

# *Missing in Action: A Soldier's Journey*

By  
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Recovered from a journal given to this library by Artor Siannodel, now corporal of the Meadas Army.

*"The Kingdom of Gandock invades Villages, peasant Death Toll in Hundreds,"*

*"Gandock declares War upon the Kingdom of Meadas, Meadas accepts,"*

*"War Ravages Countryside, Gandock on Defense"*

*"Meadas Winning Servemar War"*

*"Orcs pledge allegiance to Gandock, Meadas Backing Off"*

*"Demilitarized Zone now Militarized,"*

*"Meadas Makes Comeback with Dwarf Allies, Pushing Back."*

*That's what all the headlines said. I didn't believe a word of it all. As far as I could tell, the war was going pretty well.*

*Then one of my friends signed up to fight. His name was Gregor. Gregor was a human man, early 20s (23, I think), in decent health. Average skin for a human, blue eyes, freckles, blond hair, married with a little baby on the way. He was fresh out of college, but he wanted to help destroy Gandock. He had a heart of absolute gold, and was a gardener by hobby.*

*Now he is in a garden.*

*The Army sent his body home "...and on behalf of a grateful nation..." and all that. I couldn't pay attention to it, even though I tried. It was all I could do to keep from sobbing, particularly in front of his mother. That's when I knew: I needed to sign up, avenge Gregor's death.*

*My name is Artor Siannodel. I am a half-elf. I'm Gregor's cousin, but he felt more like an older brother. I was born a few years after Gregor, but that didn't entirely matter. We grew up together, plain and simple. Elf children are taught languages and other stuff in the womb, and I*

*used to hear stories about him (Dad had the spells to do it). He was my best friend growing up and we had plans to settle down someplace together. He'd have a house with his wife and I'd have one to myself side by side. I was never a gardener. I have been really into music since I was but a young lad. I got really good at the fiddle and would always play it around him. He said it helped him focus and find all the weeds. He'd never kill them, just keep them trimmed where his herbs and vegetables could grow.*

*That's why I feared the worst. He didn't have the heart to kill anybody, not even an orc trying to kill him. That's what the official report said, but the army always lies about how soldiers die. Always.*

*So I joined the war on Avris 3, 920 Years Rejuvenated (YR). They put me through a couple of months of intense combat training. I learned spears, shields, swords, and armor primarily. Those of us that didn't drop or quit got shipped from Sille Island and sent directly to the front.*

*The Commanding General sent us a dire warning. Gandock has been pillaging any area with excess noise and lights, so we were only allowed what the Kingdom of Meadas issued us. It was too late for me. I brought my violin. It wasn't entirely legal, so I kept it hidden. It was a beautiful violin. It had a black sheen and played like it was carved by an angel. Was.*

*Due to my medical prowess, I was sent to be a corpsman at Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) 2319. MASH 2319 was located right next to the human village of Gren and the Bullywug settlement Croak-splop. They were approximately three miles from the front, or an hour's march.*

*The Kingdom of Meadas had a massive cobblestone wall surrounding the main kingdom. The fringes only benefited from local constables. That wall was another day's march (maybe thirty miles). The end of meadas territory was protected with a wooden wall, but I imagine that was long since damaged, maybe even destroyed.*

*We grunts liked to call MASH 2319 "Archie's One-Stop Repair Shop", or simply "Archie's Repair". Our commander's name was Colonel Archie Gunther, and he was the finest surgeon in the country.*

*At the MASH 2319, I would help with treatment until the real physicians could do it, grunt work, and defense. It's a war crime, according to the United Council, to attack medical units, so I thought I'd be fine.*

*I was wrong. A couple of weeks after I was stationed there the orcs and Gandock armies raided our area. We had to retreat. Before we could do that, their massive trebuchets were placed and boulders flew at us. My tent was shelled. My bunkmates and violin were destroyed instantly. Gren and Croak-splop and Archie's Repair were stationed next to got hit hard, and I did too.*

*One rock landed a couple of feet from me and I went flying. The last thing I remember is seeing a bunch of orcs and angry humans charging, a rock flying, and then black.*

*That's why I'm journaling this, in some old book someone casually littered here. Perhaps it used to be someone's diary. The pages before my writings are indecipherable. Only the greatest wizards could recover it now.[We have. Those are in other publications] My father, a sun elf, was a wizard of such prowess, and he gave me this pen. It's enchanted, so it will never run out of ink and when people borrow it it returns in the time I say it does. How convenient for me. Being in the service for a while, and with the mail hard to get, I'm not sure what my father is up to. I hope he's well.*

*I woke up in the middle of the night. My eyes serviced me fairly well and I examined the base. Archie's One-Stop Repair Shop was obliterated. Common military procedure for Meadas was to recover as much equipment and as many bodies as they could. That would be impossible for the time being.*

*I was glad I was wearing gambeson rather than chainmail or plate, because I needed to be extra sneaky. As I looked around, I checked to see if other people scavenged the dead. Nope. That was good. My pockets were empty, save for my wallet and this pen. My wallet contained a drawing and all of two gold pieces total. My scabbard had my arming sword, but my quiver was empty, and my bow was bent. Someone probably stomped on it. After a few minutes I was able to find a map and compass set and a couple days worth of rations. I left everything personal-looking with the people they belonged to. As far as I could tell, I was alone. I imagined Meadas officials would come by after the Servemar war was over or this was our territory again, but no doubt profiteers would take the "good stuff" before then.*

*Looking around, I saw several fires in the near distance. I knew that some of them were a few miles away at the village. Nothing I could do for them. I slumped. Maybe it was the elvish passion talking, but I hate seeing so much destruction.*

*I figured I could help end the war by joining.*

*I figured I could stop some.*

*It seems the opposite.*

*The more soldiers we have here the worse it gets.*

*Gandock forces took over the base and are now using it as a forward staging ground. From what I could overhear, they planned to advance in the morning and push through the main country walls of Meadas within a couple of days after that.*

*I didn't think the war was going that bad. They must have outflanked us and overpowered the area. I doubted it was possible but they must have managed it.*

*I had to stop it. If I didn't, Gregor and all the other young men died for nothing. They weren't even drafted. They wanted to save their country. It was all up to me.*

*I tried to think logically about how the Gandocks would be set up. Often, foot soldiers would be stationed by bodies of water while the officers would be hidden away in clustered tents. They would be using the fortifications as cover and they would have put the trebuchets in good spots so they could defend their new territory.*

*I figured that the safest way out would likely be through the swampy part. MASH 2319 was close to the swampy and marshy bits of the area. I knew I would have to really work through it, but I could get through well enough.*

*From what I knew the swamp was called Monty's Marsh, named for the person who first settled it about 300 years ago. I guess the humans eventually gave their village to the Bullywugs and left figuring that they weren't suited for it. That's how Croak-splop was founded.*

*The swamp was treacherous. It was about an hour away, and it got steadily wet. Lucky for me, my favored terrain was swamps. They were quite common around where I grew up. In fact, I first learned to sword fight with my father in a swamp.*

*It took me a little over that hour to get there. I had to be very sneaky. A pair of orcs were on lookout. I knew I couldn't kill them and get away with it, so it was very difficult getting away. To this day I'm sure they saw, heard, or smelled me. I can never be sure.*

*Going by the barracks was interesting. I could overhear the soldiers talking. They're saying a dwarf and a few humans are looking in the limits of MASH 2319.*

*I couldn't believe it! My squad survived!*

*My squad consisted of a trio of humans, a dwarf, and I. The dwarf, Grinok son of Gronik the Battlemaster, was a battlerager of his local clan, Hard-Ore. He joined the Meadas Army when the local clans swore themselves to Meadas. He commanded the three humans and I. I'm only a private. Grinok Hard-Ore was a good man. A little gruff and reckless, but he was polite enough and cared deeply for us. He's never lost a soldier, and he knows it.*

*Our humans were Ejarn, Klen, and Odawir. They had the combined intelligence quotient of a potato salad. It's a wonder that they passed basic. Scuttlebutt is that they're triplets, and their grandfather is a colonel. Others say they're just good pals who joined up together, and they're just putting on a show to seem dumb. Nobody knows. I certainly don't. All I know is that they're good soldiers and they have a special bond.*

*The humans and I did some special assignments before we were officially part of this company, and before we were officially stationed at this hospital. One of which was with some Bullywugs. They were raising trouble against both armies and we were sent to deal with it. It took a couple days but it was fascinating. We eventually made an uneasy truce, but if any of us were caught on their land again we would face death and damnation.*

*Bullywugs inhabited the swamps around my little town, Mithlanor. Our mayor made a similar yet less aggressive truce. We were allowed trade and fraternization from dawn until dusk every day. After that, nobody was welcome in or out.*

*Croak-splop was a few miles to the east. My squad had said that in the event that Archie's Repair was ever ransacked, we were to head to that town and wait a few days for the others to arrive.*

*I decided to make my way there. It wouldn't be all that hard. Just a little tricky in places.*

*I had to be really sneaky now. I watched the orcs patrol, and saw a small squad advance towards the town. That only meant that the brutes decided to scout the territory. Their scouts would likely be rangers, trained in this type of operation.*

*People with no real experience would be terrified. I was just scared. I was never a violent person. It took Gregor's death to instill that fiery trait. I have never fought in combat. I knew, without any doubt, I couldn't take these guys head on.*

*I decided to follow them. It was starting to get light out, so I imagined dawn would follow in a few hours. I stayed a couple hundred feet behind them and followed using their footprints and noises. It wasn't that hard. I know it's just a stereotype, but it's fair to say that the orcs I followed were brutish and noisy.*

*We marched for a little over an hour and sure enough, we found a sign. The sign was written in Human and had a Bullywug translation. "You are approaching Croak-Splop. Please check in at customs". The Bullywug translation has a different, difficult, and more culturally appropriate name for the town, but as I cannot pronounce or spell it, let's move on.*

*At this point, I decided to just scoot ahead of the orcs. When they stopped for a rest, I went a few hundred feet and looped around them. Customs was not far off after that.*

*There was a Bullywug official standing by a small gate. Bullywugs are frog-like, amphibious, and green skinned humanoids. His little cubicle had no chance against a quartet of orcs with axes. I ran up to him when he produced a club and croaked, in Bullywug, "Traveller with armor! Why do you enter our home? Speak, or be imprisoned with the rest!"*

*He must have seen my Meadas emblem (a spear head inside a flower) and private stripe. I learned Bullywug from a neighbor who loved visiting with them. "I enter for refuge. What others?"*

*"Meadas warriors, like you. You seek refuge from what?"*

*"Orcs! Please show me in,"*

*The bullywug turned a very light shade of green. He beckoned me to follow him and ran as fast as his tiny little legs could carry him.*

*We went only a few minute's walk before we got to the municipal hut. It was a stick hut, using hardened mud to cask the rock together. We crawled under the small hole (I just barely got in) and the gatekeeper explained it to the chief.*

*The chief was not happy that I barged in uninvited. I had no legal reason to be there. I explained the amnesty and the other captives and the orcs, but he seemed uninterested. I was to be taken to the other prisoners.*

*My mother was a human woman. She was quite resourceful for someone who had to run a distaff and do various chores all day. She always told me to be prepared and careful, because I couldn't ever predict my future. My father, being a diviner, would always chuckle.*

*You might find that to be absurdly simple, but I've always kept that in mind. That's why I would always carry a satchel with various survival, medical, and warrior's tools. I never knew.*

*I started to look around the area. My arming sword was to be put in a pile of arming swords a little bit away from our cages.*

*I got to the cages and who's to be found? My squad! Roc Squad was reunited! It turns out everybody made it.*

*"I don't believe it! You're all okay!" I was so excited.*

*"Ye don't think we coulda got to ye eventually?" Grinok gruffed. Under his beard, we could see a big grin. His nose was a little redder than usual, and he seemed to have a lot of pent-up energy. It's not like a dwarf to stay cooped up so long. He gave me a warrior's handshake and said, "We went out and looked for ye. They were all over the place, durned orcs! We had t'fight off several, and did what you must've done,"*

*"I woke up in the middle of the night and walked around! I heard you guys were alive but had no idea where you'd be! I followed our plan and went here,"*

*One of the humans, Odawir, coughed and spoke in a hoarse voice, "We spent the better part of three hours out looking for you. If we looked where you were we'd have found you!"*

*I fought the urge to roll my eyes. We spent about an hour catching up like this. It was rather uncomfortable,*

*One of the bullywugs came over and spoke to us. She seemed terrified, and in a hurry, "The chief needs a word with you!" I was the only one who understood that, so I nodded my approval.*

*"Durned frogs," Grinok grumbled, "I swear, he's getting a promotion if he has to keep croaking like that,"*

*She took, maybe, 3 steps and the chief hurried out of his little hut and hobbled to us. He, too, seemed in a hurry. He fumbled over himself several times and grabbed a spear from a pile. It was stone-tipped, which we all knew was desperate.*

*"I have a deal to offer," he said, "We have a squad of orcs approaching. We can't handle them, but you can,"*

*I translated this to the rest of us. The chief continued,*

*"We will give you amnesty and any aid you want if you join with us and you defeat them. Deal?"*

*I translated the rest of this to our squad and we bickered for a while. One of the humans suggested we do nothing, another of them suggested we make peace with the hostile orcs, and the other suggested we fight. They argued between themselves until it was so loud that bullywugs across the compound could hear it and turned their frog-like heads.*

*It eventually became just Grinok and I talking. We decided that we would help the bullywugs. No way we'd let them be hurt when we lead the orcs right to them, even though the legality is a little grey*

*We got in our armor and ate some rations. Our weapons were returned to us and we got in positions.*

*It felt like hours. And it might have been, someone stole my watch. We stood there in near silence, save for the jokes the humans told and for the occasional trudge or crunch we'd hear in the woods. Klen had a flatbow and took up a spot on a branch, obscured by the leaves. Pretty smart. Odawir and Ejarn had spears and shields and formed a very lackluster "turtle" that really only protected them. Their chain glittered under it.*



*Grinok had an ax and a wild grin on his face! His armor's points had been sharpened to a terrifying point, and I figured the ax wouldn't get much use. My arming sword seemed weak compared to them, even though it's the best sword a knight could carry.*

*I got impatient and scouted maybe five minutes ahead of where we were. It turns out the orcs made an unusually smart decision. They doubled back and got a squad of Gandock forces. Now we have humans with crossbows and orcs with axes.*

*I hate violence, but I hate evil more. I ran back just as fast as I could and let everyone know. A few bullywug warriors with rather primitive (at least compared to Klen's) flatbows came up and lined the swamp waters. We were ready.*

*Eventually, the clomps of boots and the grunts of foul mouths became louder, and we eventually saw their heads in the distance. Klen took a couple shots. One missed but bounced around so much that not even he knew where it ended up. The second impaled an orc and made them really angry.*

*The humans sent a flurry of crossbow bolts our way. They cut into my armor and everyone else's a little but nothing too serious. It was just to make us angry.*

*Nobody moved for a while. Eventually, the Gandock forces barrelled through the bushes and the marsh and attacked us head on.*

*Any tactician could tell you that a spear is a more viable weapon than a sword. The orcs figured that their axes could break through the spear lines and they tried it. One was successful and gave Odawir a huge gash. He was downed because of it, but the other orc was too headstrong and took the spear point hard. He was still standing, but was very wobbly. One of the bullywugs also went down. One of the humans bashed them with his shield and the poor guy went flying. Their shamans came out to tend to us (the bullywugs primarily) and that helped quite a lot.*

*A human got his crossbow out and took a really good shot. Klen fell out of the tree and onto the cages, making a ruckus so loud everyone else turned their heads.*

*I charged in, doing a sort of roll and bringing down the stumbling orcs. The way I figure, it was better than him suffering. The others brought their swords against me, but I was able to*

*deflect the vast majority of them. I got some cuts that would later form small scars but nothing too serious.*

*A couple of the humans fell to bullywug shots, but another bullywug fell and Klen still hadn't got back up. I was starting to think he must have been knocked out, killed, or paralyzed. I couldn't see him, so I didn't quite know.*

*The shamans were running around, stabilizing as much as they could. They took a couple of hits as well but it wasn't much.*

*I took another swing at an orc. I drew some blood but not quite enough. Fortunately for me, a well placed shot took care of my immediate problem there. Now we had two orcs and three humans left to deal with.*

*One of the humans appeared to be a grizzled war veteran who knew crossbows were terrible at short range. He drew a pair of scimitars and rushed Grinok. This was a smart move, because now the pointy armor wouldn't be as useful. Grinok rose to the challenge and brought his ax to bear. He used his armor gauntlets to block one blade and caught another in his ax. I saw him twist the human's arm, thinking it might break. I ran to him. He made a poor move.*

*The scimitar caught flew free and the human brought it to bear. He cut into Grinok's cheek and chin, cutting some beard and drawing a lot of blood. Grinok stumbled, and it looked like he was about to be slain. The scimitars raised-*

*I didn't see it but I heard the whistle of an arrow fly. I assumed it must have come from Klen, which meant he was alive! I decided that Grinok was safe and pressed the Gandock forces.*

*They decided to call a retreat. Odawir chucked his spear into the hand of one of the soldiers, and an orc got another deep gash into a bullywug and into me, but that was the end.*

*They took off running and we shot arrows behind them.*

*Odawir and Klen decided to follow them and make sure they weren't regrouping with a larger force. We all waited. I tended to Grinok and Klen. They both had significant injuries and would need bed rest, but survived. I tended to my own injuries as well. I was in pain but wouldn't die.*

*When those two returned they revealed to us that the orcs and humans retreated completely. Archie's One-Stop Repair Shop wasn't ours yet, and the fighting was still very intense by our borders, but for the time being we were safe.*

*The chieftain was very grateful. "You have saved our village," he croaked, "As such, you five are offered complete welcome and hospitality. Our shamans will tend to you the best they can, and we will show you a shortcut to your unit.,"*

*"Durned frogs," Grinok groaned, "Just one time I'd like to hear Common,"*

*"So be it," the chieftain spoke in rough Common. Grinok looked completely embarrassed but offered no real apology.*

*"That would be great. Thank you, Chieftain," I bowed respectfully.*

*After a day of rest and recuperation, we trudged through the swamp. The chief made good on their word, and even brought some soldiers with them for security. We made camp for a few nights, but eventually did see a stone wall in the distance.*

*This is where we parted ways with the chieftain, knowing we could make it from there. They were very considerate towards us, and I would recommend we make allies with them in future struggles.*

*One of the soldiers introduced themselves as Grogenos the Wise and Brave. He was a soldier for similar reasons I was. I guess that bullywug village took in a lot of bullywug refugees from other swamps. He enlisted in our cause, and we were honored to take him in.*

*After a couple more days, I made it to the wall. It turns out Archie had set up a new MASH, and the survivors from that raid called Archie's Repaired Repair Shop, much to the chagrin of our counterparts. We became even more frontline and Grogenos would often take archer positions protecting us.*

*We were a team. I can't imagine how well I and the bullywug village would have fared if we hadn't found each other. I'm making a copy of this journal entry to send home and I'm donating this copy to the military records. Perhaps some good can come out of this war after all.*