

The Swiftaxe Letters

by Brandon M. Dennis

My dear Bloofeet,

In your last letter you mentioned your newfound fascination with the Savage class. I don't blame you of course; after all, the class is an amazing piece of work and we can thank the Mythic gods every day for it, but I fear you may be dancing with fire.

What I am alluding to is what happened to our good Berserkers. You may be too young to remember, but when I was an active combatant we did the same thing you are doing now with Savages. They were our primary battle unit. We would fill our groups with Berserkers and we did quite well. We ravaged the lands of Emain every day and had such fun doing so! Ah, my dear nephew, you should have seen the responses from our enemies! All they did is cry and moan, and for good reason, for we owned realm warfare like no one else, our Berserkers throwing themselves into fits of rage and killing even the hardest of Heroes with one stroke of the axe.

But as you know, they were deemed too strong by the powers that be. Those meddling nuisances! Mythic came and brought Berserkers down to a reasonable height, and now they can hardly harm a fly. Well, I say, "hardly harm" in that they can do about as well as our enemy's Mercenaries or Blademasters, but we are Midgard! We should not be on par with such fools!

But then Mythic, those shrewd powers, gave us our new toy, and you my dear Bloofeet have discovered the power that lies in their claws. But be wary! Look to the Berserker. See how they roam Midgard lost and sorrowful? The Savage has all but replaced them; even the Warrior (dare I suggest the Thane?) is more highly thought of than they, and Berserkers are useless when compared to our other fine fighters. Do you want this to happen to Savages?

Be shrewd, my good nephew. Do not make the mistake that we made, not so long ago. In our day I received little fame, being a mere Skald, but I was there! I saw the battles! I remember clashes, so fine, when I would run with seven Berserkers, and we didn't need healers! We didn't need crowd control! If only a few of them could break

through, our enemies fell before us like wheat to the scythe. So I know well the exhilaration you feel when you lead our Savages into battle.

But what you must now do is fight off the excitement and blood-lust. Dull your senses and use your mind. Do not fill a group with seven Savages, or even four for that matter. If a group can win reliably with one class significantly outnumbering any other, that is a class that is obviously overpowered, so do not let our enemies see this! It is fine back in Midgard. Let Savages scurry hither and thither as they please, for our own will not complain to the gods. Fools they would be if they did! But if you show our strength so lavishly to our enemies they will do exactly what they did to Berserkers, and crawl to their pitiful knees in cries and moans for “fairness”.

Ha! As if they could get fairness in this world! Did Berserkers need to be hit by the bat? Of course they did, but what does that matter to us? Keep our secrets from them as long as you can. We will reap the benefits because of it!

So it concerns me that you and other of your peers run amuck in Emain so recklessly. I, for one, will not allow my realm’s finest class be brought down to the level of our enemies, so walk softly. If you or anyone else, my dear nephew, cannot control yourselves, your elders and I will have to do something about it. Remember, the death of a few skirmish leaders is a small price to pay to ensure dominance in battle. So be wary!

Your affectionate uncle,
Swiftaxe

My dear Bloofeet,

Please do not whine to me, I am just as frustrated as you. What, did you expect Hibernia to just sit there and be molested forever? Of course some day they would stand up and rebel. But that’s just when we should have struck them again with our rod of control! They think they are all mighty now since they stole our Hammer and the other relics of strength, but they are fools! History shows that they will be ours again – those pitiful weaklings! – but this they know, which is the worst part.

Do not be surprised then when they defend their own more violently than we ever did. Their hearts were in their boots before, but now they are above their heads. Yes, we were the same, and for much longer. How mighty we were! How famed the Midgard response was! Oh, we wouldn't let even one of our keeps fall to enemies, and we were so haughty! So brave! So wicked! Hahaha, grand were those days and our people wallowed in the blessings we bestowed upon them. And if not for that bloody trick those damned Hibernians used, we would still be that way! Curse Nightshades, they should not be able to carry rams.

But now look at us. You see what the relics have done? Try we do, day after day, but no, we can't get past the Hibernian defense, and every battle we lose lowers the morale of our people and strengthens the Hibernian's precious pride. But no, I forget; pride is what we would have, those idiot Hibernians have instead become shrewd. They know they will lose the relics eventually, so it is no party in Hibernia, no, rather they grimly go to war and grimly defend and continue to do so, day after day. It may be weary for them, but I tell you, it does more damage to us than them.

Do you remember what we used to say, when we sat at our boards drinking during the day before raiding our enemies at night? Hibernians were the brunt of our jokes! We scoffed them to no end. There was nothing to fear from the pointy-ears, no, not by Midgard. But now you see, we are the brunt of their jokes. We have our nightly and early morning raids, we have our Savages, we have our little tricks, but they can't help us now, at least not yet, and that is because our people are descending the same ladder Hibernia descended years ago and has been at the bottom of until now. For every battle we lose we go down a rung and they go up!

You fool, do not harass them incessantly. That just makes their resolve stronger! That's the last thing we want. No, rather we want to take them unaware, in a moment of false security; that will be the crushing blow we deal to knock them off the ladder again. They are less than us and we are many, but why then are we overwhelmed every day in Emain? Because they *want* to defend for they see that they *need* to defend. And honestly, it is truly amazing. Even when we were at the top of the ladder, we never had as much support as they have now. Our significant numbers were sure to overwhelm them, but

still the majority of us sit in Darkness Fall getting richer, or playing with our silly houses. It was all fun and games, and we could do many things without fear of opposition.

But even with our numbers we still lose because all of Hibernia is emptied to defend. We send out maybe a third of our fine fellows and we harass the borders of Emain, and in response Hibernia sends everyone, every elder that can wield a staff or weapon, play a song or cast a spell. As long as they have that much commitment to their defense we will never succeed because we will never get as much support as they do. Smaller be their number's, aye, but deadly what numbers they have be.

So abandon this foolish campaign, my dear nephew, and be shrewd like me. Have Hibernians not had relics in the past? And have we not always taken them back? Here is how we will take them, if we ever do:

Albion will weary in their attempts to take advantage of Hibernia, and we will weary of our constant onslaught. Time will pass and Hibernians will see that they no longer have to defend as rigorously as they have had to. Hibernia is under siege nearly all day every day, for that is the nature of our lands, but this makes them used to it, and what defense is normally set against us can be easily avoided. Their watch will lessen and their eyes will wander, and this is when they will become weak!

Forget big epic battles at their relic keep gates. Hit them when they are weak and cannot defend. Sneak in slyly, bring fifty or so men and take their keeps in the wee hours of the morning. They cannot resist this attack, they are too few. Take our Hammer this way, when they cannot defend. A thief is a fool to steal when the owner is in the house.

This strategy has worked countless times in the past and it will work again, but we must wait for an opportune time. Their communication is too great and their desire to keep the relics too strong. Let the relics become more of a burden. Let they're eyes become lazy due to inactivity. The serpent strikes when the rat is blind, and sleep is our enemy's blindness.

Your affectionate uncle,
Swiftaxe

My dear Bloofeet,

You expressed concern in your last letter about the Albion horde. Now, I can forgive you because you are young, but still I must educate you.

You stumbled upon reports of their numbers, and this normally would be something to be concerned about, for even though Albion outnumbers Hibernia by almost half, they outnumber us significantly as well. Yet any fool can judge by looking at strength, and strength can be misleading.

Would you like a history of Albion? You need one my dear nephew, for you are now somewhat of a realm leader and need to be informed of such things. Albion once was a terror to be reckoned with, but we became crafty and exploited our classes, first the Berserker and now the Savage, and numerous other fine things we of Midgard have in our favor. But more than that, Albion grew bigger, and bigger and bigger. The more they grew, the harder it was for them to be organized, and despite all their wealth and all their fighting men and women, they became and still are, nothing but a flea that flits around a room.

So do not fear Albion, just harass them. They have the ability to be descent rivals, but they do not have the leaders to unite them. I could sit here and put together the perfect Albion force, and if I were to ever meet such a force in battle I would tremble. But hah! There is no one to make such a force! Albion drifts aimlessly from one dungeon to the next. They make their little houses and paint their pretty armor and go find fun glowing things. Realm warfare is more of a novelty to them than anything else. All they know to do is rush to Emain day after day, with their mindless Cleric drones sitting in their secure portal keep all day. Nothing serious comes from Albion. Not even an organized attempt.

Hibernia can beat them in battle, if that says anything. Hibernia, the weakest in numbers; Hibernia, with the most vulnerable classes! Our axes tear their scale to shreds, and their endurance disappears with the targeting of one class. But they can defeat Albion, not because they are more powerful, but because they have better skill from being under siege since time began, and from having better unity. You see? Do not rely solely on Savages or our stunning abilities, or our limitless endurance. If we ever adopt the mindless attitude that our Albion enemies have we will be just like them, and no

matter how powerful our classes are, just as Albion is potentially powerful, we can lose and lose repeatedly.

Thank Odin that we of Midgard have never been so low, and never will be! But we must not become careless. So kill those of Albion. Take their keeps and harass their borders. Keep them low and dismantle their spirit. That is the best sabotage we can do, and pray to whichever of our dead gods you must that Albion never wakes up and realizes what they are capable of.

Your affectionate uncle,
Swiftaxe

My dear Bloofeet,

Stop it; you stop this whining this very instant. I don't want to ever read another letter like your last one again. I swear I will slay the messenger that brings me your next letter if it contains even one cry or whine.

Enchanters? Hah! Let the foolish whine about Enchanters, but there is absolutely no excuse for you and your Savage crew to lose to point-blank area of effect spells. What were you doing, standing out front of a recently claimed enemy keep? Then you deserve to be beaten so easily. You bloody fool, how did you ever become a leader? You should be a measly pantry-boy and serve me my mead at the board.

Did the word "Spiritmaster" escape your mind? How about the word "Healer", eh? We of Midgard have the best set up for point-blank area of effect spells than any other realm, better than Albion and yes, even better than Hibernia's precious Enchanters. Enchanters are nothing. You have a shield, right? Stun the Enchanter! Have your bloody Savages assist you! Is it that hard? You see, they do not have an area of effect stun like we do, so you have absolutely no excuse to have lost. People prance around bewailing the Enchanter, but they speak mindless dribble! I don't want you to join their ranks. I forbid it.

I told you three letters ago to stop forming Savage crews. Sure you can win any skirmish, but you are still vulnerable to magic being an all melee group. Instead of losing

to point-blank area of effect spells, use it yourself, and use it better. Get a competent Healer. Get a competent Spiritmaster. They are not hard to find you fool. Instead of sticking your Savages mindlessly out into the enemy's midst, stun them! Healers have an area of effect instant stun; use it in conjunction with point-blank area of effect spells. If you do so you will become wary of falling for the same trick and should win reliably when doing this against your enemies.

I cannot remember how many times we won battles by doing this very thing. Once a troop of weak pointy-ears tried to take Odin's seat. They got through the first two gates of Hlidskaif Faste and were attacking our good Lord when my troop came upon the keep. We merely ran up the stairs, had our Healer stun the fools surrounding our Lord and our Spiritmaster killed them all in three waves of his staff. Neither of our enemies have the capacity to do that. Exploit our strengths! This is something you should be familiar with, you Savage-whoring mongrel.

What will your excuse be when Enchanters get hit with the bat? You will still die to point-blank area of effect spells if you aren't shrewd. And have you forgotten Albion? They have the same capacity that Hibernia does but never use it because they are mindless wastes of flesh. They have Wizards who can cut through bone with terrifying rings of ice, but how often do you see them use it? Such is the decayed and rotting realm known as Albion; all they do is piss and moan but don't do anything to better themselves. Disgusting.

And you remind me of them you tongue-wagging rodent! Keep your cries and moans to yourself and fight smarter! We have some of the best tools ever and here you sit sending me sob stories and tearstained letters. By Thor's Hammer, your next letter had better be written in Hibernian blood or your head will be the next thing my axe shall taste.

Your affectionate uncle,
Swiftaxe

My very dear, sweet, delicious Bloofeet, my pastry, my dainty,

So you write to me again, after word of what happened has already spread far throughout the Midgard realm, you come to me for comfort and understanding. How little you understood my love for you, for I thought my letters betrayed my thoughts clearly. No comfort or answers will you find here, only thirsty eyes and a quivering smile.

Surprised are you that Savages were finally hit? Simple, my sweetness, how utterly simple. I told you more than once to conceal our secret, to keep them under our hats as long as we possibly could, for indeed, our fine Savages existed in resplendence for many months since the Valkyn came to us but only were revealed to our enemies by you and people like you who disregarded sense and reason and flaunted our prize before them like festering meat before the nose of a dog. You ran your Savage crews relentlessly through Emain, even after repeated warnings, but no, I cannot blame you alone, for our Viking blood-lust is primarily to blame. You were not alone in your foolishness but others did the same and flaunted our Savages before the eyes of those who in the end destroyed them as they did Berserkers before.

Can you imagine what the gods said to themselves when it was discovered? It was like blinds falling from their eyes. Their tongues and limbs were loosened and they could see, understand and act upon our Savages. Had the secret remained with us they would have never known how powerful Savages were, but that is now lost, long lost. So clear to them was the might of our claw-wielders, and although it took them long enough, the blow they dealt will leave its mark as long as Midgard stands.

Listen to the voices of Albion and Hibernia! Oh how they mock us and revile us! Long have they waited for this moment and it finally came, so it is no wonder that they laugh and show us their cruel, mocking teeth. Have you seen how they tromp through our snows anew and bash at our walls without fear? They are fools, for if they think the might of Midgard relied solely on the Savage they are sadly mistaken, and we will show them soon, so very soon. But a large power has fallen from our houses and we will have to be twice as vigilant, for our enemies have not been idle in their fights against us but have grown wiser and shrewd. We must now combat their wit and mockery to remain in power, which will be the hardest task our realm has ever faced.

But that is not my concern at the moment, my dear sweet Bloofeet, for I am done with the warrior life. You are my concern now, and I will deal with you and your

foolishness, your disregard for Midgard and your arrogance as a lion deals with a zebra. I will consume you my sweet, and drink every drop of your worthless blood, and savor the taste of your hideous flesh between my teeth, ah! the little morsels. Worthless Kobolds such as yourself, my good nephew, are fit to be meals and not brethren, and so I anxiously await our next meeting, if you do not flee into the sea and drown yourself before then.

Your increasingly thirsty and ravenously affectionate uncle,
Swiftaxe