

TACTICIAN

Tactics Anthem Chronicles

by

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eBOOK EDITION

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Tactician:

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The constant barking of dogs at the back of the alley roused Gareth from his slumber. The tactician-in-training was not particularly happy. He shook his head vigorously, trying to clear away remnants from his dreamscape where he stood battling a ferocious fire-spouting red-dragon alongside his hero, Sir Gawain of Camelot. There, just moments ago in his dreamland – he was the legendary Sir Gareth. Here, he was a *nobody* – at least for now. True – yesterday he had passed the initial trials of his tactician course, and technically, he could shed his ‘in-training’ title and pass-off as a Junior Tactician, but in this trade – one needs to attain the rank of a Section Tactician and be gainfully employed before the School would present

him the official Tactician certificate necessary to joining the Tactician's Guild. That – Gareth sighed, is at least eighteen months away.

It was mid-morning – and he was due to be at the training grounds by noon. Grumbling, he performed the needed ablutions and putting on the simple garments of a Tactician of Torpann – Gareth got up and double-bolted the wooden doors of his sparsely furnished quarter – one of the two rooms of Rufus' Tavern, and hurried down the creaky stairway and left the Tavern, one hand clasped against the sword hilt on his side. One can never be too careful in the city of Torpann, where thugs, muggers from all of Erets abound.

Today is an important day for Gareth – or so he had thought, as he made his way to the training grounds, greeting the many familiar faces along the way. Gareth was to meet with some of his cohort who 'graduated' with him yesterday and head to the Fair – the Recruitment Fair. "Have you heard?" Rufus the chubby tavern keeper had told him excitedly last evening. "A fair to recruit and train aspiring tacticians, such as yourself, has been set up near the outskirts of Torpann City. Make your way there tomorrow lest you miss this opportunity! I will have more news for you tomorrow, but I sure know where the ten...". The rest of the words were lost on the weary tactician climbing up the stairs... Right. Thought Gareth. I cannot afford to miss this chance, and he doubled the pace of his steps as he strode purposefully towards the training grounds barely fifty away.

Fifty feet away from you.

Here you are, waiting impatiently for Gareth at the grounds with Flubus, Sunil and Heather. The five of you had agreed that banding together would improve the chances of getting hired as it seems the Fair Organizers this year are looking for teams rather than individuals. Not that it mattered. Everyone knows that at the end, the 'team' is just a way of selecting the best performer, and weeding out the losers eventually. But as the adage goes, there is strength in numbers, and better to be part of this team than join up with shady 'tacticians' whom you have never met. Chances are, the odds of being back-stabbed by 'em is roughly the same as the enemy.

"You are late." Heather muttered matter-of-factly. Heather Durill, arguably the finest female tactician from this graduation class, was also the most voluptuous and sensuous girl in this part of town. With mesmerizing emerald green eyes and soft luscious lips, as Flubus have so 'oft dryly said, "Heather is stunning to behold. But her best asset? Her winning

tactic? Heaving those bosom of hers and charming the enemy to drop his guard. Before long, he would drop to the ground, and never knew what hit him.”

“I couldn’t agree more.” Sunil smacked, as though reading your thoughts. But now, the business at hand is to make it to the Fair by noon. Already, a crowd is forming in the distance... Today, together with your four fellow tacticians, you will find a match – a prospective paymaster. That is a fine thought to hold on to, as the five of you set foot on the Fairgrounds. The stench of a hundred men crowding at the entrance of Fair greeted you. The stale air threatened to choke you, but curiosity got the better of you as the five of you stared at the large signage blocking the way to the Fair.

‘Only the worthy need apply. To be deemed worthy, defeat the pugnacious bunch of renegade tacticians, all ten of them, and come back with evidence of your win.’

You cursed beneath your breath. What was that about? Ten renegade tacticians to defeat? Where will you find them? Judging by the shouts from the crowd – none is the wiser. “Now what?” Sunil stormed. Heather turned to Flubus, who shrugged and then to Gareth. One could not miss the sneaky smile on his face. “Lads, spirits up – I know someone who can tell us all about these ten renegades. Follow me.”

Before long, you find yourself face-to-face with Rufus, the tavern keeper with a front-tooth missing, and eyes glued to Heather’s chest. “Out with it!” Gareth bellowed. “Tell us about the ten renegades you were going to tell me last evening.” The five of you had backtracked from the Fair to where Gareth’s ‘abode’.

“What’s it in for me?” Rufus chuckled, and placing one outstretched hand on the table. Gareth and Flubus each set beside the tavern keeper, while Sunil, Heather and you were dumbfounded - staring at the cheeky man from across the table.

Gareth gave Rufus a tight slap on his back that sent his face slamming onto his still opened palm. “I’ll tell you what you will lose if you keep mum. Two more missing teeth! On the other hand, should we prove successful with this bunch of ten renegades...” Gareth lowered his voice to a whisper. “15 Tactics Coins for you.”

DEAL.

Rufus began speaking all at once, exclaiming and gesturing with great anticipation. “Ten young tacticians have recently formed a gang called the ‘TENBADSIRS’. Each of them claims to have attained mastery over one of the aspects of tactical combat. Teach those uppity

bullies a thing or two.” From what the tavern keeper is saying, you gather a lot of which he was babbling were plain exaggerations. *Basic spells that can negate the 2nd Circle tactics?* Bah. Yet, you observed that Heather and Sunil were listening intently, nodding from time to time and mentally taking notes. Gareth and Flubus on the other hand, were cursory at best, having little interest beyond wanting to know where to find this bunch of imposters.

The problem at hand was clear to you. Yet no one has mentioned it so far. How in Erets are you going to get the required minions to do battle with these ten tacticians? Rufus was still going on about the earth shattering, fire explosive tactics of the enemy, gibberish nonsense when an idea struck you. This is Torpann! The place of brutes and thugs. Most are cutpurses and small-time villains, but the more ‘serious’ ones have organized themselves into Guilds and such – and you could probably hire the dozen minions you require. Best of all, you recalled that five minion sections have recently returned from northern Bretunia after successfully completing a quest for your trainer. You could seek their help for this mission. Your mind began racing. Ten tacticians to defeat... There are five of you. Each can hunt down two each, and your team could complete the task in a couple of days. This could actually work!

An hour later – the five of you stood before your trainer, Master Tactician Skeentip, and who better than have Heather present your request... Heather coaxed and purred, and teasingly wheedled her way around Skeentip, whom you can see is fast being persuaded to support your cause. “I see you all are determined to get your commissioning, yes?”. the Master Tactician intoned. All of you nodded in unison. “I could do this for you”, but on one condition.” Skeentip eyed each of you fixedly. You noticed your compatriots stiffened. You have some idea what was coming... “Register and defeat Captain Leofric in the upcoming Tactician Exam within the fortnight ~ and graduate to become a full-fledged Section Tactician by joining our ranks in the Guild.”

You guessed right. The Torpann Guild of Tacticians has lost much of its stature in recent times, owing to the multiple defeats of its tacticians in the battles to keep the Morganic troops at bay. Last Spring, the Guild Master had agreed to align itself to King Constantine in the defense of Torpann against the Morganic army. Constantine had dispatched 100 sections to defend the city. Over the last six months, more than half of this army had been decimated, along with sixty section tacticians from the guild. The guild is currently under-staffed and qualified Section Tacticians have been difficult to recruit. Your cohort is one of those that have been hastily put together 3 months ago in an attempt by the guild to bring up the

numbers. But everyone knows that it takes at least two years to pass the Section Tactician examinations. To register for the exams under six months? That is a sure-fail scenario.

Gareth was about to protest when Master Tactician Skeentip raised a finger to hush him. “I know what you are thinking”, he began. “But at a time like this, I have struck a deal with Captain Leofric.” Startled – Sunil muttered. “You don’t mean...”. *Hush*. Flubus grabbed Sunil by the hand. “Let Master Skeentip continue.” Skeentip paced the room discriminately, his favorite teak office situated at the centre of the training grounds, glancing about nervously. “Captain Leofric is a royal examiner from Camelot – and we all know the standards for a Section Tactician is *beyond* you at this juncture of your training..” He paused, letting the words sink in. It certainly achieved the desired effect. “Nonetheless – we cannot defend Torpann without Section Tacticians leading the minion sections into battle. So, here’s the arrangement – A week ago, Captain Leofric has agreed to give provisional Section Tactician-ship to any tacticians with field experience and can defeat him once in five rounds, instead of the required three. When we heard that the rascals from the North-Western Mercenary-Guild have descended upon Torpann a few days back to taunt us with their renegade TENBADSIRS tactics, we convinced the owners of the Fair to post this challenge. The rest I think you can easily piece together. So...” Gareth interrupted Skeentip. “Master - what I really want to know is how many teams have you sent out against the renegades, and how have they fared?”

An uneasy silence ensued. “So far, no team has managed to win more than four battles, but...” Flubus pronounced, “That’s ok Sir, we will do it.” All eyes turned to Flubus. “I mean – what choice do we have?” he challenged. You concurred. Flubus was right. The issue at hand is really about how quickly we can assemble the minion sections and determining who gets to battle whom. “It’s settled then.” Master Tactician Skeentip swiftly wrapped up the meeting, and having made the necessary arrangements for us to meet our allotted minion sections – declared that we should set off first thing tomorrow, and report back in the evening.

The luck of the draw determined who the opponents were. And as it turns out, you get to duel the ‘Alter’ and the ‘Disallow’ tacticians. Coincidentally, both of them have been sighted at the north-eastern outskirts of Torpann. Hence, if providence favored you, these two may yet yield to you before evening tomorrow. But first, you need to get acquainted with your minions, and to build rapport before the battle tomorrow. That set, you made your way to the

Adventurer's Lodge expectantly, and as you were talking towards the lodge, Heather stopped you mid-track.

“Mind if I tag along?” Heather inquired slipperily. Having known her for three months, you have come to realize when Heather presents a request, it is a demand statement. “Master Skeentip told me my section will not be ready till day-after, so I was wondering if I could accompany you to see how your duels go. Maybe pick up a tip or two from you?” Heather smiled affably. You really did not have any excuse to say no to Heather, nor the heart to do so. In any case, it probably is useful for her to observe the duel, as the whole team needs to win in order for the quest to be deemed successful.

Before long, Heather and you stepped into the Adventurer's Lodge, and you scanned the room excitedly for Darius, Level One Master Warrior. “Greetings Tactician!” a voice came from behind you. “I have been expecting you.” You spun around and beheld an impressive character before you. Before long, Darius was introducing the entire section to you – the 4 different classes and three ranks that make up the classical tactics section. As the leader of this section, Darius explained the strengths and weaknesses of his minions and what, in his experience, are tactics that would go down well with this section.

That done – you headed back to your dwelling, and began formulating a battle strategy for tomorrow. The night seemed to pass by far slowly than normal, but when morning came – strangely, the interest in the TENBADSIRS suddenly waned in Torpann. A bigger news had reached Torpann from Camelot. Prince Uriel had left Castle Camelot unaccompanied, and is now declared missing. Knights have been sent to all the cities, seeking tacticians to look out for the Crown Prince. You could feel the tension in the air, and wondered if by some twist of fate, you might be asked to undertake a quest later that might cross path with the Prince himself. However, the matter on hand is still fighting the duels today, and you must not be distracted. As if on cue, Heather appeared before you. “Heard the news?” she queried, “I think it will be wonderful if we get to seek out the Prince! But looks like you are all set for your duel – and oh? Darius and his minions are here already – so what are we waiting for, let's go!”

Darius informed you that Flubus, Sunil and Gareth had also set off a while ago with their respective sections. Word has gone out that the renegades will be met with a new team of challengers today, and they have readied themselves accordingly. Making a mental note of the scouts, rangers and warriors in your minion section, and their respective ranks, from

novices to adepts, you psyched yourself and your newly assembled minions, you make your way towards the outskirts of Torpann – towards your first duel, Juriele, Renegade Tactician of the ‘Alter’ tactics, with your side-kick Heather, in tow.

It did not take you too long to locate Juriele once you hit the North-Eastern outlands of Torpann. You noticed that Juriele looked relaxed, and was laughing heartily with his minion section a hundred feet away. You slowed your footsteps, and heightened your precautionary instincts. Heather, sensing your change in mental framework, ceased flirting with a particular handsome Red-hooded Ranger Adept, and adopted a well-developed defensive stance.

Heather sized the situation at hand. She smiled. It has often been rumored that Heather is a walk-over, never serious with her training and more of a vixen than a spellcaster. She knew better. Heather had purposefully built-up this external façade to disarm her opponents. Her deliberate attempts had been successful, and only those who were close to her knew exactly how deadly she can be. “Vixen she is not,” as Gareth had correctly observed. “She’s more like an adder, striking when you least expect it.”

Juriele looked no older than thirty years of age. Stout, and dark-haired, the renegade tactician spotted thick eyebrows and a fairly bushy beard. Looks can be deceiving, Heather knew. His minions were in fact experienced fighters, and Juriele himself is on the verge of acquiring second circle powers. It will be a tough better, concluded Juriele, and she communicated that thought to you with a facial expression you had seen only occasionally – one of dread, but yet of hope. By now, Heather saw that both Juriele and you have readied your minions and the first round will soon commence. It is interesting to note that the challenge posed by the TENBADSIRS is really a taunt – one engineered by Morgana’s mercenaries to demoralize the Arthurian camp. These tacticians and their sections are battle-hardened fighters, yet they have deliberately limited their powers by constraining what tactics they would use. Juriele for instance, have chosen only to use only ‘Alter’-typed tactics. Within the First Circle tactics, each ‘type’ represents only a limited selection of possible spells. Heather mentally calculated that this means no more than twenty possible spells. Whereas she knew that you have a spellbook selection from more than a hundred spells. Which ones would you use today for this battle?

It was an excellent battle to behold. Heather was glad she came. She saw you had the Initiative most of time, and was able to send out a number of Star deployments, making it difficult for Juriele to respond. Yes, Juriele was able to alter the strength of solo minions you

deployed from time to time, and he even managed to change the environmental battlefield effectively. But the sheer numbers from your star deployments over-ran the opponent by the seventh turn, and Darius delivered the victory blow on the eleventh turn by defeating a Skilled Scout of the Red Cloak with a brilliant move. Heather also noticed you had relied mainly on offensive 'Issue' and 'Bury' type spells for this duel, which complemented the star deployment strategy well.

"Well done, young tactician" – Juriele began. This is only the third duel I have lost since setting foot in Torpann, and I must have had so far, a dozen battles? You would not have stood a chance if I had increased my spell selection." The renegade said this almost matter-of-factly, with a tinge of condescending attitude in his tone. Yet something tells you that he was probably telling the truth. "Since this was to be a purely 'Alter' type battle, I thought it was quite interesting you countered the tactics fairly well. Instead of using 'Negate' and 'Disallow' type tactics against my 'Alter' spells as most tacticians would have deployed, you chose to go on the offensive. That's a good strategy, and I commend you for that." Juriele reached into his cloak and handed you a smooth Blue Gem. "There, show this to Master Skeentip, the emblem of your victory. Now, be gone lad."

Heather noted how Juriele had so nonchalantly 'dismissed' you and gotten back to his minions, who though defeated, did not portray a defeatist attitude. That impressed her – and she mentally made a note that mercenaries could be a useful asset for the future, in battles that would truly matter." Heather saw you had thanked Juriele for the duel, as one tactician to another – and Darius had taken over command of the minion section, mending the slight wounds sustained during the battle – nothing serious. The minion section would be ready for battle after noon today, and Heather was delighted that there would be more action in a few hours time. And she was right.

Darius barked instructions to the minion section as we made our way eastwards towards our next battle-spot. Heather mused that it took only one hour after the quick meal-break around noon to track down Cidrus, renegade tactician of the 'Negate' tactics. Unlike Juriele, Cidrus made no small talk, did not spare a minute for us to form up, and took care to retain Initiative as much as he could. Tall, bald, and clean shaven, Cidrus was intense and methodically in his attack. Heather saw you were on the defensive most of the time. This was because any spell you had thrown at Cidrus were quickly negated, so it was clear from the onset that to win this battle, you had to rely on the minions much more than in the previous battle. As Cidrus often held the battle initiative, you had little chance to deploy the

Star deployments as before as well. Turns out, luck was on your side after the tenth turn. Just when Heather thought it was all over for you, Cidrus switched to using Duo after ‘negating’ the star deployments. That proved fatal to Cidrus. Since he had already deployed his Adepts and stronger minions previously, he was left with a number of novices. Although Darius had been successful in a previous turn, he cannot be re-deployed from the Victory ‘pile’. Fortunately, you still have several master rangers and master scouts in your ranks. Exchanging blow for blow, and throwing out the spell-based approach, you fought the Initiative back and took out Cidrus eventually by deploying a Duo of Master Scouts in the final turn. Heather nodded in appreciation. She could see Cidrus fuming in anger. After all, he still had his Red Master Warrior in his rank. But he could not be deployed as the Battle Mode remained ‘Duo’ from turn ten onwards... Excellent luck, Heather concluded. She saw that you were overcome with fatigue, and still in a daze. She took it upon herself to saunter towards Cidrus to demand the Victory Insignia, and received for her efforts – a Red Gem. She walked over, offered you a hand and kissing you on the forehead, she mumbled something about being she being the Lady Luck for you and handed you the emblem.

“Well done – but it is my turn tomorrow. I too, will need to win before the team is considered victorious.” Heather reminded. “Will you accompany me to my battles?” she offered. Just then Darius marched over, and suggested we head back to Torpann before dark falls, as the section is not really in a state to encounter the ‘random’ encounters that frequently occurred when dusk came. Given the injuries some of the minions have sustained from these two duels, it was essential to get the wounds treated back at the Adventurer’s Lodge. Heather regained her joyful disposition almost immediately. Going back to her interest, the red-cloaked Scout – she was chatty all the way back to camp – which cheered the minions, and playfully – she offered to recruit any of Darius minions the next time she needed a section for her quests. You grumbled. Heather always beats you to it – gaining access to people’s hearts.

Night came and went. You had a concussive sleep with fleeting images from the duels of the day. Master Skeentip had congratulated you heartily on your victories. Flubus, Gareth, Sunil have amongst them won four battles today and in two days, Heather would have gone through her duels and if all goes well, the five of you would become the first team to defeat the ‘TENBADSIRS’ – a great start to your Tactician careers!

Word had gone around that your team, now nicknamed ‘Skeen-Tacts’ stood a chance at being *THE* team to be make it first into the Fair proper, and some townsfolk had chosen to

follow your team-mates and witnessing the remaining duels. With six battles won within a day, the remaining four would be closely watched – and Heather would be helming two battles today. You had no doubt in your mind Heather would emerge victorious. Her seemingly casual approach belies her fierce strategies, and as you correctly predicted, both her opponents were totally taken aback at her intensity of her never-ending attacks. Her stamina was commendable, and you thought she would best you in a long-drawn duel. Heather summarily dispatched and disarmed her opponents with her well-balanced spell-deck, specially designed against single tactic-type opponents. She dueled well, and received a Yellow Gem and a Green Gem, which she kept carefully in her front pouch, gleaming with satisfaction.

The sound of mugs clanging and rowdy cheers filled the air at Errand's Inn, the de-facto place to stay for sojourners in Torpann. Not a day goes by where Torpann does not find a cause for celebrations, and the bar in Errand's Inn opens only after dusk – and the whole town gathers to get drunk. What's more, since the war started, this is one of the few times where the town roundly rallied behind a cause. The Torpann Guild of Tacticians came out rather well. This week, three teams managed to defeat the 'TENBADSIRS' renegades (many more failed of course), and the ten of them have since returned to report back to one of the Dragonlords. No doubt Queen Morgana now has a good idea as to the abilities of the Torpann tacticians, and therefore what it takes to over-run this stubborn bastion called Torpann. For Gareth, all that mattered was that he is now one-step closer to being offered full membership in the Guild. Of the five, Gareth's motivation had been the most obvious and consistent. Sunil, ale in hand – could almost hear Gareth's thoughts this very moment. Gareth the knightly tactician, sporting a moustache, no beard, blue eyes, short light brown hair and always in chain armor during battles using Trap and Relic-based tactics, sees himself in time to become a Royal Tactician, commanding the knights of Camelot in tactics-battles. For Sunil, however – this journey is a much simpler undertaking. Sunil – the sharp nose, tall and dark fighter known to his peers as Sunil the Dark (some wonder if it is a derogatory term or a description of his disposition), is one of the best magic-based tactician in the cohort. Sunil will lend his tactics to the highest bidder, Arthurian or otherwise.

Somewhere in this fairly large Inn, some drunken patron is looking to start a brawl. Some are flirting openly with the 'wenches of Torpann'. Flubus and Heather are sitting somewhere, seemingly engaged in some deep conversation that only they can understand. Flubus, the 'Spiritist' of the five – a connoisseur of Spirit-based tactics, sporting long brown-red hair

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