitter irony, until today.

Commander Searle, the leader of the Elemental's defense of Stonekeep, had performed admirably in the battle. The Centaur's Trolls, Forest Elves, and assorted allies from across the Land had held off the massive High Elven assault with a combination of swords, spells, and simple ingenuity. Now, Sir Mishler was standing on the path back to the peaks, back to his home, to defeat and infamy in the eyes of all the Elves of Rivvenheim.

Stonekeep Castle would have been easy to conquer, with time and proper planning. But when Council Lord Jamus raised the stakes this morning by announcing the arrival of a Necropolis Sect army, and demanding that Stonekeep be taken in a day rather than weeks, Mishler's commander demanded the impossible. But Anthonius had tried to conquer the structure anyway, gambled with the lives of dozens of High Elves, and watched as they threw their near-immortal lives away for nothing against the Elemental defense. In all the long day of battle, not even one High Elf even reached the top of the fortress wall, and were ultimately left faced with defeat on the rock-strewn ground before Stonekeep's unbreachable gates.

Retreat. It was the only option. Sir Mishler had saved the lives of the remaining members of his warhost with the command to withdraw, but at the expense of his own career, his family's name, and his personal honor. But tomorrow night two dozen soldiers fresh from the toils of war would be at home with their families, their loved ones, and their children - and for that fact alone Mishler could live with himself for the centuries to come.

Taking off his helmet, he carefully set it onto a boulder beside him. Unfastening his beautiful cape, he draped it alongside the helm, careful not to dirty his family's crest. Lastly, the High Elf took his ancient battle standard, his family's prized possession of honor and prowess, and laid it gently beside the other abandoned objects. The collection of personal relics were in such a place where they would be seen by the High Elves still climbing up from the battleground below, placed in such a way where they could collect the objects in a way that would prompt no questions or accusations.

A new life, Anthonius thought to himself, as he girded a salvaged longsword onto his belt. A new life somewhere away from here. Somewhere where I can put this black day behind me, and all of the dark tidings it bears. Farewell, fair Rivvenheim, homeland of my heart.

Pulling the hood of his cloak up over his brow, he nimbly stepped into a thin passage that would lead him to the green valleys of the Wylden far below, his cloaked form swallowed up quickly by the shadows of Rivvenheim.

And somewhere in the growing darkness behind him, a Vampire hissed, and stealthily moved to follow...