

The Silver Hmá

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Introduction

Every month, a fortune in military payroll passes through the Palace of War in Khirgár to pay the salaries of the tens of thousands of soldiers in Daikán province. Most of this payroll comes in the form of assayed silver ingots as a precaution against counterfeiting. Each ingot is impressed with the appropriate hallmarks and official stamps indicating its origin, value, and provenance. Those ingots bound for Khirgár bear the hallmark of a small Hmá (a six-legged sheep-like animal), for reasons lost to the history of the silver-smithing clans that prepare them for the Imperial government.

A few days ago, four of these silver ingots was stolen from one of the crates in the treasury of the Palace of War. This astonishing crime was only discovered by a surprise audit instituted by the new head of accounts (Visán hiSérekel, a clever and ambitious official of the Black Hood clan). Since there are one hundred and twenty-eight identical crates in the treasury, Visán assumes that many of the other crates have been similarly reduced. After all, if someone is going to rob an Imperial treasury, they would hardly take just four ingots. Consequently, a small fortune in silver may have been stolen.

Dismantling the crates (which are large and ponderous), unpacking the silver, weighing and counting the ingots is very time consuming. Weeks could pass before the full extent of the theft is known. This event has paralyzed the payment system of the military, a grave misfortune during these times of war with Yán Kór. Unfortunately, no monies can be disbursed until every ingot has been accounted for. There is serious concern among the local bureaucracy, as negligence can bear the same penalty as collusion when it comes to Imperial crimes. The penalty for theft from an Imperial treasury is, of course, death by impalement.

Among those who will suffer most seriously because of this theft is your clan-cousin Sánjesh, the son of your clanmaster in Khirgár. Sánjesh is the Comptroller of the Palace of War. Not only is he the man with the most opportunity to have stolen the ingots (as he has ready access to the storehouses where the crates are kept), but he is also the official with the most immediate responsibility for the distribution of funds to the soldiery of Khirgár. Innocent or not, Sánjesh is in great danger of taking the “high ride” on an impaler’s stake. Moreover, as son of your clanmaster, his implication in this dishonorable crime affects the standing of the entire clan.

Referee’s Information

The stolen silver is already out of Khirgár. The real thief is a disgruntled Tirrikámu from the Legion of Gusha the Khirgári, Mridak hiVridi of the Sword of Fire clan. Mridak has extensive local knowledge and was on guard at the treasury until rotated out last week.

Motivation: Mridok has been passed over for promotion once too often. He believes his support for Prince Mírusíya has been viewed with suspicion among the officials of the Palace of War, many of whom support Eselné instead. Furthermore, his intended bride, Nalái, of the Golden Sunburst clan, was given to Sánjesh rather than himself because of his lack of professional success. He has now decided to engage in a large-scale vendetta against those whom he perceives as having blocked his advancement and happiness, especially Sánjesh. This is not about money; it is about destroying those Mridok believes responsible for his present situation. Because no one is certain when the theft took place, the oft-replaced guards are under less suspicion. Investigators from the Omnipotent Azure Legion as well as outsiders assume that such a theft would require an insider with time and opportunity, not merely a guard who was present at a rare accident.

Circumstances: Mridok was present five nights ago when a crate was damaged while being hauled from one part of the storehouse to another. As a matter of regulations, the crate had to be replaced immediately. Consequently, he used this rare occurrence (and his rank) to filch four ingots from the crate. Every other crate in the treasury is perfectly fine; no major fraud has been perpetrated.

Because of extreme nature of the storehouse’s security arrangements (military guards, stone walls, narrow doors, no windows) and the sheer mass of the ingots presumably stolen, investigators are baffled. How could such a huge crime have been pulled off without anyone knowing?

Lines of Investigation

The characters may attempt to interview every member of the guard detail. To do this will take days as there are over sixty such soldiers. Three of the soldiers (plus Mridok) will be unavailable at their clanhouse, since they have left Khirgár on leave.

Unless the characters have a significant contact in the Palace of War, they will probably not be allowed to enter the storehouse. Should they find a way in, however, they will find that none of the crates is less than in perfect condition. Thus, there is no visible sign of anything unusual.

Should they poke around the Palace of War, they will come across two other small details. The first is that a slave laborer named Zála is nursing a wound on his left arm. He will explain that he injured himself while re-packing a crate five nights ago. Should the characters care to investigate, there is a document in the records office attesting to this (standard procedure again). Its veracity is attested to by the commander of the guard detail, none other than Mridok of the Sword of Fire clan!

Mridok’s Escape Plan

Mridak is not to be found at the Sword of Fire clanhouse. He is on leave from his military duties (nothing unusual about that) and has gone hunting in the badlands north of Khirgár. He took with him three clan-brothers (Mottán, No’ómu, and Gayán) as well as four slaves and two Rényu.

The terrain in the badlands is rocky and barren with an extensive network of sandstone canyons. Mridok intends to slip away from his clan-brothers in the night and bury the ingots. His clan-brothers have no idea that he is doing this and would, in fact, be quite displeased with such ignoble behavior.

Mridok may be a thief, but he is no coward. If attacked, he will defend himself and will not hesitate to use his clan-brothers and slaves to help him. If he is about to be captured, he will attempt to kill himself by jumping into a canyon, so as to prevent the characters from fully exonerating Sánjesh.

Possible Complications

There are Milumanayáni tribesmen and Yán Koryáni scouts in the badlands.

Wild life may be hunting the characters are they are hunting Mridok. Flash flood.

Resolution

If the characters retrieve both the silver and Mridok, they will be heroes and will get both official recognition and a lot of goodwill from the affected parties. If the characters bring back only the silver, there will remain some doubt as to whether Mridok was working alone. This result could make the Sword of Fire clan look as if they were complicit in this affair, something that could give the characters a long-term enemy in Khirgár.

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