Narrattor: Welcome, dearest retainers to court of blades and welcome to Valloward, the greatest City in this or any other age.
A city where hearts race and swords flash. Where intrigue and danger lie around every corner. Centuries ago, celebrated veterans were given title to Valor Isle, a place long-abandoned by its first residents.
Here the heroes found ancient secrets, bountiful land, and a fruit bearing oracular gifts.
Generations later, six families vie for ultimate control of this Jewel of the archipelago, each seeking to lead the Great Dance of houses.
A new retinue rises to clash with flashing blades, veiled plots, and powerful magics in pursuit of their House's interests…and their own secret ambitions.
Speculate presents Valloward: A Court of Blades campaign.
Starring: Premee Mohamed, Marie Bilodeau, Brandon O'Brien, Gregory A Wilson, and your dancing master Michael R Underwood.
Be welcome retainer get comfortable…but not too comfortable. It's time for Court of Blades

Mike: Greetings Fair citizens of Valloward. Tonight we continue and fully endeavor upon our game of Court of Blades, where I will sometimes use a fancy Renaissance voice developed from five years of being in the Society for Creative Anachronism. I am your humble dancing master Michael R Underwood.
Premee: Hi, I am Premee Mohamed, I am a novelist and short fictioneer based out of Edmonton Alberta Canada.
Marie: hi I am Marie Bilodeau. I am in Ottawa based uh science fiction fantasy and horror writer as well as a performing Storyteller.
Brandon: Hello everyone. I'm Brandon O'Brien a poet, writer, and game designer from Trinidad and Tobago and one third of the co-host team of speculate alongside Mike and Greg
Greg: Um uh hi everyone um I my name is Gregory Wilson better known as Arvaneleron on this channel um and uh author and game master and streamer and podcaster and, as Brandon has said, co-host along with Mike and Brandon of speculate.
Mike: Valloward is a city of city of uh you know honor a city of duels it is a city of

trade is a city of plenty there are you know three different major crops of Valor Island: the lenscaps, the Queen's apples and the illustrious and uh somewhat mysterious plentifruit which grants of oracular powers if you believe such things uh though the the continued fortunes of House Carrine might suggest that there is something to it. Or maybe it's just a a front for their other Magics. And in the now 300 years since the founding of the settlement formerly known as Valor's Reward now Valloward, House Vorster was there from the beginning among the first veterans and their families and on entourages or the soldiers that fought with them who came to this island they thought uh was you know long since abandoned and by all accounts was but we know as the audience that that the Dialta are not all gone forever. They came to this island they found amazing gifts and every year on the day that they kind of arrived on the island they have celebrated what is now known as Founders' Day and today is the 300th anniversary of the founding of Valoward and so the Founders Day Festival has become a little bit less central as other holidays have kind of come come and gone.

Mike: Another thing is a a great sculpture that is placed kind of at one end of the the room and this sculpture is you know it's like starts 12 foot tall and depicted one of the initial the initial Founders. The founder of House Vorster. But, as the party has progressed that sculpture has the outer layer has dissolved, revealing of different sculpture of another leader later in Valloward's history. So this is a a use of the destructive magic of the Old Country put to a beautiful use. And so you know every 30 to 40 something minutes, this sculpture is kind of becoming a new thing as uh it's almost sculpted and carved in real time, um becoming smaller and smaller revealing New Visions

Mike: So House Vorster is trying to kind of make Founders' Day a big thing again because they are the old house of martial valor, their history and Valloward's history are truly inextricable and so they have kind of lobbied for the honor of hosting the Founders' Day feast because it's not uh the feast and ball it's not as big of a deal compared to some other holidays you know on Founders' Day children will send tiny paper boats down river to the sea. The city will have a very stuffy ceremony of investiture which was done earlier today and then at
the ball is the more traditional social activities of Vallowarrd where there is

drinking and dancing and merriment and intrigue. There must always be intrigue.

Mike: Founders' Day is also a customary day to open a business, to get married or to begin a new endeavor. And so, we will join our coterie, who at some point will need a name - perhaps a name will emerge from their exploits this evening. In the uh the kind of the great Halls of House of Vorster, uh which are you know I think maybe not quite as fashionable as the the kind of the quarters and the the mansions of some of the other houses um that are farther up in the ranks of the Great Dance uh. But, they are still illustrious they are very storied which is appropriate for the Founders' Day feast. And in the Grand Ballroom we have uh there are folks dancing there is a string quartet, there are many wonderful decorations and I'm going to point out a couple of cool things that are here and then I would invite you all to add a detail or an idea of something that might comprise um kind of the um the festivities of the evening.
So, one of the cool things that we have is magical batteries hanging in windows and this is a magic thing that Brandon and I talked about in one of the the world-building stream we did a while back. So there is floating kind of volcanic porous rock that is suspended toward the top of great bay windows and would have been absorbing light all day and now in the evening it has the power to refract that light and thanks to some additional magic it casts colored patterns on the walls, showing slowly moving murals depicting moments from Valloward's history and so the great white painted wall uh walls of the interior of this ballroom are covered with scenes of battles from from the old country uh scene of like a successfully repelled invasion. Other moments but not just from House Vorster's history but Valloward overall. Another thing is a a great sculpture that is placed kind of at one end of the the room and this sculpture is and it was like starts 12 foot tall and depicted uh one of the initial the initial Founders the founder of house vorster but as the party has progressed that sculpture has the outer layer has dissolved revealing a different sculpture of another leader later in valor's history so this is a a use of the destructive magic of the Old Country put to a beautiful use and so you know every 30 to 40 something minutes this sculpture is kind of becoming a new thing as uh it's almost sculpted and carved in real time um becoming smaller and smaller revealing new visions.

Mike: um for anybody who has an idea, what's another element that either you

were involved in introducing or that you think House Vorster would be sharing with the um the attendees of this ball who are largely drawn from the nobility but also from prominent factions that are well regarded in the city. so

Greg: I would assume there's a uh there's a spot in one area of the hall in which there is a mock uh combat being conducted um where there are specific historical combats uh styles being used as examples so you have something from from what people can tell from what the researchers from the Acadamee Valour have told us or The Valor Academy about what House Vorster would have done when they first began in terms of how things were fought and then combat from 200 years ago and then combat from 100 years ago you know and the modern Innovations of new combat as time has gone up and I imagine that um Carevis is watching um with arms folded um with a smile on his mustachioed face, arms crossed over his armor he has by the way a deep crimson cloak that flows down and has the code of forms of House Vorster on emblazoned on his ceremonial armor. As always he has not one but two swords that is built and he is watching with this smile as the uh very good combat people um are working through their paces and occasionally maybe might be known to make a comment to somebody next to him about um

Greg (as Carevis): You know that's not exactly how it's done you have to take a step to the left and then move forward but it's really quite admirable what they're doing. I'm very impressed they've been working on this for a long time”

Greg: That sort of thing as time goes on

Mike: So what about these displays do you think strikes Carevis in this moment as um like the what's the biggest change and how duels were fought between founding and today?

Greg: 300 years ago, the duels were more brutal um more direct there is something to be said for uh the loss of that directness in some ways can be frustrating when you're trying to get from point A to point B but the truth is that the brutality meant not only were you being unnecessarily cruel with people it means you were attacking the wrong targets and there were times where in your

rage and your anger you ended up killing three people around your target instead of the one you actually wanted to kill so a lot of what I think Carevis would be focusing in on is House Vorster increased focus on efficient discipline um and so but it's mixed emotions right because at the same time, man, the idea of just being able to cut through all the red tape if you will of combat and just being like without all the whys and where fours and just going straight to the point is admirable. But Carevis loves the style of combat that doesn't just want to be cruel for the sake of it and so I would say there's a mixture and Carevis of this is what things used to be and man it was really direct and that's nice but uh but how can you give up the innovations of uh the mise en guard and the step forward and the leap back um the parry and thrust um how can you give those things up really I think would be the mixed emotion.

Mike: And I think there's another Bravo probably across the uh across the the piste across the the pitch from you um from maybe one of the other houses um who do you think that is?

Greg: Rodriguez
Mike: Rodriguez

Greg: It’s Rodriguez
Greg: (as Carevis): Rodriguez, you fop what are you doing there you don't understand any of what you're seeing. I suppose you'd have been best suited for 300 years ago huh perhaps you want to get back out there you might be able to keep up with them now.

Greg: This is by the way in my mind anyway good hearted banter because I actually like Rodriguez um but you know he's kind of an old bastard and so I you know make fun of him.

Mike: Um what house do you think Rodriguez serves

Greg: Uh I was totally prepared for that question and uh Rodriguez is clearly a part of um uh let's see let me take a look at the factions he's probably in he's probably in House Fairest I think because he would be the force side of things

um and I would I would assume that he would be you know like perhaps we've had like run-ins in the past our houses but there's kind of a mutual respect and kind of an understanding that he knows that I know that I know that he knows you know um but I would never choose him over my house naturally but. That's what I would say.

Mike: Yeah and so Rodriguez kind of uh smiles and then uh plucks basically a little um carved ornamented um toothpick that's been turned into a rapier from the drink. Bites the fruit pulls it whilst looking straight at you and then says like uh basically swallows the fruit in one go and says,

Mike (as Rodriguez): D'Arencio, uh do not start things that you are unwilling to end because clearly I am already armed and you have what your tongue? That's not good for anything in terms of fighting. Other things, certainly but here? Those look more ornamental than anything.

Mike: He points at your swords um and like is doing this as he walks around to like embrace you.

Greg: Uh as I'm walking towards him I'm like,

Greg (as Carevis): That's quite clever. The interesting thing of course about your rapier there is that fruits don't bite back um

Greg: And so I you know pop him uh you know
just do the the the step in the Bravo hug right the you know the uh back slap
and then um stand back and I look him up and down
and I say um,

Greg (as Carevis): You're looking fairly well Rodriguez. What's the news? I've heard there's been, mm, action on your side of the street so to speak there have been people concerned about whether your house is managing to keep things safely together. I hope you've been able to keep things in order it's your job to do that you know.

Mike (as Rodriguez): Well I'm I end up with quite a number of jobs. It's it's helpful because it gives me the opportunity to buy more hats

Mike: Like gestures up to his flat cap which is like a good 18 inches across

Greg (as Carevis): I would have assumed that was your father's it looks old enough to be that

Mike (as Rodriguez): No, it's your father's.

Greg: (as Carevis): Oh, clever that assumes that we are brothers and if so I clearly got the better hat.

Greg: I'm very proud of this hat by the way this hat that I have which is also crimson and has like a feather extending up this way I would encourage everybody to think um Sean Connery uh also I think Rodriguez vibes from Highlander I would encourage I know that I called him Rodriguez but in terms of just the hat look okay for me that's that's what I'm imagining you know.

Mike (as Rodriguez): The the city has many demands and when one when us a Bravo like you or I is assigned to a task things have a certain tendency to narrow to a point as you know. These things I cannot I can't discuss everything but what I can discuss is that your cake is very good we may have to steal your baker from you, please introduce me.

Greg (Carvis): Absolutely I'd be happy to do that. You know the funny thing about cake is that the more you eat of it the more magically seems to appear on the plate it's almost as if they encourage more of it um here let me take you in this direction perhaps you can explain to him how to cut a cake with that dull blade of yours

Mike: and I think it's at that moment that I ask: what is it that you notice that is suddenly wrong in the room

Premee: The statue has gone through one transformation already I don't think I recognize the third person that it's turned into I wonder who does and I wonder who did that because I'm sure that can't have been part of the program.

Mike: Yeah so as you as you turn to regard the statue the the figure is uh a little tragic and you you can tell that in their hand they were supposed to be holding like a globe or maybe um some some crafted item. But instead, when the kind of the when the stone dissolves around this thing into a sphere there is a gigantic pop and a flash, like a flashbang going off. And suddenly the room is filled with shouts and um and like very palpable fear all at once.

Premee:
I finish the rest of my drink. Takes a lot to phase Lutrus, having grown up uh the way that he has um. I back up against the wall because it's good to have your back to the wall just in case there's some kind of um crusher mob situation and I noticed that uh Morgaine has uh has done the same because they're a very sensible person despite being brought up in money and to my memory never really having encountered anything like this. And we watch the chaos unfold because people are running for the exits even though they don't know what they're running from.

Mike: Yeah and so there's there's people kind of um brushing by you and you know there's the shout of guards and the Princept Vorster is trying to like regain control of the room but like a lot of people have like they're you know clutching their face because their like their vision is still totally rocked um and the light.
It feels like it generated a bunch of light and sound but now there is a thick kind of white gray something in the air and so there's people brushing by um and you see maybe just in time to be able to do something one of the craftspeople um kind of flip something in their wrist as they're walking up to Morgaine and you see a knife. What do you do?

Premee: Uh I I don't even think I quickly reach out and uh take the person's wrist and take the knife and squeeze just hard enough to let them know that if I wanted to I could break their wrist but I'm sure this is just a misunderstanding and now I've got a nice new knife.

Mike: Okay so to accomplish this I think you'll need to make a roll

Greg: That just happens just so we know. That all that all just occurs and uh you know that's amazing.

Premee: Yeah okay what do I what do I have to roll yes

Mike: I will need from you is: which action you're using to do this and so this is on your character sheet.

Premee: I can't remember um.

Mike: Actions that you have some points in - Skirmish is a likely candidate here because this this assailant has lethal intention you can tell. But the player always gets to say what action the character is using to address the challenge then what I do is the GM is is I will say here's how risky that is and here's how effective it will be if you succeed and so I think Skirmish is a good choice here but this is still a desperate situation you will however have standard effect instead of maybe limited effect if you're trying to use maybe maneuver to disarm them or if you were just going to try to use a Sway to get them to stop.

Premee: I think as a as a Couth uh I wonder if I can maneuver at all in this situation I mean it sounds like it just happened quite suddenly this sounds like a Skirmish to me yeah and I don't know I feel good about Skirmish I'm pretty sober I'm a little on edge.

Mike: Sure thing.

Premee: I just grabbed him I'm rolling to see if I can right.

Mike: Do you recall.

Mike: Yeah maybe I the reason I was looking at those craftspeople was because some of them looked kind of familiar and I'm sure that House Vorster wouldn't

have hired anybody from the Low um to come work at this party but if they were looking for skilled craftspeople who might be able to work with the this kind of um thing maybe they did. Maybe this person recognized me, maybe I recognize them maybe a little bit maybe I'm not sure.

Mike: Yeah so if you flashback you can basically say we're gonna flash back to: and then sometime before now so you could say “I'm gonna flash back to the time that I saw this craftsperson on this you know in on this corner” you know basically just say as an author this is when this is the moment we're flashing back to. Normally when you do a flashback like that I might say oh well that's fairly unlikely so it's gonna you have to pay two stress. Because of Better to be a Tiger Than a Man, um that flashback costs no stress so you tell me what moment we flash back to if you want to do something daring there you might roll then um but you basically you get to be the author for a moment.

Premee: I saw this particular craftsperson back in the Low associating with a group of organized crime people -gangsters. Gangsters that I normally tried to avoid and um didn't think much of it because you know it's kind of a small wet neighborhoods and we all kind of know each other but um he's got a very distinctive face and I recognize the face and I know that he keeps low company. Lower than I used to keep even.

Mike: Okay um yeah I think that is just establishing a detail so I don't think I'll need to make you roll for that but basically you know the the craftsperson comes and you know if this were a TV show we would cut to Lutrus seeing that person in the Low, seeing some associations or a quick montage, and then we jump back to see Lutrus sleeping into action. So you have one in Skirmish you would start with one die. You can push yourself which means you mark two stress. Stress is the a resource you have to basically get to do cool things or resist bad things.
I will I will let you all know that it's fine to do a push a push or two or an assist because you will get to clear your stress between this evening and when we do your your first errand so I would invite you to push for an extra die if you like um because with a one and Skirmish you'd roll one die and you need a four plus for a success or a six for a success without consequences.

Prmee:
okay.

Mike: Um um as you're as you're like making your way to Lutrus, especially because Lutrus is right next to uh Morgaine um you see that one of the um one of the servers has emerged from like emerges from some smoke and the tray that they have is sharp and they are going to try to make them uh they're following um on and about to throw the um uh they're about to throw that that tray at Lutrus. And so you could assist by uh interposing yourself and doing something about that.

Premee: Please please save me from Oddjob.

Greg: Yeah yeah I was just gonna say that. “Show them what you do random task.” Um so I uh right so I imagine that you know both uh swords are out and uh as the sort of tray is coming back what I'd like to do is to step in front with swords crossed to block the tray and what I'd really like to do is block it and then just all my strength down to get the tray out of his hand this this is my imagination: step forward interpose trade down knee in the chest throwing him back on the ground with the sword at his throat and then I'll say something cool once I figured that out. That's what I would that's what I'd like to do now how do I do that?

Mike: yeah so if you're an assist in a situation like this, I'm fine to say cool you did that thing it's an assist. One of the things that's fun in this game is that sometimes you get to do a really cool thing without having to roll for it because you're really just assisting somebody else.

Greg: okay well then awesome. Um then then I appreciate that and so I will do that and so it clatters to the ground. I am curious one one note as I'm knocking this person to the ground with a knee in the chest um do I get a sense does the how much resistance does the faux servant put up? That is to say is this something that I'm able to do with relative ease or if this is this a person who um only my superior whatever is able to overbear this person I want to know how professional this person is basically

Mike: Sure

Greg: And I don't know whether what you can tell me if anything about that

Mike: Yeah, I think because you are using your fine weapons you are able to do this relatively easy but you think if you were using lesser weapons or weapons you weren't familiar with this would be more of a straight up challenge because of the them having initiative and because things are so chaotic and you're having to keep track of everything. So this is a tier two opponent and you are a tier two group and then you have a fine item which lets you take effect as if you were tier three.

Greg: Gotcha.

Mike: So I'll give you that bit of information. What's the cool thing you say?

Greg: So when I when he is the knee in the chest and he is knocked down to the ground and the sword immediately is down in his throat and I say…

Greg (as Carevis): That'll be enough of that there's been enough damage I think to plates and other items tonight. Instead we're going to talk you and I in just a moment about what guild of servants you've come from and who you intended to serve here. In the meantime stay there barely breathing for just a moment yes?

Mike: So Zelpha, how do you notice the sniper on the third floor?

Brandon: So, um….