

Chronicles of Everwood



Оглавление

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1. Prologue

Everwood is a beautiful and amazing world. A world of endless evergreen forests and colossal mountains whose snow-white peaks touch the misty heights. A world of crystal-clear lakes, warm sunshine, and the purest starry sky. A world whose pristine beauty, once seen, you will love forever and never forget. It was Everwood that, by the will of the Demiurges, sheltered a great many living creatures – crawling, running, flying – who live and thrive in peace and tranquility.

If you look around, the nature here is diverse, though at first glance it might seem that the endless green of the forests differs only in coniferous and deciduous trees. This is far from the truth. Under the fragrant crowns of ancient trees grow large and small plants of unseen beauty, many of which bear juicy and nutritious fruits. Any hunter rejoices at the abundance of diverse game and wild animals living in these forests. Not to mention the lakes, as pure as mountain crystal, which are scattered like droplets by the hands of the Demiurges across Everwood's green expanses. In the few seas whose salty waters wash the continental shores, countless varieties of fish teem, and the sparse mountain ranges are so high that their peaks are eternally covered in unmelting snow.

For many centuries, the inhabitants of Everwood never ceased to admire all these gifts and beauties, developing their own cultures and founding ancient kingdoms. Their ideology was creation, as well as harmony with nature and the surrounding world. They were loyal to all races, open to various sciences, and strived for development. Over time, all these kingdoms reunited into a single Empire of Two Faces, marking this event as the era of Everwood's flourishing.

The history of the Empire of Two Faces lasted for many centuries, but the Wars of the Schism and the subsequent Unknown Calamity, which at that time defiled many lands of Everwood, destroyed it. In the maw of the apocalyptic Great Battle, the ancient civilization fell, marking the beginning of a new reckoning. At the cost of sacrifices the Unknown Calamity was halted.

Long years of recovery followed. Years gave way to centuries of creation. Centuries transformed into an era of revival. And Everwood blossomed anew! On the ruins of the ancient Empire, numerous kingdoms and city-states emerged. But not all of them were driven by the ideas of creation and harmony with nature. Kazor, one of Everwood's western kingdoms, unexpectedly began attacking its neighbors, seizing their territories and destroying peace and stability. Abandoning faith, Kazor destroyed temples, proclaiming technocracy and the Transform as both tool and goal. Ancient constructs, once defiled by the Unknown Calamity, were considered the greatest heritage of their ancestors by Kazor's society, and the renunciation of gods led to an infatuation with technomagic. The deeper Kazor's technocracy delved into its research, the crazier ideas it spawned and the more devastating wars it waged became.

But Kazor's ambitions were not destined to come to pass. The largest alliance of eastern kingdoms since the Empire of Two Faces united their forces and stopped the enemy. With great difficulty, crushing Kazor's hordes, the alliance eventually destroyed its capital. Since then, Kazor's destruction has been named the Doom of the Outcast, and the lands where it was located are still considered defiled to this day.

2. First episode

*735th year. Kingdom of Feliz. Western Ashmark Province. New Settlement.
Guild Master, Marcus Wright.*

...When I mentally revisit the events that led us, the first Defenders, to the border of Gloomwood, to the area where the Kazor invasion was stopped hundreds of years ago, the realization comes that even the bleakest assumptions about its legacy turned out to be true.

It's clear that these lands were marked by the deeds of those endowed with truly great power, yet possessed a mind equally evil and alien to us. This is evident from the remains of constructs, sarcophagi, and other artifacts, which, by their very presence, poison the earth's depths, the air, and plants, posing a danger to all living things. There's only one word for this: Filth.

In attempts to resettle Kazor's once fertile lands and exploit its rich resources, the allied kingdoms sent numerous military expeditions. But good intentions gave way to greed. Again, the cursed Kazor became the cause of bloodshed and discord among former allies. The filthed lands could not be reclaimed, but riches flowed out of them like a river. Along with them, technomagic artifacts began to spread throughout Everwood.

Soon, the Filth broke beyond its borders, managing to poison the minds of many Everwood inhabitants. Only a step away from complete chaos, the situation was brought under control. Subsequently, that period was called the Great Purge. During it, a new faith in the One and Only spread, becoming the leading force in the fight against the Filth and its spawn.

In recent years, although border skirmishes between states haven't ceased, each of them has begun to build fortifications along the frontiers of the corrupted lands to thwart attempts to spread this evil. And here, on the border with Gloomwood, the King of Feliz was forced to establish another fortified New Settlement several years ago. Although the province often lost contact with small villages whose inhabitants disappeared without a trace or fled, unable to defend themselves, the New Settlement managed to withstand the onslaught of the filthed creatures of Gloomwood.

Defenders—that's what the inhabitants of Feliz called those volunteers who swore to serve peace and order, dedicating all their efforts to fighting the Filth. Arriving here, in the New Settlement, defenders seek to establish themselves, so their first destination is often the **Guild**. It unites everyone who seeks knowledge in magical arts, ritualism, healing, and self-defense. The Guild is subordinate to the crown, and its leadership is carried out by the High Council, traditionally located in the capital. Guild servants are called Masters. All Masters are stern, battle-hardened veterans who are strict in their service, highly valuing discipline and subordination.

Addressing the Masters with respect can earn their special favor and lead to important assignments.

The second place worth visiting is the **Tavern**. There you can find out the latest news, make initial acquaintances, and find groups heading into Gloomwood for reconnaissance. One should be careful in choosing assistants, as not all of them are as helpful in combat as they claim. But don't hesitate to approach the locals, chat, and ask questions. They are quite welcoming to greenhorn fighters and often approach them with small errands.

And of course, those who wander through the dangerous Gloomwood might encounter the **Forest Hermit**. According to some rumors, he's a mysterious old man, one of the First Defenders who voluntarily chose to become a hermit and swore to return to the settlement only when he learns the secret of the Filth. According to other rumors, he's an old and eccentric, but once very promising sorcerer. But I believe these are just illusions of those who have inhaled the poisonous fumes of Gloomwood, and trusting these tales is like listening to a child...

3. Second episode

*739th year. Kingdom of Feliz. Western Ashmark Province. New Settlement.
Guild Master, Vidomina Spellman.*

...Much hardship has been endured by the western lands of Everwood over these centuries. Much has changed in the essence of this world and its inhabitants. Where once endless carpets of green forests stretched, now only fire-scarred white skeletons of trees remain. Hundreds of lakes, that once sparkled and played in the light of the sun and moon with myriad crystal droplets, now blacken as poisoned stains on the earth's surface. Countless forest beasts have perished in the depths of impassable, filthy territories. And those who attempted to resettle Gloomwood increasingly resembled their brethren from other races less and less. Their entire nature underwent a Transform and became subservient to the dark, destructive essence of the masters who have been rotting and decaying for centuries in ruined factory-crypts. They are driven by an insurmountable malice towards the living, flourishing, and magic-filled Everwood.

For hundreds of years, after the fall of Kazor and the Doom of the Outcast, I observed the re-spreading Filth and tried with all my might to find the thin threads that entangled Everwood with pockets of infection. I participated in the Great Purge and always held out hope that if luck didn't smile upon me, someone would surely emerge who could expose the source of evil. This hope led me here.

The New Settlement has, since its founding, contained the growing threat from the filthy lands. How many of my friends, voluntary defenders, whose faces I will remember for centuries, have died here? Countless. In the year 735, the local magical barrier, cast by my teacher Cosimo Pentacle, which prevented artifacts from leaving Gloomwood's border, fell. Cosimo died in my arms, giving his own life for that spell. The Filth began to actively penetrate the province and beyond its borders. Then, the ingenious blacksmith Clavius Smith, thanks to data on constructs gathered by the defenders, assembled a unique device that blocked their activity. Therefore, the largest expedition of defenders into the depths of Gloomwood in the history of the New

Settlement was organized, which also included missionaries from the church of the One and Only, Ashmark mercenaries, and members of the Order of the Dragon.

The expedition accomplished its mission, successfully using Clavius invention multiple times. But a series of betrayals among the defenders themselves, and then the disappearance of several heroes, including Clavius, put an end to the successes achieved in the campaign. Few returned to the New Settlement, and the blacksmith's invention was stolen by Filth accomplices.

As soon as news of the discovery spread, the Settlement began to be reinforced with new defenders. By order of the bishop of the church of the One and Only, a camp for the Order of Saint Rodion was established near the New Settlement, and the Order of the Dragon founded a Watch Outpost on the other side of Black Lake to control supply routes. But the Filth was not dormant either. Waves of abominations began to roll into Ashmark one after another, destroying defense lines and approaching the New Settlement. For now, combined efforts are managing to protect the Caravans that deliver resources and provisions to the New Settlement. Only this allows the defenders to hold their positions and accumulate new knowledge about the Filth and its weaknesses.

4. Third episode

*779th year. Kingdom of Feliz. Western Ashmark Province. Fort Adrian.
Guild Master, Vidomina Spellman.*

...Sometimes, in my dreams, the past returns. Sometimes it's events that happened hundreds of years ago. And sometimes it's recent, just a few decades past. And yesterday, I was there again...

I walk through the ruined barricade at the gates. I see the walls of burning buildings. I see my beloved Tavern, "The Dirty Beauty," as it was called then. I see the Guild's roof, collapsed from a shell. Screams echo from within... But I move on, towards Mulandir's Bank. Around the corner, in the square, I see myself and about a dozen other defenders who haven't laid down their weapons, continuing the fight against the approaching cadavers. I see several filthy ones. It seems they are technomages... Among them, a laughing Valentine...

I turn sharply. Where the barricade once stood, a group of riders in gleaming armor is already bursting in. Their horses wear black and white checkered harness. The Feliz crest unfurls on blood-stained cloaks. Can it be? Has the prince brought reinforcements?! Ah, no... He died the day before... I hear Valentine's sharp, menacing cry and...

And once again, the ceiling of my department building. My eyes stare straight into the crack between poorly fitted boards. My hand grips the dagger under my pillow till it aches... I must have woken up. I always wake up at that moment... Perhaps it's for the best. Time to get ready for duty.

Forty years have passed since that day. Is that a long time for a dark elf living into her third century? I think so, yes. And too painful. Forty years since the New Settlement ceased to exist. Forty years since Fort Adrian was erected on its ashes. And forty years in a kingdom where the royal dynasty has fallen.

Since that day, Feliz has endured a series of usurpers and coups. Currently, King Flavian II the Grey officially rules the state, and his throne knows no stability. Enemies try to overthrow him from within, and neighbors from without. For the second year, the mountain kingdom of Kruph has been trying to tear Ashmark away from Feliz, flooding it with spies and smugglers under the pretext of aid and better control over Gloomwood. Meanwhile, the former capital has long belonged to Karmora, who so opportunely lent support to Feliz, while also seizing a dozen neighboring fortresses. Such examples are contagious. The only stroke of luck is that Fort Adrian was assigned a strong garrison with a prefect who skillfully maintains Feliz's authority and repels neighbors desires to obtain such an important trophy.

The fort is an important part of the defensive line around the perimeter of Gloomwood. The Kingdom of Feliz controls two other similar forts, while the rest are managed by Kruph, Karmora, and Casa Del Solteira. Not far from Fort Adrian, there is also a military training camp where I teach in the Department of Magic and Healing. A Department of Martial Arts, temporarily relocated from the capital, is also open here. We train militia to fight the Filth, but it's clear this knowledge is no longer sufficient. Increasingly, we have to contend with saboteurs, spies, and cultists.

Oh yes... They recently opened an Taven at the fort. I haven't been there yet, but I hope to go soon. I've long wanted to soothe my soul with some ale, so tormented by memories... And to hear news from the outside world, of course, how can I live without it? Maybe with the music of the minstrels, I'll find peace again...

THE END

