

BAILIWICK NEWS UNDERGROUND

Political Satire, Allegory and Parody for Centre County Citizens

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Once upon a time, but not all that long ago, and in a land not very far away, there lived a puppet king named Barrick of Earron.

King Barrick and his Council of Advisors ruled the Kingdom of Shitney Mountain from inside Castle Olde Main, surrounded by the tall trees and thick, dark foliage of the Forest of Secrecy.

Outside the Forest of Secrecy, in the valley below the castle on Mount Shitney, was a cluster of villages. Most of the adult villagers toiled under the mountain, carving elaborate tunnels and maintaining broad support pillars to hold up the mountain and the castle above. Many of the other villagers cared for the tunnel toilers and their families: preparing food, cleaning clothes, healing the sick, tending the children, repairing the homes.

The tunnels were used to import and export the kingdom's main cash crop: young scholars who would pay King Barrick thousands of ducats over four or five years, and in exchange for their ducats and time in the tunnels, King Barrick would give them a certificate of participation.

Foot traffic through the tunnels was heavy, but foot traffic through the forest was light. A few emissaries from inside the castle keep occasionally made their way out through the forest, to the surrounding villages, and a few villagers were sometimes invited into the castle for special events.

In some ways, the system worked well. The tunnels were generally well-carved and the young scholars came from far and wide to wander the limestone halls and talk with each other and with the villagers who forged new paths and maintained old ones. The villagers were, for the most part, well-fed and well-sheltered in their homes in the valley.

But as the years passed, the tunnels became more crowded and cramped. Oftentimes the young scholars lost their way and the villagers couldn't find the lost ones to guide them back. Many of the youths spent hours inebriated with the Elixir of Oblivion, to dull the pains of loneliness and lostness.

The villagers began to struggle to find new sections of the mountain to carve, and their tools became worn, broken and scarce. The pillars holding up the mountain began to crumble at the foundations, and while the skills and materials needed to repair them were generally available, the Forest of Secrecy made it all but impossible for the villagers to get the attention of the King and his counselors to replace the tools and plan repairs.

In many of the most powerful ways, the upper realm and lower realm were separated as if by thousands of miles.

It was not always thus.

Some of the old folks, who had lived in the villages for many decades, could remember a time when the forest was still young and sun-dappled and the King of Mount Shitney had a consort: the wise and beautiful Queen Integra.

In those days, Queen Integra moved freely between the castle and the villages, and inside the halls under the mountain. She had a voracious appetite for attentive listening to the needs and concerns of all the people who lived in the land, and great skill in communicating differing views across chasms of misunderstanding.

But sometime just at the edge of living memory, everything changed. The King and his Council of Advisors became entranced with piling up ducats, and building monuments to each other, and the balance of power between rulers and ruled that had mutually benefitted so many for so long, fell into neglect and ruin.

Queen Integra objected at first, reminding the King and the counselors that their fates were intertwined with those of the villagers and the scholars. The King and counselors, unable to ignore her while she moved and listened and spoke freely, finally imprisoned her in a small stone cell in a tall tower, with only a slit opening through which she could see the sky.

In vain, the villagers looked for Queen Integra to make her rounds. Weeks turned into months, which turned into years, and she didn't appear, and the Forest of Secrecy around the castle grew taller and denser, and they gave up looking for her. Until one day...