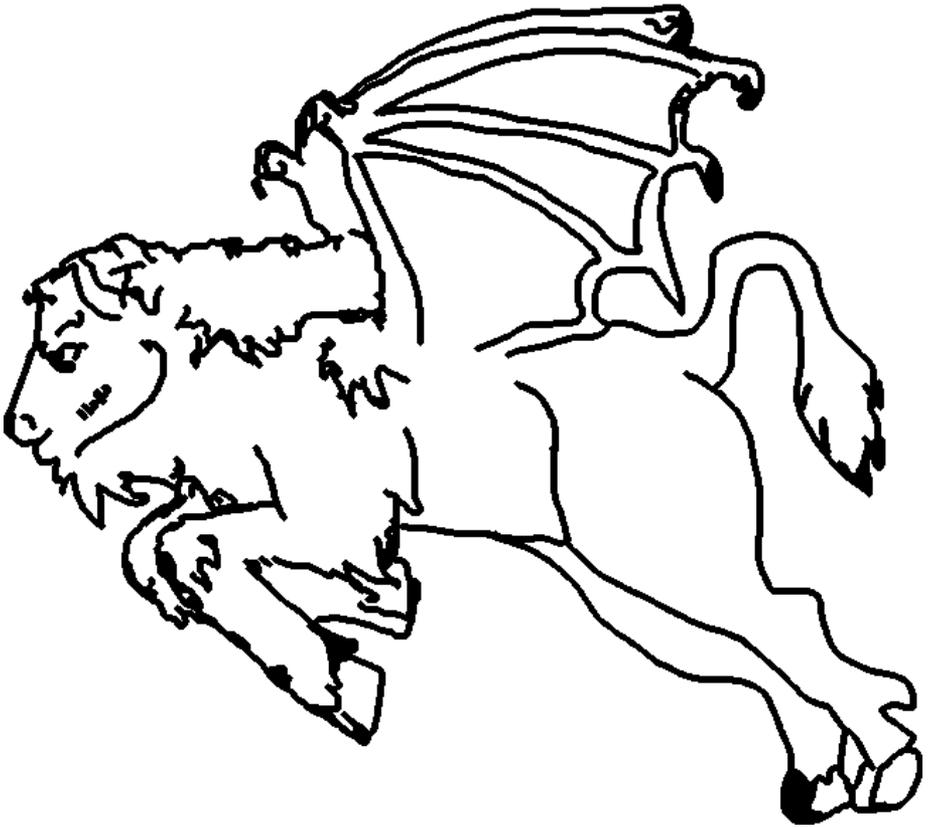


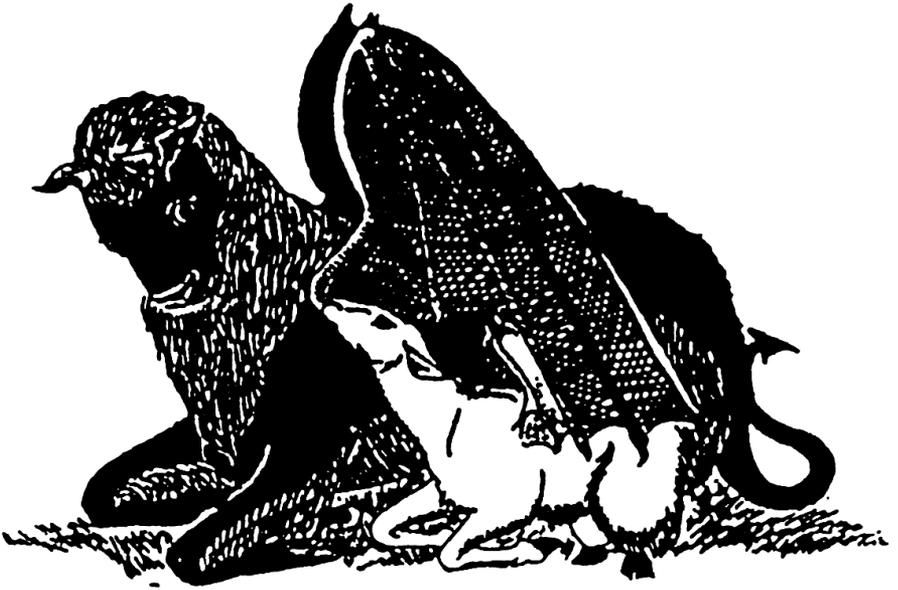
THE LEGEND OF
ARGENT
THE SILVER DEMOBISON



BY STEVEN IRONHAND
ILLUSTRATED BY BRANWYNN CONMAIGNE
(A PARABLE OF ROBERT SARTOR VAN PEYS-BAS)

Some skeptics may wonder how a great, fierce beast like the Demobison could have been chosen as the emblem of Calontir's AOA-level Arts Order. The answer to this question lies in a collection of petrified clay tablets that was recently unearthed from a deposit of archaic fewmets. It is my pleasure and honor to present in these pages the story found therein, which I have painstakingly transcribed over a period of many months.

Here beginneth the Tale of *Argent. The Silver Demobison.*

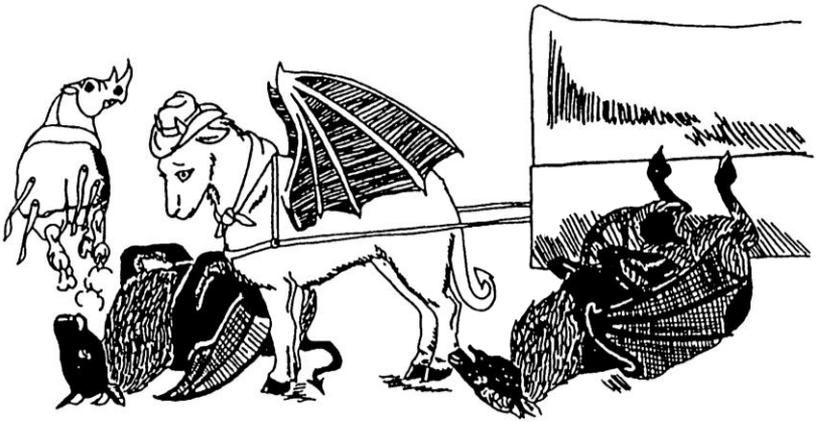


Know, O King, that there was an age undreamed of, when Demobison were so numerous that their vast herds darkened the skies of Calontir with night-black wings, and plowed up the plains with iron hooves.

On a fine spring morning in that age, it came to pass that an elderly Demobison dam, almost past her fertile years, gave birth to a sport, a freak among Demobisons. For this calf, instead of being black, with fire-red eyes, blood-red horns, and rust-red hooves, as was normal for Demobisons, was entirely white, except for his gentle blue eyes. The mother, striving to hide her shame behind a proud front, named him "Argent."



As Argent grew up, it became apparent that, aside from his peculiar coloration, he was ...well ... different from the other Demobisons. Instead of subsisting on the normal Demobison diet of mountain lions, grizzly bears, and wolverines, he preferred to dine on *coq au vin*, *trout almondine*, *duck a l'orange*, and *broccoli hollandaise*. Instead of sniffing skunks, he would sniff flowers. Instead of engaging in rough-and- tumble Demobison pastimes such as tying empty ale kegs to the tail of a mountain lion, or playing pin-the-tail-on-the-rhinoceros. Argent devoted himself to artistic pursuits! He made costumes, did embroidery, practiced calligraphy and illumination, wrote poetry, played the violin, composed music, and engaged in other such unDemobison-like activities. Needless to say, the other young Demobisons regarded Argent as a figure of fun, referring to him as an "artsy type," or a "970-pound weakling."



Argent, however, stoically ignored such gaucheries, for he knew that Fate had singled him out for a higher destiny. After several years of honing his skills, he felt himself ready to reveal the fruits of his labor to an unsuspecting world. He would take the products of his talents to the Pennsic War, there to enter the great Pennsic Arts Pentathalon. He had amassed far too great a collection of art objects to carry on his back flying, or even walking, so he constructed a covered wagon, designed to protect the collection from the elements, and, lastly, made himself a broad-brimmed hat, for protection from the sun on the long trek to Pennsic.

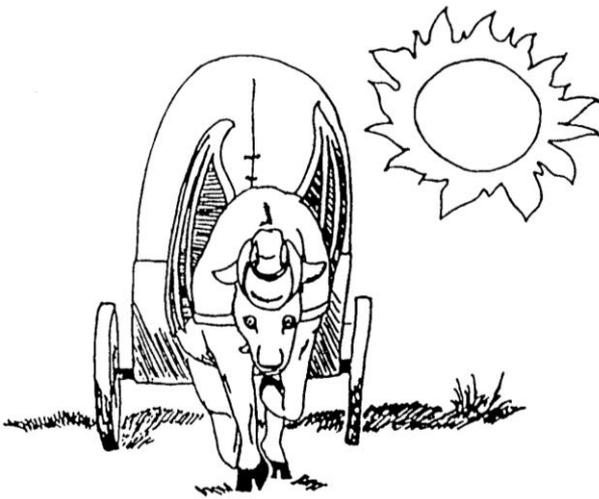
And so, one day in early August, when Argent's acquaintances (they would never have admitted to being his friends!) were playing a game of pin-the-tail-on-the-rhinoceros, they looked up from their fun to behold an incredible sight! There was Argent, trudging across the plains, pulling a covered wagon behind him and wearing a tall-crowned, broad-brimmed leather hat.

"Hey. Wimp!" one of them called, "where you goin' with that contraption?"

"To Pennsic War." answered Argent politely (for he always behaved with impeccable courtesy, regardless of the scorn heaped on him by his fellows).

"Pennsic War!" hooted another of the Demobisons. "You don't even fight!"

"It is my intention." replied Argent with great dignity, "to enter the Pennsic Arts Pentathalon."



"Pennsic Arts Pentathlon! Haw, haw haw!" Gasping and wheezing with laughter, the Demobisons rolled on their backs helplessly, allowing the rhinoceros to run away and hide in the confusion. (tr. note: This is the origin of the little-known and even less often sung verse to the Coeur de Boeuf Challenge Song: "O, the Rhinoceri of Calontir got no Tail!")

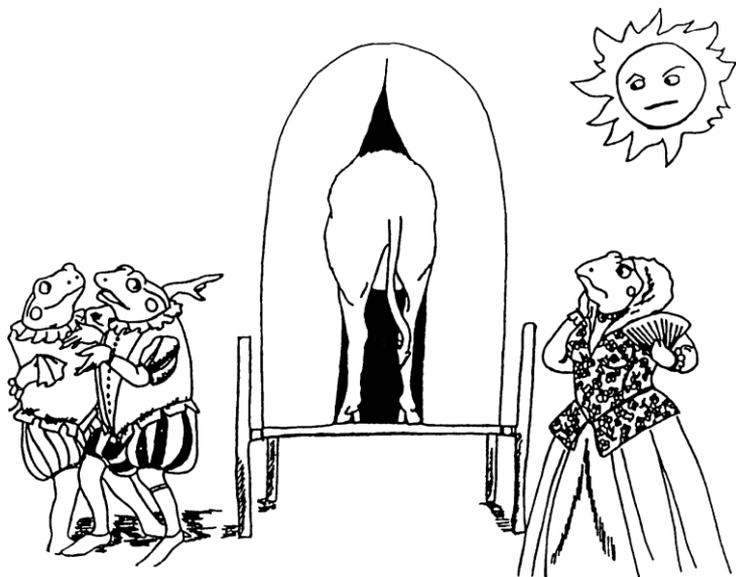
One of the Demobisons still had enough breath to speak. "But, it's still two weeks 'till Pennsic. Why not fly up the night before like the rest of us?"

"I have too many entries to carry by myself. so I will walk all the way to Pennsic, pulling them in this wagon." replied Argent.

"You sure got a lot o' guts for a wimp!" chuckled the Demobison, beginning to snort and chortle like his comrades.

And with the laughter of his cousins echoing in his ears, Argent trundled eastward.

Long and arduous was that journey. Over hills, in and out of valleys, through sun and rain and marsh and desert he trekked. Whenever he came to a river that was too deep to ford, he flew his entries across, one at a time, then went back, disassembled the wagon, and flew it across piece by piece, and laboriously reassembled it on the far side. He hadn't anticipated the river crossing problem, and the only way to keep from falling hopelessly behind schedule was to travel by night as well as by day. But, drawing upon his vast reserves of Demobison stamina, he pressed on.



Finally, fifteen days after his departure. Argent arrived at the site of Pennsic War, gaunt, haggard, and 300 pounds thinner.

After asking directions, he went straight to the area where the Arts Pentathlon was to be judged, under the auspices of an interkingdom consortium of Frogs. Some of the ordinary Demobisons, who had of course, flown in the night before, gathered around to see what would happen to Argent.

"Is this where the Arts Pentathlon is being judged?" he asked. "Mais oui!" replied the Premier Frog. "But, je regret to inform you, mon ami, that you are too late. The entries were cut off a half hour ago."

"A half hour!" cried Argent. "But I've been pulling this wagon for fifteen days, all the way from Calontir!"

"Quelle tragique!" exclaimed the Frog. "But that is the way the crepe crinkles, as they say."

One of the other frogs, however, surveying the sweaty, dirty, travel-stained young Demobison in his funny hat, and the dusty, travel-scarred wagon, took pity of Argent, or perhaps saw a way to score free generosity points, or perhaps was influenced by ominous rumblings from the watching Demobisons, who were resentful at seeing one of their own getting the shaft, even if he was peculiar. At any rate, for whatever reason, she spoke up, voicing those now-famous words: "Oh, let the Bison Boy in. What harm can it do?"

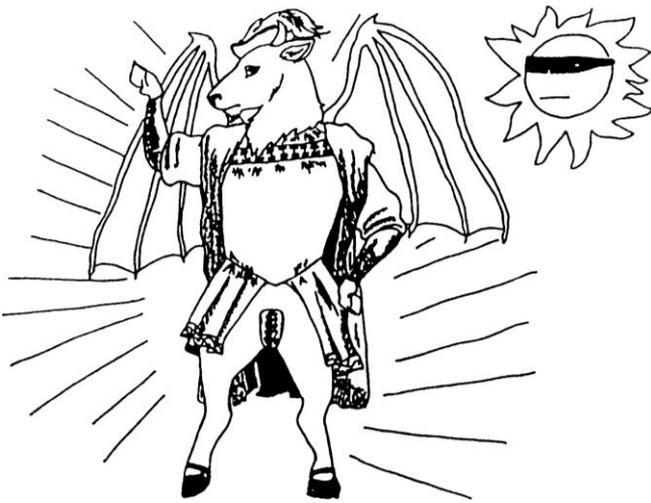


"Oh thank you, thank you! It will only take me a few minutes to get my entries ready."

And with that, Argent disappeared into his wagon, where he quickly made some alterations in his contest garb, to compensate for his 300-pound weight loss.

A few minutes later, the frogs were suddenly dazzled by supernal splendor as Argent trod forth from his wagon, clothed in excruciatingly authentic Tudor garb of pure white satin and velvet, trimmed with snowy ermine, embroidered in white and silver thread, encrusted with diamonds and topaz (for a spot of color, don't you know), white leather gloves and slippers, and a white hat with a pure white plume. The frogs gaped in stupefied awe, their froggy tongues hanging all the way to the ground as Argent made seemingly endless trips between his wagon and the display tables, setting out his embroidery, his calligraphy and illumination, his poetry, his hand-made violin, his hand-made lace bobbins, his lace, his hand-spun and hand-dyed fabrics made on his hand-made spinning wheel, and so and so forth, etcetera, ad infinitum.

Well, when the judging was over and tabulated, Argent had won forty-three first prizes, twenty-one second prizes, and two third prizes. (Actually, the statistics were somewhat confused, as Argent had tied with himself for first place in some of the events.) Needless to say, Argent was the overall winner, and was declared Champion of the Pentathalon. Meanwhile, the Demobisons were nudging the other spectators and saying things like, "He's one of us, you know." and "We knew he had it in him!"



That evening, as the Demobisons were getting ready for the post-revel, they discovered Argent hitching himself to his wagon. 'What do you think you're doing?' they asked. "Come and party with us at the post-revel!"

"No," replied Argent. "I need to get an early start for home. After all, it's a fifteen-day trip for me."

"No way!" said the Demobisons. "You're brought honor and glory to the race of Demobisons! You're a credit to Calontir! We'll all help you carry your stuff back, and you can fly home with the rest of us."

And so, with each Demobison carrying one of Argent's entries, they all flew home together, leaving the wagon behind at Pennsic. Indeed, with the Demobisons all vying for the honor of carrying one of Argent's entries, there was nothing left for him to carry; so, being the lightest, he led the flock home.

When word spread of Argent's triumph, the Royal Falcon, supreme Bird of Calontir, summoned Argent forward in Court, and decreed that an Arts Order would be named after him, in honor of the fame he had brought to Calontir. Furthermore, he appointed Argent to the Office of Kingdom Minister of Arts.

As for the other Demobisons, when they saw the honors that Argent had gleaned, and especially when they saw how the female Demobisons flocked around him to ask his advice about costuming, they decided that maybe there was something to this artsy stuff after all, and quite a few Demobisons began to take up artistic pursuits.

And that is how an Arts Award Order came to be named after a Demobison.



So endeth the tale of Argent, the Silver Demobison as translated and recounted by Master Stephen Ironhand, Baron Three Rivers, and illustrated by his lady, Branwynn Conmaigne.