



**WICKED FANTASY**

**companion**

**Written by John Wick**

**Designed by Gillian Fraser**

Written by **John Wick**

Designed by **Gillian Fraser**

Based on Articles by **Jesse Heinig** and **John Wick**

Produced by **Mark Diaz Truman**

Graphic Design and Cover by **Jessica Kauspedas**

Special Thanks to our Guest Designers: **Ben Mandall, Dan Dillon, Stephen Rowe** and **Steve Helt**

"Broken Bonds" by **Matt Forbeck**

Dungeon World Conversion by **Sage LaTorra, Adam Koebel**

Savage Worlds Conversion by **Joel Sparks**

©2013 by John Wick. Used by Permission. No part of this book may be reproduced without explicit permission from the author. Unless specifically stated, all persons and places and events in this book are fictional and do not resemble actual persons, places or events.

**[www.johnwickpresents.com](http://www.johnwickpresents.com)**

# Contents

<b>The Courage of Tamyn Taval</b> .....	<b>1</b>		
Part One:	6 .....	40	
Shy and Tam .....	2	7 .....	43
1 .....	2	8 .....	48
2 .....	5		
3 .....	7	Part Three	
4 .....	9	Caphin Village.....	53
5 .....	11	1 .....	53
6 .....	13	2 .....	59
7 .....	15	3 .....	61
Part Two		4 .....	66
The Courage.....	20	5 .....	69
1 .....	20	Part Four	
2 .....	24	Soulcrusher .....	71
3 .....	27	1 .....	71
4 .....	32	2 .....	74
5 .....	35	Afterward.....	82

<b>Love Beyond Death</b> .....	<b>85</b>		
Overview .....	87	<i>Scene 3: Gallan's Home</i> .....	103
Acts & Scenes .....	88	<i>Scene 4: King Rat</i> .....	104
<i>Lady Chance's Courage</i> .....	89	<i>Scene 5: The Plate and Key</i> .....	106
Introduction: The Courage.....	91	<i>Scene 6: Reclaiming the Name</i> .....	108
<i>Available Resources</i> .....	93	<b>Act 3: The Iron-Bound Courtesan</b> .....	109
Act 1: The Village of Skyvale .....	94	<i>Scene 1: The Red Rope</i> .....	109
<i>Scene 1: The First Murder</i> .....	94	<i>Scene 2: The Spy</i> .....	110
<i>Scene 2: The Laboratory</i> .....	97	<i>Scene 3: The Senator</i> .....	112
<i>Scene 3: The Widow</i> .....	97	<i>Scene 4: The Vampire</i> .....	113
Act 2: The Butler's Name .....	100	<b>Act 4: The Fallen Palatine</b> .....	116
<i>Scene 1: The Flame and Lion</i> .....	100	<i>Scene 1: The Office of the Palatines</i> .....	116
<i>Scene 2: Gallan's Bakery</i> .....	102	<i>Scene 2: The Nowhere Inn</i> .....	118

<i>Scene 3: Saving Silveste</i> .....	119	<i>Androit Benjong</i> .....	134
<i>Scene 4: The Holly Juff</i> .....	119	<i>Bakery Door Scythe Trap</i> .....	134
<i>Scene 5: Showdown in the Holly Juff</i> .....	121	<i>City Watchman</i> .....	135
<b>Act 5: The Tomb</b> .....	124	<i>King Rat's thugs</i> .....	136
<i>Scene 1: Arrival</i> .....	124	<i>Concealed Drawer Needle Trap</i> .....	136
<i>Scene 2: A Room of Ghosts</i> .....	126	<i>Bastards (4)</i> .....	137
<i>Scene 3: The Trap</i> .....	127	<i>Senator Vikkers</i> .....	137
<i>Scene 4: The Truth</i> .....	128	<i>Alessio, Bastard leader</i> .....	138
<i>Scene 5: Covetous</i> .....	129	<i>Elite City Watch</i> .....	139
<i>Scene 6: The Sacrifice</i> .....	130	<i>Ashivaeyr Mezzet</i> .....	140
<i>Scene 8: The Dragon's Tear</i> .....	131	<i>Reginald Crane</i> .....	141
<b>NPC List</b> .....	133	<i>Sam Yffur</i> .....	142
<i>Scoundrels (3)</i> .....	133	<i>The Estvere Vampire</i> .....	144

## **Archetypes, Prestige Classes & Racial Traits ..... 149**

<b>Humans</b> .....	150	<b>Fighter Archetype: <i>Gorddluydeae</i></b> .....	164
<b>Bard Archetype:</b>		<b>Gnolls</b> .....	166
<i>Senator</i> .....	150	<b>Ranger Archetype:</b>	
<b>Ranger Archetype:</b>		<i>Tachba</i> .....	166
<i>Roadman</i> .....	150	<b>Wizard Archetype: <i>Or'gakash</i></b> .....	167
<b>Sorcerer Archetype:</b>		<b>Prestige Class:</b>	
<i>The Arcane Order of the Shepherd</i> .....	151	<i>Bach</i> .....	168
<b>Haffuns</b> .....	153	<b>Gnomes</b> .....	170
<b>Barbarian Archetype:</b>		<b>New Gnome Occupation: <i>Cannibal</i></b> .	170
<i>Wilpa</i> .....	153	<b>New Gnome Region:</b>	
<b>Wizard Archetype: <i>House Mage</i></b> .....	153	<i>Parks and Gardens</i> .....	170
<b>Butler Alternate Class:</b>		<b>Oracle Curse: <i>Sympathetic Healer</i></b> .....	170
<i>Feltura (The Fallen Butler)</i> .....	154	<b>Rogue Archetype:</b>	
<b>Orks</b> .....	159	<i>Arbeith</i> .....	171
<b>Antipaladin Archetype: <i>Thravdu</i></b> .....	159	<b>Gobowins</b> .....	172
<b>Paladin Archetype: <i>Herald of the End</i></b> .	160	<b>Bard Archetype:</b>	
<b>Ranger Archetype: <i>Feth'Ork Master</i></b> ...	161	<i>Nanna</i> .....	172
<b>Elves</b> .....	162	<b>Fighter Archetype:</b>	
<b>Barbarian Archetype: <i>Syventhall</i></b> .....	162	<i>Bannaw</i> .....	173
<b>Bard Archetype:</b>		<b>Wizard Archetype: <i>The Footha</i></b> .....	173
<i>Llurwen</i> .....	163		

New Focused Arcane School: <i>Shifting Luck</i> . . . . .	174	Prestige Class: <i>Thesall</i> . . . . .	184
Uvandar . . . . .	175	Uz: The Enemy . . . . .	186
Bard Archetype: <i>The Instrumentalist</i> . . . . .	175	<i>Creatures of Dim Water</i> . . . . .	187
Fighter Archetype: <i>Miner</i> . . . . .	175	<i>A Labyrinth of Tyranny</i> . . . . .	188
Ranger Archetype: <i>Carpenter</i> . . . . .	176	<i>The Slaves</i> . . . . .	189
Roddun . . . . .	178	<i>A Silent Revolt</i> . . . . .	191
New Racial Trait: <i>Tsituk</i> . . . . .	178	<i>Uz Subservient</i> . . . . .	191
Fighter Archetype: <i>Tkisk</i> . . . . .	179	<i>Adon'de'nadoi</i> . . . . .	192
Oracle Mystery: <i>Gemstones</i> . . . . .	180	<i>Kasz'h'nek</i> . . . . .	194
Kuba-Chubisi . . . . .	182	<i>The Hunger</i> . . . . .	195
Bard Archetype: <i>Sheshen</i> . . . . .	182	<i>Uz Sovereign</i> . . . . .	196
Wizard Archetype: <i>Nuabltec</i> . . . . .	183	Hassja: The Whispering Darkness . . . . .	199
New Focused Arcane School: <i>Antimagic</i> . . . . .	183	<i>The Highest Priority</i> . . . . .	200
		<i>The Knowledge Family</i> . . . . .	201
		<i>The Life of a Hassja</i> . . . . .	202
		<i>Hassja, Spawn</i> . . . . .	205
		<i>Hassja, Young Adult</i> . . . . .	206
		<i>Hassja, Adult</i> . . . . .	207
		<i>Hassja, Ancient</i> . . . . .	208

## Wicked Fantasy: Savaged Races . . . . . 211

Uvandar:		Gnolls (Dach'you): Runners by	
Don't Call Them Dwarves . . . . .	214	Moonlight . . . . .	220
<i>Savage Worlds Racial Traits</i> . . . . .	214	<i>Savage Worlds Racial Traits</i> . . . . .	220
<i>Uvandar Moods</i> . . . . .	215	<i>Moon Signs</i> . . . . .	220
<i>New Edge</i> . . . . .	216	<i>Pack Leaders</i> . . . . .	221
Elves:		<i>New Edges</i> . . . . .	221
Tree, Soil, Iron, and Dark . . . . .	217	Gnomes:	
<i>Savage Worlds Racial Traits</i> . . . . .	217	Adapted to Anything . . . . .	222
<i>Half-elf</i> (dzunkaveth) . . . . .	217	<i>Savage Worlds traits</i> . . . . .	222
<i>Heritage</i> . . . . .	218	<i>Regional Adaptations</i> . . . . .	222
<i>Soil Bound Elves</i> . . . . .	218	<i>New Edges</i> . . . . .	223
<i>Iron Bound Elves</i> . . . . .	218	Gobowins:	
<i>New Edges</i> . . . . .	219	Fortune's Thralls . . . . .	224

<i>Savage Worlds Racial Traits</i> .....	224
<i>New Edges</i> .....	225
<b>Haffuns:</b>	
<b>Keepers of the House</b> .....	227
<i>Savage Worlds Racial Traits</i> .....	227
<i>Haffun Families</i> .....	227
<i>New Edges</i> .....	229
<b>Humans:</b>	
<b>The Reign of Men</b> .....	231
<i>Savage Worlds Racial Traits</i> .....	231
<i>THE CITIES OF MEN</i> .....	232
<i>New Edges</i> .....	232
<b>Kuba-Chubisi:</b>	
<b>Hidden Immortals</b> .....	234

<i>Savage Worlds Racial Traits</i> .....	234
<i>New Edge</i> .....	235
<b>Orks:</b>	
<b>Blood of the Gods</b> .....	236
<i>Savage Worlds Racial Traits</i> .....	236
<i>Divine Heritage</i> .....	237
<i>New Edges</i> .....	237
<b>Roddun:</b>	
<b>Guardians of the Streets</b> .....	240
<i>Savage Worlds Traits</i> .....	240
<i>Roddun Reputation</i> .....	240
<i>Roddun In The Cities Of Men</i> .....	241
<i>New Edges</i> .....	241

## **Dungeon World..... 243**

<b>Humans</b> .....	244
<i>Coming Home</i> .....	244
<i>Home Cities</i> .....	244
<i>New Human Cleric: The Philosopher</i> .....	245
<i>New Human Paladin: The Palatine</i> .....	250
<b>Haffuns</b> .....	252
<i>Custom Move: Ghuva, the Giving Curse</i> .....	252
<i>Haffun Race Moves</i> .....	252
<b>Orks</b> .....	255
<i>Compendium Class: Gathrak</i> .....	256
<i>Bard Change: Fala</i> .....	256
<i>Ranger Changes: The Feth'ork Bond</i> .....	258
<i>Cleric Change: Shathula, The Cult of Pain</i> .....	258
<b>Elves</b> .....	259
<i>Custom Move: The Iron Binding</i> .....	259
<i>Compendium Class: Durzhab</i> .....	260
<i>Compendium Class: Heart-Bound</i> .....	260
<b>Dach'youn</b> .....	262
<i>Thief Changes: Eecha</i> .....	262

<i>Fighter Changes: Grrkbun</i> .....	263
<i>Ranger Changes: Shu'sha</i> .....	263
<i>Wizard Changes: Owoun</i> .....	263
<b>Gnomes</b> .....	264
<i>Compendium Class: Brazen Fox</i> .....	264
<i>Druid Changes: Forsterken</i> .....	264
<b>Gobowins</b> .....	265
<i>Burwuk</i> .....	265
<i>Compendium Class: Buk</i> .....	265
<b>Uvandar</b> .....	267
<i>Uvandar Race Move: Uvonghest</i> .....	267
<i>Uvandar Race Move: Uvanshuvan</i> .....	267
<i>Wizards Change: Jeweler's Magic</i> .....	267
<i>Druid Change: Woodcutter</i> .....	268
<b>Roddun</b> .....	269
<i>Roddun Race Move: Scavenging</i> .....	269
<i>Compendium Class: King Rat</i> .....	269
<i>Wizard Change: Junk Wizard</i> .....	270
<b>Kuba-Chubisi</b> .....	271

*Compendium Class: Savu-Kaven* . . . . .271

*Compendium Class: Mahsb-Ahtabd* . . . . .272

**Profanity** . . . . . 275

**Cursing in the Reign** . . . . .276

*Curses* . . . . .276

*Fortune* . . . . .277

*Swearing* . . . . .277

*“OK” is not OK* . . . . .277

*A Load of Cobblers* . . . . .278

*By the...!* . . . . .278

*Insults* . . . . .278

*“Yes.”* . . . . .278

*“No.”* . . . . .278

*Bastard* . . . . .278

*Making Feet for Children’s Shoes* . . . . .279

**“Broken Bonds”** . . . . . 281

**Trusty Pete's Mug** . . . . . 305

**GM Chapter** . . . . . 311

**Game Mastering Wicked Fantasy** . . . . .312

*Introduction: The GM as Magician* . . . . .312

*The GM Toolbox* . . . . .313

*Technique* . . . . .314

*The Awesome Pool* . . . . .317

*Writing Adventures: The Revenge of Lady Va* 319

*The Rights and Duties of the Reign* . . . . .321

*Magic in Wicked Fantasy* . . . . .326

*Co-GMing* . . . . .329

*Scars* . . . . .331

*Hidden Hit Points* . . . . .332

*Why Are You Here?* . . . . .333

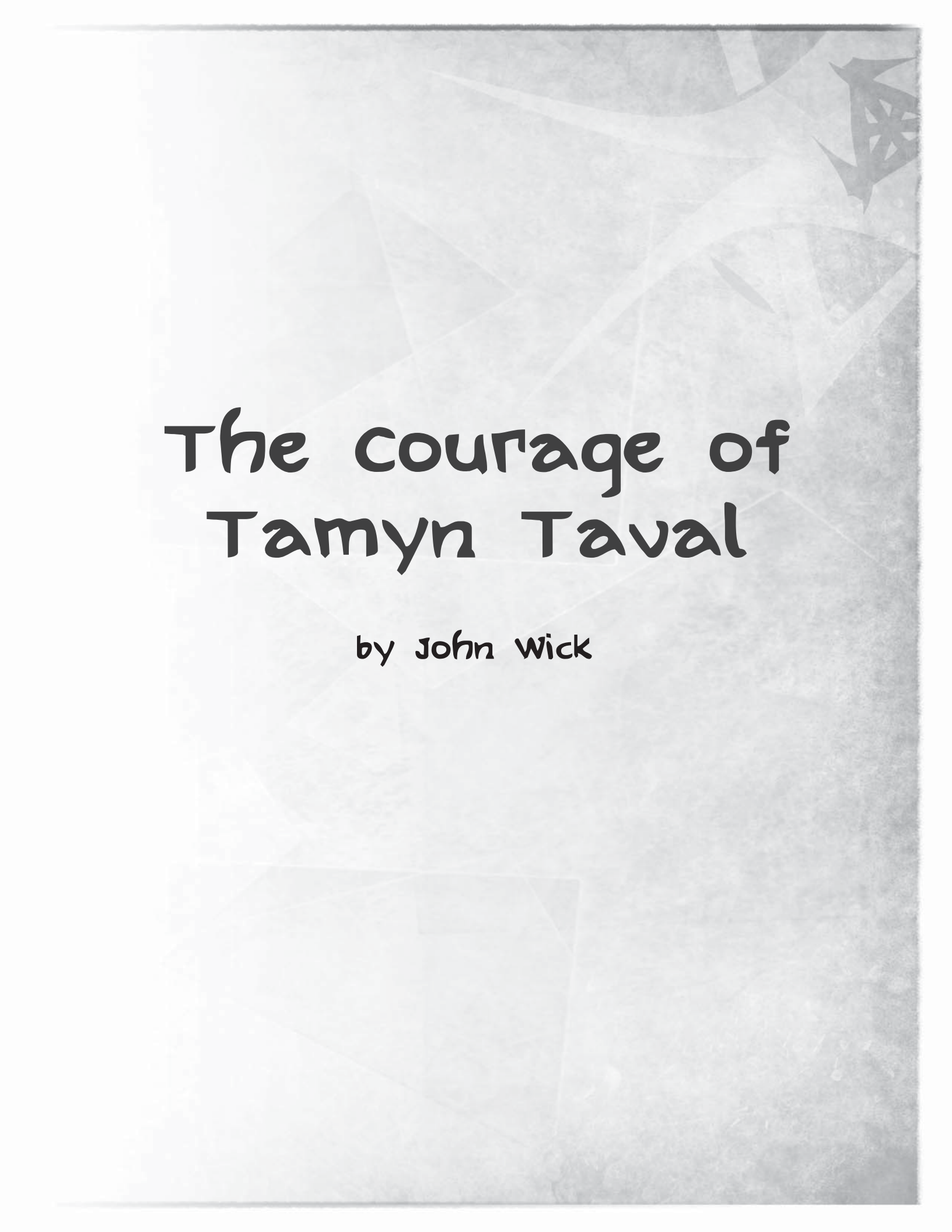
*Themes in Wicked Fantasy* . . . . .333

*Adventure Hooks* . . . . .335

*Last Words* . . . . .337







# The courage of Tamyn Taval

by John Wick

Part One:  
**shy and Tam**

**1**

Tamyn Taval looked at the dead man in front of her, his empty eyes glaring into hers. A moment ago he was alive, but now, he was like a doll, silently staring. The arrow in his throat was meant for her. It skimmed by her cheek, ripping skin.

She ducked, fell from her horse and hit the ground hard. Her shoulder disagreed with that tactic. She rolled and found cover under a fallen tree. From under the tree, she looked back and saw who the arrow had struck. It was Jenns. The big man was holding his throat, the arrow sticking out between his fingers. That was when the second arrow struck him in the chest. He fell from his horse, his neck making that sick sound of breaking bones. He fell right in front of her, his eyes looking at her. His dead doll eyes.

It was less than a breath ago, but everything moved so slowly. She saw more arrows hit the other riders. They fell, too. She heard the screams of the dying all around her. Seven men and five women. The men and women of Count Jonsen's Courage.

She looked to the woods, trying to find her attackers, but the forest hid them from her. Her cheek began to ache. She touched it, saw blood on her fingertips, and for a moment,

she was surprised. She had forgotten the arrow. She tasted something bitter on her tongue. Then, someone whispered her name.

"Tamyn," the voice said. She looked up and away from the dead man.

"Over here!" the voice whispered.

She found it. Just beyond the body, hidden well in the green. A small man with dark hair and blue eyes who looked like he could squeeze through a beer bottle if he had to. It was Shyver.

"Shy?" she asked.

He nodded. For some reason, she marked that he had no arrows in his throat or in his chest. For years, she would remember this moment, not understanding why.

"Are you hurt?" Shy asked, keeping his voice low.

Tamyn shook her head, not saying anything.

"They were waiting for us," he said. An arrow flew by, but he did not need to dodge. It wasn't for him.

She nodded. "Agreed." Tamyn took a breath. Her thoughts were coming back to her now. "We will deal with that later," she told him. "We need to get out of here."

"Who is left?" Shy asked.

She dared a look around. Tamyn saw many bodies, none of them moving. She looked back at him. "Just us."

"You're right," he said. "We need to get out of here.," he said.

Tamyn thought about what he said. *They were waiting for us.*

She looked at Shy. "Whoever gave us up is also after the count," she said.

Shy didn't understand for a moment, then his eyes showed her that he did. "Pull us away from him," he said.

She nodded. "We have to get back to the castle."

As she spoke, three more arrows hit the tree she hid behind.

"That is going to be more difficult than it sounds," Shy told her.

Tamyn looked around. Between her fallen tree and Shy there was only open ground. She could run, but she would be an easy target. She thought for a moment.

She looked for a horse. None within reach. Then, she looked at the dead man. She saw nothing to help her.

Tamyn shouted to Shyven. "Do you have any oil?"

He nodded, ducking back into the green. He came back with an oil pouch. "Here!" he shouted, tossing it to her. She caught it and worked off the top.

She could hear movement in the woods. They were closing in.

Keeping close to the ground, she poured the oil over the fallen tree. As she did, Tamyn thought, *My mother would never forgive me for this.*

Then, she took out her smoking kit. She pulled out one of the black matches and struck it against the box. Nothing.

More movement. They were closer.

She struck it again. This time, it caught. She tossed the match on the tree and the oil caught, erupting into flames.

"Run!" Shy shouted. She did.

She kept low, hoping the fire would cover her movement. She ran fast, pushing against time. Then, when she reached Shy's tree, she jumped. A swarm of arrows flew by her. She heard shouting from the archers. She looked at Shy and he smiled.

"Lucky," he told her. "As usual."

She touched her cheek. "Close this time."

"We are near Invir Falls," he said. "We can get horses at the way station there."

More arrows flew by them, but the archers were just shooting blind now. She looked back at the bodies she was leaving behind. Then, she looked at Shy. "They're all..."

He shook his head. "We won't do Count Jonsen any good if we join them," he said.

She nodded and turned away from the woods. Shy ducked down, running low. She was right behind him.

A few miles down the road, they found the Invir Falls way station. The guard recognized them from when they passed earlier. His name was Reg. Tamyn remembered thinking he was too young to be a guard when she first saw him. That was barely an hour ago. Seemed like a year ago.

"You're a sight!" Reg shouted out to them. He ran, bringing a flask of water. Tamyn took it and drank deep. Then, she gave it to Shy.

"I'm going to fix this," she said, pointing at her cheek. Shy nodded and drank more water.

The way station was small and unequipped. A building with two rooms and a sorry excuse for a stable. She walked inside, found a washing basin and a mirror. She threw off her backpack and got her sewing kit out. She looked at her face in the mirror.

She saw her father's brown hair fall down over brown eyes, all covered in dirt and blood. Human hair, human eyes. From under that hair, she saw her mother's features: high cheekbones and elven ears.

She washed the blood and dirt off her face. When she looked back in the mirror, she saw Shy standing behind her. He was shorter than her, only reaching up to her shoulders. He smiled.

"You need help with that?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes."

"You never were any good with blood," he told her.

"I know."

He took the needle and thread from her thin fingers. His were thick and strong, covered with callouses.

"So why do this?" he asked. He threaded the needle.

She sat down and braced herself. "All the years we've known each other," she told him, "and you've never asked me that."

Shy leaned forward and pinched her skin together. He looked her in the eyes. "You should be drunk for this," he said.

"One or two sips would do it," she told him, smiling.

He laughed. "Thin elven blood."

"Half-elven," she corrected him.

He smiled. "I know." Then, he stopped smiling. "Hold still," he said.

She clenched her fingers against the bench and clenched her teeth together.

He frowned. "This isn't the first time we've done this."

She sighed. "Always feels like it."

The needle pierced her skin and she winced.

## 2

Later that night, she stood with Shy in a library. Count Jonsen held a book in his hand. He was tall, dark-haired and well-groomed. Everything a count should be. He set the book down, took a breath, then sat. He looked at them.

“All dead?” he asked.

Tamyn nodded. “Yes, sir.” Her hair was matted and her clothes torn. She had not bothered to change. Shy stood beside her in the same condition.

He turned and sat down at a small table. He lifted a silver cover and looked at the meal beneath it. Lamb, steamed vegetables, bread. He began carving the lamb. “And you think it was a trap?”

“I know it was a trap, sir,” she told him.

He finished with the knife and picked up his fork, pausing before he ate. “How do you know?”

She felt the scar on her cheek burn. Shy stitched it well enough, but the pain was still sharp. “Sir,” she told him, “no one knew which way we were traveling. From which way we were to approach the forest.”

“The bandits did,” Count Jonsen said. He nodded, slowly understanding.

She nodded. “Yes. Exactly.”

He took a bite of the lamb and smiled. Then, he said, “That indicates someone in this household overheard my orders

and your plans.” He shook his head. “Household intrigue. I don’t like it.”

Tamyn felt her stomach grumble. Watching Jonsen eat after days of dried fruit and meat. She heard a sound come from Shy’s belly.

“Oh, forgive me,” Jonsen said. “You must be famished.” He turned to a servant. “Please, fetch two more plates.”

The servant nodded and turned away. Jonsen picked up a goblet of wine. “Now,” he said. “How will we unveil this... spy in my household?”

“Fire the servants,” Tamyn said.

Jonsen made a sour face. “All of them?”

She nodded. “All of them.”

He shook his head. “Nonsense,” he said. “Surely, there is a way to do this that doesn’t involve such drastic measures.”

“If I may, sir?” Shy asked.

The count nodded and Shy continued.

“Tamyn and I have seen this before. Your brothers want your title. And if they’re willing to kill twelve men to get at you, they’re willing to kill *you*.”

The count laughed. “Nonsense,” he said. “Killing hired mercenaries is one thing, but my brothers would never...”

He saw the looks on Tamyn and Shy’s faces.

"You're serious, aren't you?"

Tamyn nodded. "Yes, sir. We are."

The count thought about that while he sipped his wine. He made a face, looking at the cup. "Bitter," he said. He looked at a servant. "Fetch me another bottle. This one has gone bad."

Tamyn looked at Shy. There was panic in his eyes. Both of them rushed forward. Shy knocked the glass from the count's hand. Tamyn screamed at the servant.

"Water!" she said. "Fetch water! Now!"

The servant's eyes grew wide and confused.

"Now!" she shouted again.

The servant rushed out.

"What is going..." the count tried to speak, but Tamyn held his jaw.

"Stay still!" she said. Then, she looked at Shy. "Hold him!"

Shy grabbed the count's hands and held them down to the chair. "I'm sorry, sir."

The count looked at her. "What treason is this?" he shouted.

"Shut up," she said. Then, she pulled off her muddy gloves and shoved two fingers down the count's throat.

He choked an objection. Tamyn kept his jaws apart with her left hand, reaching with her right. Then, she heard the sound she was reaching for. The count's body buckled and she withdrew her fingers.

The count vomited on the table, his body wrenching. Both Tamyn and Shy held him. Then, when he was finally still, they eased their grip.

"What..." the count started. "What..."

Shy sniffed the bottle, then nodded at Tamyn.

"Arsenic," she told the count. "In your wine."

The count shook his head. "Madness," he said. "Complete and utter madness."

The servant returned then, holding a pitcher of water. Shy took it and gave it to the count. "Drink this," he said. "All of it."

The count looked at Shy like he was mad. "Water?"

Tamyn nodded. "All of it."

He looked at the pitcher, then at them. He drank. He drank until the pitcher was empty. Then, he put the pitcher on the library table.

"Someone is trying to kill me," he said.

Tamyn nodded. "Yes. They used the bandits to draw us away, then tried to poison you."

The count stood up for a moment, swaying. Tamyn and Shy held him. He shook them off.

"This is enough," he said. "I am retiring my chair in the Senate." He stepped over to a bookshelf, barely able to hold himself up. "Retiring. I will give my title to one of my brothers."

Tamyn shook her head. "No, sir. You cannot do that. This is what they want you to..."

The count held up his hand. "The two of you will be well compensated, but I have no further need of you." He waved at them. "Go see my clerk. He will pay you for your service to me."

Tamyn looked at Shy. He grinned, slightly. She looked back at the count, knowing there was no convincing him.

"Thank you for saving my life," the count said. "But your services are no longer needed."

The count looked at the servant. "Show them out."

The servant stepped forward, gesturing toward the library door. Tamyn and Shy walked out.

Once they were out the door and in the corridor, she told Shy, "He will be dead in a week."

Shy shook his head. "Fifty silvers says less."

### 3

They sat in a tavern together, sitting alone. The bard in the corner sang a song about the Battle of Winnfred. The crowd sang along. Shy and Tamyn did not. Shy was on his fifth glass of wine and Tamyn on her first. She was the one more drunk.

"Well," Shy said. "Another Courage disbanded. How many is this?"

Through the haze in her head, Tamyn counted. "Our third," she said.

"In how many years?" Shy asked her.

Tamyn counted again. "Three," she told him.

He laughed. "I still remember. Lord Breghart. You told me, 'Come on Shyver.

Come with me and join Breghart's Courage. We'll make a fortune!"

She nodded. "I remember."

The bard finished his song. The tavern applauded. He bowed and began singing about the Battle of Goldtree.

Tamyn looked at Shy. He was looking around the room. She remembered finding him, bringing him in. Earning his trust.

Shy said, "I swear, these tavern bards only know three cursed songs. The *same* three songs."

Tamyn laughed. She also remembered Breghart's Courage. The tall, handsome

lord vowed to bring justice to his lands. She believed him. He was dead two weeks after she signed up. Someone cut his throat in his sleep. Then, Lady Vanda's Courage. She was murdered by a lover. Then, Count Jonsen.

"At least we left Jonsen alive," she said.

Shy laughed and drank more wine. "What do we do now?" he asked.

She shrugged. "Soldiers?"

He nearly spit up his drink. "In the Army of the Reign?" He laughed harder. "No, no. They would never take me. Not with my history. And you..." he paused, his laughter dying. "No," he said. "They would never take you."

There was a silence between them. Finally, Shy told her, "I won't be a mercenary again." He shook his head. "No. No more blood money."

Tamyn thought about that. Serving in a Courage was better than being a mercenary. At least, that's what she thought three years ago. Serving under the banner of a noble, hunting bandits and trolls. Protecting farms and villages. That would have been the life. But that wasn't what happened.

"They're all sick," she said.

Shy looked at her. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"The nobility," she told him. "They're all sick. Inbred, petty cutthroats."

Her voice was getting louder, but she didn't notice.

"They're all sleeping with their siblings, all trying to murder each other for nothing.

*For nothing.* We weren't protecting villagers. We were bodyguards for a bunch of sniveling, spoiled rotten..."

Shy said, "Tam. Keep your voice down."

"I won't!" she shouted. Suddenly, the music stopped.

"The count is a fool!" she shouted at the tavern. "And he's sleeping with his cousin. And the reason the count's brother is trying to kill him is because his brother used to be sleeping with her!"

Shy put his hand on hers. "Tamyn," he said. "You need to sit down now."

Tamyn looked at the tavern and saw all the faces looking at her. In her head, she felt the wine swooning around. Then, she smiled and said, "Sorry." And she sat down.

The music started again. The tavern began to sing, but nervously.

"We shouldn't stay here tonight," Shy told her.

She nodded. "Where do we go?"

Shy looked at the armed men wearing the count's colors, sitting in the corner of the tavern. "Anywhere but here," he said.



## 4

The jail cell was cold and wet and sobering. Tamyn sat in the corner of the cell, curled up tight.

“Well,” Shy said. “When I woke up this morning, I didn’t expect to be here.”

Tamyn lifted her head. Her face was pale and tired. “Neither did I,” she said.

Shy sat down on the floor. “It’s summer,” he said. “Why is it so cold in here?”

“We’re underground,” she told him. “And it’s stone.”

He shrugged. “Yeah. I guess so.”

Tamyn looked around a bit. There were other cells, exactly like theirs. The men and women looked sick, hungry or just asleep. She ducked her head down and tried to sleep.

“It’ll be all right,” Shy said. She didn’t answer him.

A door opened elsewhere. They heard someone walking down the corridor. Then, a voice shouted their names.

“Tamyn Taval! Shyver Wek!”

Shy shouted in return. “Here!”

The guard reached the front of their cell. He looked down at Shy and smiled. His unshaven cheeks stretched wide. “Visitor,” he said.

Shy took a deep breath. “That was quick.”

Tamyn felt her skin prickle. This was going to hurt.

Another set of footsteps made their way down the corridor. This time, they were light. At first, Tamyn thought it might be a woman. She was wrong. It was a haffun.

His hair was honey brown and braided. His clothes were expensive and he smelled like a noble. Tamyn had never seen him before.

The haffun stepped up to the bars. He looked at them both.

“You are difficult to find,” he said. His voice was like his footsteps.

Tamyn stood up. “Who sent you?”

The haffun looked at the guard. “I no longer require you.”

The guard shrugged and walked away. The haffun looked back at them. Tamyn watched. He was evaluating them. Summing them up.

“You don’t look like I expected,” the haffun said.

“You know our names, friend,” Shy told him. “We don’t know yours.”

“And you won’t,” the haffun said. “Not yet, at least. Maybe later.”

“We aren’t talking either,” Tamyn told him. “Not until we know who sent you.”

“Well,” the haffun said, “if you would like to sit in that cell for a month, you can be as uncooperative as you want.”

Everyone was quiet after that. The haffun took a step back and looked them up and down.

Finally, he said, “Drunken ruffians.”

“Drunk, yes,” Shy told him. “Ruffians, no.”

The haffun turned his attention to Shy. “Shyver Wek,” he said. “You have been trouble since you were born, haven’t you? In and out of street gangs. Arrested for robbery, burglary and various confidence games.” He paused. “And murder.”

Shy shook his head. “Only arrested. Never convicted.”

“You have seven different aliases,” the haffun continued. “Shyver Wek is the seventh. You are running out of names.”

Shy smiled. “I can make a new one at the drop of a hat.”

The haffun turned his attention to Tamyn. “Tamyn Taval. I see it is true that elves cannot hold their liquor.”

Her face turned sour. “I’m not an elf.”

“Your mother is,” the haffun said.

Her voice grew darker. “That doesn’t make me one.” She threw a thumb over her shoulder. “Go ask them. They’ll tell you.”

The haffun asked, “When is the last time you saw your father?”

She said, “When’s the last time your head saw the inside of your ass?”

The haffun nodded. “That was probably appropriate. I understand the situation you are in. There are not many of your kind. Unwanted by both your parents’ people.”

Tamyn rushed the bars, reaching through. The haffun took a step back, moving as swift as a blink, avoiding her grasp. Shy put his hands on Tamyn’s shoulders, whispering to her.

“It’s all right,” he told her. “It’s all right.”

“I’m fine!” Tamyn said. Shy let her go. Then, she turned back to their visitor. “You got a point being here?”

The haffun recovered himself and nodded. “I represent Lord Catalan.”

Tamyn nearly spit. “Hah,” she said. “That figures.”

“I went to the count—your last employer—to locate you. He said you had a scuffle with his guards and wound up here.”

Shy raised his hands. “Hey, *we* were drunk, *they* were drunk...”

Tamyn said, “We saved his life. Ingrateful bastard.”

“*Ungrateful*,” the haffun said. “But that doesn’t matter. I know. You tried to prevent his assassination. But he terminated your employment.”

Tamyn interrupted. “You said ‘Catalan.’”

The haffun nodded. “Yes.”

“And I suppose he wants us?”

“Yes.”

Tamyn paced the cell. “Figures.”

Shy looked at her. “What do you mean?”

She stopped her pacing and looked at the man. “Lord Catalan. Vernor Nix. Resident of Ashcolmb. The man’s so treacherous they say his fingers are poisonous. They say he’s told so many lies, his tongue is black.”

She felt her glare fall on the haffun outside the cell. “I’d rather be in a cell than work for Catalan.”

The haffun adjusted his gloves. “If you were speaking about Lord Catalan a week ago, everything you said would be true.” He paused. “But not today.”

“Oh?” Tamyn asked. “And what changed about him?”

The haffun smiled. “He’s dead.”

## 5

Out in the marketplace, Tamyn looked at her empty pouch. “Cursed guards,” she said. “They took *everything*.”

Shy didn’t even bother looking.

“They always do,” he said.

Tamyn stuffed the pouch back into her pack. “Don’t even have coin for breakfast.”

The haffun raised a coin in his fingertips. “I will take care of that.”

They stopped at a banger merchant and the haffun bought three. He handed one to Tamyn and one to Shy. He wrapped the third in a handkerchief and put it in his pocket. Tamyn bit into hers, tasting the soft, crunching bread and the spiced beef. It was hot, burning the top of her mouth. She didn’t care.

Between bites, she asked the haffun, “What’s your name?”

“Errol,” he said.

Shy asked, “And what do you do for the deceased Lord Catalan?”

He shook his head. “Nothing.” Then, he said, “But for the *current* Lord Catalan, I am his majordomo.”

Shy cocked his head, looking at Tamyn. “What is that?”

Tamyn told him, “Chief of staff.”

Shy said, “Oh. Got it.”

They walked through the busy City streets, walking against the morning market crowd.

Errol said, "The *current* Lord Catalan is the brother of the *late* Lord Catalan. And he wishes to make your acquaintance."

"Why?" Tamyn asked.

"Because the *current* Lord Catalan is unimpressed with his brother's Courage."

Tamyn smiled a bit. "You mean they're villains, just like him?"

"Quite the opposite," Errol said. "They're all villains and he is not."

She finished her banger then asked, "What's the *current* Lord Catalan like?"

Errol turned to look at her. "Not at all like the previous one."

Shy asked, "How so?"

Errol said, "He was the third son. Not much room for him to move in such a small castle. And he never liked his father."

Tamyn said, "I heard the old man was a bit of a villain himself."

Errol continued. "So, he left home. Went to Tamerclimb."

Shy took notice of that. "Tamerclimb? Yeah, that's a 'screw you daddy' move."

If Errol heard Shy, he didn't show it. He kept talking. "He received full training there."

"A palatine?" Tamyn asked.

Errol nodded. "Yes."

Tamyn looked back at Shy. She gave him the "I don't know about this" look. Shy shook his head and returned it. She looked back at Errol. "If he's a palatine, doesn't that mean he's taken an oath never to hold land?"

"Some do," Errol said. "My Lord is the only heir left. After the death of his father and his two brothers, he is the only Lord Catalan remaining."

"I guess family pride trumps sacred oaths," Tamyn said.

"Not exactly," Errol told her. "Lord Catalan sees this as an opportunity to do some good in the region."

"A palatine in Ashcolmb," Shy said. "Sounds like a pennybook."

Tamyn asked, "Why us?"

Errol stopped and turned. "Pardon?"

Tamyn asked again. "Why us? Why does he want us?"

Errol told her, "You can ask him yourself." He gestured up. They were standing before an inn. The sign above the door had a heart and an anchor.

"He's inside," Errol said. "Top floor. Third room." He paused, then said, "And if you get any... *ruffian* ideas... I will remind you that he is a palatine, trained in Tamerclimb. He is not a... how did you say it? 'Inbred spoiled brat?'"

Tamyn nodded. "Understood."

Errol smiled. "Good. He is expecting you. Go on up."

## 6

The first floor of the inn was a public room. There was a kitchen, tables and people sitting and eating. As soon as they were in the door, out of sight of Errol, Shy stopped her.

“Wait a tick,” he said. “I think we should talk before we go up there.”

“He’s waiting,” Tamyn told him.

Shy shook his head. “Let him wait,” he said. “We have to talk.”

They sat at a table. A maid stopped by and Shy asked for a pint.

“You can’t pay for that, you know,” Tamyn told him.

“We’re not staying that long,” he said. Then, he asked, “How long we known each other?”

She shrugged. “A few years.”

“I trust you,” he said. His eyes met hers. “*I trust you.*”

She felt nervous at the contact, almost laughing. “I understand, Shy. We’ve been through a lot together.”

He paused. She could tell he was trying to think of a way to say something. Then, he asked, “You know what a palatine is?”

Tamyn nodded. “Yes.”

“And you know what I am.”

She shrugged. “I don’t see where...”

“Listen,” he said. “I grew up in Jinix.” He said the City’s name like a man who was born there does. *Jinx*. “They got a saying there. You grow up a victim or a criminal. There are no other choices.” He lifted his sleeve and showed her a tattoo. “That’s a street mark.”

She looked at it. Tamyn had seen the tattoo before, but never asked about it. Asking just seemed rude, even when she was drunk. She looked back up at him. “All right?” she asked.

“I was in gangs. Gangs that make you get tattoos and take blood oaths.” He looked at the stairs leading to the upper rooms. “Oaths of secrecy. Loyalty. You get it?”

She nodded. “I understand.”

He looked back at her. “I’ve cut off other people’s fingers. I’ve cut out their tongues. I’ve cut throats. Back when I was a kid, I did some dark things. Bloody things.”

She let that settle in. Tamyn never heard this before from him. Never saw this face. Never heard this voice. “Shy, I don’t...”

“You see? You see *me*? The me I had to change?”

For the first time, she did. “Yes,” she said. “I understand.”

He looked back up at the stairs. “He won’t,” he said.

She turned to look. Then, she turned back. “Shy, he can’t read minds.”

“No,” he said. “But he can read people. He can read me. He’ll take one look at me and know what kind of man I am.”

She shook her head and put her hand on his shoulder. “Shy. He asked for you.”

“He doesn’t know me.”

“He asked for you.”

“He’s a palatine,” he said. “I took vows when I was a kid. So did he. And he’s got tattoos, too. Words burned on his skin, forever.”

Shy looked her in the eye. “He took a vow to uphold the law. Not justice or goodness. Just the law.” He gestured at himself. “Look at me. I’m the very thing he took a vow against.”

She took a breath, trying to find the right words.

“You remember that palatine we ran into in Brightwood?” he asked.

She nodded. She remembered him, all right.

“What was his name? Titus? Something Titus?”

“Ulivet Titus,” she said. The name jumped to her memory as soon as he summoned it.

“That’s what we’re dealing with here,” he said. “A palatine. He’s going to want to cut my head off as sure as that Titus did.”

She thought about it. Maybe he was right.

Shy nodded. “You’re thinking about it now, too,” he said.

“Stop that,” she told him.

The maid dropped off his pint. “Put it on a tab,” he smiled. She winked at him and walked away. He sipped the pint, then looked back at Tamyn.

“We should just head out the back door,” he said. “Or find a window. He never has to know.”

“We’ve got *nothing*, Shy,” she told him. “No coins in our purses. Nothing. No job. Nothing. You can’t even pay for that pint. What are we going to do?”

“I know how to make money,” he said, looking away. His eyes went distant and she could tell he was summoning old habits.

She crossed her arms. “You said you were a different man.”

His eyes snapped back into focus. “They’re just skills,” he said. “Tools. A good man can use the same tools a wicked man uses.”

“To make justice or make evil?”

He smiled. “Exactly.”

She weighed it all. No coin. No job. Putting Shy back on the street. She weighed it and made up her mind.

She pushed back the chair and stood. “I’m going upstairs.”

He stood with her. “Now, wait...”

“You can stay here,” she said. “I’m going up. I’ll take a good look at him and let you know whether or not we want to work for him.”

“We should be working for ourselves,” he said.

Tamyn nodded. "And we will if this doesn't play out right. Trust me."

The maid stepped up again. She looked at Tamyn. "Get you anything?"

Tamyn shook her head. "No," she said. The maid smiled and walked away. Tamyn looked at Shy. "I'll be right back."

"You aren't free of sins, either," he told her.

She took a breath. "Yours are yours," she told him. "I inherited mine from my father. Different kind of sins."

Tamyn walked to the stairs.

## 7

She opened the door. A simple room. A small, flat bed, a table, a chamber pot, a table and a chair. Sitting in the chair was the palatine.

His head was shaved. His eyes were sharp. One moment looking at him and Tamyn knew this man was no fool. His arms were long and his shoulders wide. This man could lift the table in front of him over his head without a thought. He was writing something down when she came in. He looked up.

"Lord Catalan," she said.

"Tamyn Taval?" His voice reminded her of the trees: it sounded old and powerful, but his face was young. The two did not match.

She nodded. "Yes." Then, she said. "You're younger than I thought."

He stood. He was two heads taller than she. "Like elves," he said with that voice, deep like oceans, "I'm older than I look."

She scowled. "Not the best way to start, Lord Catalan."

He bowed his head. "My apologies," he said. "I should have known better."

That caught her off guard, and she almost stuttered. "I'm surprised," she said. "Your kind aren't usually tolerant of..." she hesitated.

"Half-elves?" he asked.

She nodded.

“Please,” he said, gesturing at the chair. “Take a seat.”

She shook her head. “With all due respect, I’ll stay here, next to the door.”

Catalan looked at her. “You look like you are ready to bolt at any moment,” he said.

“I might,” she told him.

He smiled and sat.

She waited for him to speak. He was watching her. Finally, she said, “You called me here for a reason, Lord Catalan?”

“Yes,” he said. “I need a new captain for my Courage.”

“What happened to your old one?” she asked.

He shrugged. “He is no longer my captain.”

She smirked. “Be as cryptic as you want, Lord Catalan. The less you answer my questions, the more likely I will turn down your offer.”

Catalan nodded. “Very well,” he said. “He was stealing from the castle coffers, forcing himself on the maids, drinking the cellar dry and said something untoward about my mother.”

Tamyn almost laughed. “Those are good reasons,” she said. “What did you do with him?”

Without taking a breath, he said, “I beat him for drinking, cut off his hands for stealing.”

She blinked. Then, “A—and for what he said about your mother?” she asked.

He opened his hands. “Speaking is not a crime.”

She caught something missing. “What about what he did to the maids?” she asked.

“I did nothing,” Catalan said.

Again, she was surprised. “Nothing?”

“Nothing.” Catalan took off his gloves. “While he was tied in the chair, after I beat him, I let the maids do to him as they liked.”

“Really?”

He nodded. “We needed a surgeon to keep him alive.” He gestured low. “They...” he made a cutting motion. “You know.”

This time, she laughed. Half of that laugh was fear.

“That seems...” she began.

Catalan finished the thought. “Harsh?” he asked.

She nodded. “Yes.”

“When a man forces himself on a woman...” he paused. “When a citizen of the Reign marks violence against another citizen,” he said, “let the punishment fit the crime.”

“Castration fit the crime?” she asked.

“You didn’t see what he did to the maid,” Catalan told her.

“Fair enough,” she said. She thought for a moment. Then, she said, “Lord Catalan, you want me to be the captain of your Courage?”



“Yes.”

She looked at him. As she looked closer, she saw that his face was not so clear of scars and pain as she thought before. She looked at his hands. She looked at his boots. She looked at his sword.

“Take the sword from its sheath,” she said, gesturing at it.

He looked at her with a question in his eyes.

“Take out your sword,” she said.

He stood, put his hand on the pommel and drew it. “Thus?” he asked.

She shook her head. “No, no. Put it back.”

Catalan did as she said.

“Now,” she told him. “Draw it as if I were an enemy.”

His eyes drew narrow. “Are you an enemy, Tamyn Taval?”

“If you want me to be the captain of your Courage, do as I say.”

Catalan watched her for a moment, then drew the weapon. It came free of the scabbard almost as if it were greased. No catch, no pause, no hesitation. And its edge landed on her shoulder, just a hair before the skin of her neck. From across the room, he drew the blade and laid it against her neck. In a breath.

Catalan looked at her. “You said, ‘As an enemy.’”

She nodded, trying to keep her lip from trembling. “I did.”

He withdrew the blade and put it back in its sheath. “Is that what you wanted to see?”

“Yes.” Her hands were shivering. She put them behind her back.

“I want to ask you a question,” she said.

He sat back down, holding open his hands. “Ask.”

There was a knock on the door. She turned quickly, her hand on her sword.

“That,” he said, “should be our supper.” He rose up and walked toward the door.

“I’ll get it,” she said, holding up a hand, keeping the other on her sword.

“You still do not trust me?” he asked. “I could have killed you a moment ago.”

She kept her hand on her blade. “Sir, the reason I’m alive is because of my mistrust.”

Catalan nodded. “Fair enough.”

She opened the door. A serving lad stood there with a plate of cheese, bread and meat. She took it and told him, “Go away.” He nodded quickly, seeing the half-drawn sword. She closed the door, took the plate to the table and set it down. She cut off some of the meat and chewed it.

“Good,” she said.

He tore off some bread. “You had a question?”

Tamyn nodded, broke off a bit of the cheese. “Why me?” she asked.

“To be the captain of my Courage?” he asked.

She nodded. "Yes. I want to know why you picked me. And how you found me."

"Errol found you," he said.

Tamyn asked, "How?"

He shrugged. "I do not know. That's what he does."

"What does he do?"

"He finds people."

Tamyn didn't like that answer, but she wasn't going to get any further asking it again. "Why me, then?" she asked.

"You served in my brother's Courage."

She nodded. "Yes."

"You were the captain. For all of two days."

Again: "Yes."

"And he let you go."

Catalan took a piece of cheese and meat between his fingers and ate them both. "The ledger says you were dismissed for two charges. The first was insubordination."

She nodded. "That sounds about right."

"You were ordered to beat a peasant who could not pay his rent. And you refused."

More cheese. Tamyn had forgotten how hungry she was. She also forgot Shy was downstairs waiting for her while she ate.

The palatine spoke. "I said, 'And you refused.'"

Tamyn jumped back to the room. "Yes," she said. "He was an old man. He had no coin. There was no way for him to pay his rent."

Lord Catalan smiled. "It sounds like you are exactly the kind of woman I want leading my Courage."

She grabbed more food. Looked at him more.

"I choose my own men," she said.

"Of course."

"No second-guessing me. I choose my own men."

"They are your responsibility. That also means their actions fall on your head."

She nodded. "Fair enough." Then, she asked, "How much?"

Catalan looked confused. "Pardon?"

She spoke slower. "How much are you paying us?"

He nodded, understanding. "I am not paying *us*, I am paying *you*. You divide the money as you see fit."

"All right," Tamyn said. "How much?"

"One hundred silvers a month," he said. "For the lot of you."

She shook her head. "Not enough."

He lowered his brow again. Catalan spoke with his eyes, she noticed.

"Not enough," Tamyn said again. "If you want men who are worthy, you'll spend more."

"In Tamerclimb," he said, "one hundred silvers was enough for ten men to live like kings."

She lowered her brow to match his, raising her voice. "In Tamerclimb, that may be true. But you aren't in Tamerclimb anymore. You're in Ashcolmb. And in Ashcolmb, you'll need to pay more."

He shook his head. "There is no more."

She wiped her hands clean of bread crumbs. "Then, I'm sorry," she said, standing up. "I'm afraid I can't help you."

Tamyn turned to the door, but he called out her name. "Tamyn!"

She stopped and turned. Now, he looked young.

"How much?" he asked.

She told him. He shook his head. "That is too much."

"That," she said, "is how much it costs to run a Courage in Ashcolmb."

Catalan took a deep breath. Then, he looked at her. "That is more than I have been advised to pay."

"Get a better advisor."

He stood. "I'm telling the truth."

She watched him. She watched him, and she knew, he wasn't lying. He wasn't lying about money. Here, in Ashcolmb. A man who didn't lie about money.

Tamyn nodded. "I'll take the job for half," she said. "But my Courage keeps half of anything it finds."

Catalan smiled. "That is fair," he said. "More than I was prepared to pay, but fair."

Tamyn walked back to him and extended her hand. "Then I am your new captain."

Catalan smiled and shook her hand. "Captain Tamyn Taval."

She pointed at the food. "You mind? I haven't had anything to eat since I got out of jail."

Catalan smiled and shook his head. "No, not at all. Take all of it. I am done."

Tamyn picked up the tray. "Thanks," she said, and walked toward the door.

"Tamyn?" he asked. She stopped.

"I almost forgot," he told her. "The journal mentioned two crimes. Only one of them was listed. *Insubordination*."

"Yes," she said.

"What was the other?"

Tamyn's eyes went distant for a moment, remembering the morning. Then, she returned. "I punched him."

Catalan looked surprised. "The old man?"

"No," she said, opening the door with one hand, balancing the tray with the other. "Your brother."

She closed the door behind her.

## Part Two

# The Courage

### 1

The clock in the tower chimed every hour on the hour, and the Watchmaker heard every one. He walked down the dark City streets with the sound of his step counting the seconds.

*Clip-clop.*

*Clip-clop.*

*Clip-clop.*

He leaned heavy on his false foot. Mist like silver moss crept on the City's streets as the Watchmaker turned onto Red Lantern Way.

He stopped here every night and the girls always teased him, trying to make him smile. He stopped in front of the clock on the corner of the street and took the chain of keys from his pocket. They jingled in his thick, thick fingers as he found the right key. The redhead mentioned something about girth and length. She knelt down to rustle his long, coarse hair and touched the tip of his wide, wide nose.

"My daddy always told me uvandir had thick heads," she said, caressing the circumference of his skull. The girls giggled and whispered. The Watchmaker said nothing.

He found the right key and slid it into the lock as the girls twisted the locks of his beard. The key clicked inside the iron box, the tumblers turned and the door creaked open with a pained ache. One of the girls made a sound deep in her throat worth a pocket full of silvers. With the door opened, he hooked the keys on his belt and reached down for his tools.

The tools in his bag and on his belt were arranged carefully. He knew the arrangement well, and could find any tool without the use of his eyes; his thick fingers were all he needed. And that's fortunate considering he only had one good eye. It buzzed and clicked in his head as it focused on what it needed to show him. He'd had to repair the lens twice since he made it, and when he made it, his fingers were swift and certain. Good compensation for his failing eyesight.

He looked inside the clock and saw what was wrong. He set himself to work. He lifted one of his heavier tools from his belt, clipping an attachment he took from one of his pockets. He twisted the valve slowly, making certain not to use too much pressure, otherwise the valve would crack under the weight. He would have to go back to his workshop and fetch a replacement; he didn't

have room in his bag for it. Something he should have thought of, but he was distracted by vandals who broke the cornerclock on Birthrum Street and 9th Avenue.

The clock ticked back to life and the blonde smiled and clapped and the brunette whispered a congratulations in his cracked ear that sounded more like an invitation. He pretended not to hear.

He put his tools away and took the keys from his belt. He shut the door and put the key in the lock. The redhead made the obvious comment and as he turned the key, and they made that sound only Red Street girls know how to make.

He took one step back, lifted his tool bag and turned on his heel. It made the sound of metal on stone and he began the long walk to his next scheduled stop. The girls threw him kisses and promised that next time would be different. Next time, they'll coax a smile under that thick, thick beard. He said nothing, only tipping his hat one step away from turning the corner, and the girls all smiled, already formulating plans.

*Clip-clop.*

*Clip-clop.*

*Clip-clop.*

Three blocks later, at Wurster and Fitt, he stopped under another silent cornerclock. This one required a little grease in the sprockets and three new springs. He set himself to his work, listening to the silence of the streets.

Five blocks later, at Shim and Seth, a valve requires one of his specialty tools. He reached

to the bottom of the bag, and pulled it out. He set his hands round the back of the tool to get the right leverage. As he worked, twisting the valve slowly, his eyes fell on the pedestal in the center of the square, and he remembered the statue that once stood there. Now, a lump of marble is the only reminder.

He finished up his work, put his tools back, locked the box, hooked his keys to his belt, turned down Wurster, turned left on Bramble and right on Shooster to the little building crammed between two larger buildings, squeezed through. He found the keys for the locks on the front door (seven in total), opened the door, stepped inside, shut the door behind him and turned all the bolts, each making a heavy *clunk* sound. And there, inside his workshop, a little place with three large tables, three stools and no bed, the Watchmaker set down his bag by the door in the same spot he's always put his bag—on the boards that have the mark just the same size—and he walked across the room to his second worktable where the still clock waits for him to give it life once again.

Uvandir may not sleep, but that doesn't mean they don't get weary.

\* \* \*

The building was small. Stones and thatch. It sat squat between two other buildings, smoke climbing up from two different chimneys. Next to the door hung a sign with the same thing written in three different languages.

*Go away.*

From outside, Tamyn and Shy could hear ringing. Metal on metal. A hammer and iron. It was constant, like the ticking of a clock.

“Are you sure we want to do this?” Shy asked her.

Tamyn nodded. “Oh, yes.” She dismounted her horse and stepped up to the door.

Shy shook his head. “Dwarves are not known for their courtesy toward uninvited guests.”

She paused by the door and turned to look at him. “First rule,” she said. “It’s *uvandir*. Never call him a dwarf.” She grinned. “Not if you want to walk away from the conversation.”

Shy dismounted. He stepped up behind her. “Anything else I should know?”

She nodded. “Plenty. I just don’t have time to teach you.” She reached out and pulled the lever by the door. They heard a bell chime. The tick tock ringing stopped.

Tamyn looked at Shy. “Don’t say anything,” she said. “I’ll do the talking.”

He raised his eyebrows. “This will be new.”

Shy heard seven locks. Seven. The small door opened and the *uvandir* on the other side was covered in soot from head to toe. He stood only up to their waists, but his shoulders were almost as wide as his height. His beard was thrown over his shoulder, blackened as well. His eye made a clicking sound. He looked up at them, his eyes bright against the soot on his skin.

Tamyn spoke in a short, curt tongue. The *uvandir* said nothing. He turned back to his work bench and began hammering again.

Shy whispered to her, “Is that *Uvandir*? When did you learn...”

“I don’t,” she whispered back, “I just know the right words.” Then, she watched the *uvandir* go back to work. When she spoke next, all Shy heard were grunts with syllables.

“Pardon,” she said.

He didn’t look up, kept pounding on the metal. “Working.”

She nodded. “Pay.”

He put the hot metal in water, watched her through the rising steam. He said nothing. A silent, “no.”

She stepped closer. “Favor,” she said.

He put the metal back on the anvil and began pounding again. He said nothing. Another silent, “no.”

She looked back at Shy. Then, she turned to the *uvandir*.

“Make justice,” she said.

The *uvandir* did not look up. He said nothing. Three “no’s.” That was it. Everything that needed to be said was said. Asking again would be risky. Tamyn knew this.

Time to take a risk.

She reached forward and grabbed the hand with the hammer. The *uvandir* looked up, his scowl making his beard arch.

Tamyn and the *uvandir* stood there for a long moment. A long moment of potential violence.

The *uvandir* pulled on his hammer, but Tamyn would not let go. Shy thought he heard a low growl in the *uvandir*’s throat, then he saw Tamyn shake her head, slowly. When she spoke next, Shy understood every word.

“Geir,” she said, “I need a watchmaker.”

The uvandir spoke. It almost made Shy jump. “I’ve said my peace.”

Tamyn took a sigh. “I need *the best* watchmaker.”

The uvandir’s glare sunk into her. He put down the hammer and hot iron, wrested his hand away from Tamyn. She watched him walk away from the forge toward an axe on the wall. She recognized that axe and she knew what it could do. He lifted his huge hands and took the axe off the wall. Then, he turned and walked back toward her.

“Uh, Tam?” Shy asked.

She didn’t move. The uvandir walked closer, his thick fingers gripping the axe.

“Tam?” Shy asked again.

The uvandir walked up to her, axe in hand. Then, he stopped. He looked up. “Why?” he asked.

Tamyn felt her back straighten. She had to give him the right answer. The *best* answer.

“A palatine,” she started.

The uvandir gripped his axe and stepped forward.

Tamyn took a step back, raising her hand. “A palatine hired me to lead his Courage, Geir.”

Geir did not stop walking. Tamyn kept backing up.

“He hired *me*. He wanted *me*.”

Geir didn’t slow down. Tamyn backed herself into the worktable.

“Geir, he’s a palatine. And he hired a half-elf bastard.”

The Watchmaker raised his axe. Shy stepped in the way, stepped between Tamyn and the axe.

“Uh uh,” he said to the uvandir, shaking his head, reaching for a knife.

Geir stopped. He looked at Shy.

Shy said, “You put that thing down or you and me are gonna play.” Shy held the pommel tightly.

The Watchmaker looked at the knife, then looked at Shy.

Geir lowered his axe. “Good man?” he asked Tamyn.

Tamyn nodded. “Yes. Lord Catalan is a good man.”

Geir shook his head. “No,” he said, then pointed at Shy.

Tamyn looked at Shy and smiled. “Yes. He’s a good man.”

Geir nodded. He stepped away and stood with his back to them.

“Go,” he said, pointing at the door.

Tamyn turned on her heel. She looked at Shy. “Come on,” she said. “We’ll wait outside.”

Shy looked at the uvandir. Geir still had his back to them. Shy started to speak, but Tamyn grabbed him and pulled him out the door.

## 2

Atellus picked up the bottle and found it empty. "Curse you, your children and their children, too," he mumbled and dropped it. Then, he looked back up and remembered why he wanted another drink.

Just across the throne room, Lord Sevinus stood still, posing for his portrait. Sword in one hand, shield at his side. Atellus looked at the arms of the portrait and the arms of the subject and held back his laughter. But then he saw the size of the bulge in the portrait's trousers and he could hold it back no more.

Lord Sevinus looked across the room. "You find something funny, bard?" he asked.

Atellus nodded. "Yes, my Lord. Yes, I do."

Sevinus held up his hand at the artist. The artist stopped.

"Tell me," he said. "What brings such mirth to your lips?"

Atellus shook his head. "It is nothing," he said. "Just a jest I heard in the tavern last night," he waved his empty cup. "I apologize for interrupting your sitting, Lord Sevinus."

Sevinus scowled. "Perhaps if you spend less time with a cup in your hand and more time with a pen, writing of my exploits..."

Atellus nodded. "Aye, my Lord."

The noble turned back to the painter. "Continue," he said. The painter did as he was told.

Sevinus spoke, keeping his gaze forward. "It has been two months since you last wrote of one of my adventures, Atellus."

Atellus nodded. "Yes, my Lord. I know." He stood, or at least tried to stand, catching himself on the chair. "It's just... well... it's getting harder to invent them."

Sevinus held up his hand again. "Excuse us," he said to the artist. The artist bowed and left, leaving Sevinus and his bard alone in the room.

Sevinus walked over to the bard carrying his sword. Atellus held up his hands to his sides and smiled. "It's the truth," he said.

Sevinus struck the bard hard on the jaw with the pommel of his sword. Atellus fell to the floor, hitting his knee on the stone.

"Do not *ever* speak that way in front of others again!" he shouted.

Atellus looked up at him, unable to speak. His head swam with wine and pain.

He pointed at the bard with his sword. "You speak of the truth," he shouted. "*The truth? The truth?* Here is the only truth that matters to you. *I* am the one who dictates truth, not you. I am the one who *pays you* to write the truth."

Atellus touched his jaw. No, not broken. That was good. But his knee shot with a sharp pain when he tried to move it.

Sevinus kept yelling at him. "You will write what I pay you to write. You will spread



the word of my bravery and my daring and my generosity and my cruelty. You will make me into the hero I deserve to be.” He paused, catching his breath. “Or,” he said, “I will throw you out into the streets and you can play songs and tell stories for food.”

Sevinus turned and walked back to the center of the room. “Get the artist back in here,” he said. “If you aren’t going to be my bard, you can be my fetchboy.”

Atellus looked at his cup. It broke in the fall. He pushed himself to his feet, minding his knee, the pain still sharp. Then, he limped over to the door and told the artist to return. He went back to his chair and sat. No cup, no wine.

\* \* \*

Atellus opened the window, the morning light burning his vision. His nightshirt was dirty and needed cleaning. His hair was thick with grit. He needed a shave five days ago.

He looked at his writing desk. A page with two lines written at the top and nothing more. One line was the title. The other was an unfinished sentence.

*The Tale of Lord Sevinus and the Sea Beast of Vorinor.*

Atellus tried to laugh, but only coughed. He picked up the page, crushed it in his hands and threw it out the window. Then, he sat down, inked the quill and looked at the blank page in front of him.

The bardic college taught him how to do this. How to lie with such conviction and sincerity that others would believe it. He

put the ink on the page and hesitated. There was nothing in his head. Nothing.

He put the quill back in the jar and stood up. He needed wine. Wine made it easier to lie. He rang the servant bell and waited. Finally, a knock on the door.

The young servant behind the door looked terrified. She shook her head. “I’m sorry, but Lord Sevinus has ordered that you receive no wine until his next adventure is completed.” The poor girl looked certain she was about to feel his wrath.

Atellus thought of a thousand objections, but he kept his mouth still. “All right,” he said. He touched the girl on the head and smiled. “It’s all right,” he told her. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

She smiled and curtsied. “Thank you, sir,” she said. Then, she stepped away, but stopped.

She turned back. “Sir,” she said. “If you don’t mind...”

Atellus beckoned her back. “What is it, dear?”

She looked at her feet. “I... that is I... read the adventures of Lord Velin’s Courage...”

He smiled, remembering. “That was a long time ago,” he said.

She nodded. “Yes, sir. My father read it to me when I was younger. I learned to read so I could read it myself.”

Emotion leapt up into his throat. “That’s... very flattering,” he told her.

She looked up from her shoes to his chest. "Is what you wrote about Lord Velin's Courage true?"

Atellus smiled. "Which part?"

The girl looked this way and that, and when convinced she was alone, pulled a small bundle of pages from the pockets of her dress. It was worn and the pages were folded at the corners.

"*The Adventure of the Seven Curses*," she said. "Is Lord Velin truly such an honorable and courageous man?"

Atellus looked at the book and his smile vanished. He felt his eyes blink. His jaw opened to speak, but he said nothing.

"The way you write about him," she said, "I could only hope to serve for such a Lord."

Atellus looked back up at the girl. He found his smile again. "I have never served for a better man," he said. He touched the book in her hands. "Every word of it is true."

The servant smiled. "I knew it!" she said. "All the other girls say that you lied about him the same way you..." she paused, then looked again down either side of the hallway. She whispered, "The same way you lie about Lord Sevinus."

He shook his head. "No," he said. "I promise you. There are good men in the world. They are just very hard to find."

She blushed a little. "Good men like you."

Atellus saw the look in her eye. He recognized it. Knew exactly what he could

do with it. He could get what he wanted from this girl. All he had to do was ask.

He took a deep breath and touched the girl's hair. "You are a lovely thing," he said. "You should find a better man than me."

She blinked with confusion. "I..." she said.

"Find a man who has a less creative attitude toward the truth."

She blinked again, then nodded. "Yes, sir."

He bid her farewell and she left.

He watched her walking away, then shouted, "Bring me some bread and water! And fruit if there is any!"

She turned on her heel, smiling. "Yes, sir! Right away!"

He closed the door and looked back at the desk and the empty page. A crooked smile found his lips. Something that he hadn't done in a long time. It felt like a stranger on his face.

He sat down at the table and picked up the pen. He wrote a line at the top of the page and looked at it.

*The Cruel and False Life of the Villain Lord Sevinus.*

His smile stretched across his face. He kept writing.

### 3

“Lord Rose” finished quickly, as usual. Valera held him, his body trembling, his breath heavy on her shoulder. She couldn’t blame him. After the time she spent teasing him, he didn’t have a chance.

He moaned again and shuddered. She held him tighter. Then, he finally whispered into her ear, “Thank you.”

She gently rolled him over and then got herself out of bed. She said nothing. She walked behind a screen and began washing.

Valera heard him speak on the other side of the screen. “I’m sorry I didn’t last longer.”

She smiled. “We will work on that,” she told him.

Behind the veil, she heard him speak. “The men in the Senate,” he said. “They don’t understand. We could accomplish so much if they just listened to me.”

The warm water washed away the sweat from her skin. She listened as he spoke.

“The Cities need to be united now. More than ever before. But they bicker and argue about borders and trade tariffs.”

She said nothing. She didn’t need to. She just listened to him talk.

“I don’t understand them. We could accomplish so much...”

She finished washing and stepped out from behind the veil. She wrapped herself in a robe and kissed his cheek. “They do not listen because they do not want to hear,”

she said. “Most men are selfish brutes who use their positions to fill their own pockets. They don’t care about anyone else.”

She smiled and touched his cheek. “But you care,” she told him. “And that is why I care.”

He returned her smile and kissed her gently. “You amazing woman,” he said. “Why will you not marry me?”

She shook her head. “Because marriage murders romance, my darling,” she said. “You must leave. Our time is done.”

He nodded. “I will make an honest woman of you,” he said. “This I swear.”

She smiled and sat on the other side of the room. “I am an honest woman,” she said. “And that is why I refuse to marry you.”

He put on his trousers and his shirt, his boots and his cloak. Then, he removed a small leather purse from his belt. He put it on the bed.

“What is that?” she asked.

“You deserve so much,” he said. “I wanted to give you more.”

She rose up and took the purse into her hand. “We have a contract,” she said. “No more, no less.”

He put his hand on hers, closing it around the leather pouch. “You deserve so much more than I can give you,” he said. “Please, accept it as a gift.”

She thought of protesting again, then put that thought away. She nodded. "I will," she said. "Now, go. Our time is over."

He leaned in to kiss her again. She touched his cheek and pressed her lips to his. He looked into her eyes and started to speak. "I lo—"

"Stop," she said. "Do not say that. Not here and not to me." She touched his lips with her finger. "Not ever."

He nodded and turned away, pausing at the door. "Next week?" he asked.

"Of course," she said.

"Goodbye," he told her and he left, closing the door behind him.

She watched the door for a moment, then opened the pouch and counted the coins.

\*\*\*

Shy asked, "Why are we here?"

Tamyn said, "Why are we *where*?"

"Here," he told her. "I thought we were looking for a sorceress."

Tamyn said, "We are."

Shy raised his hands. "This is the Street of Red Lanterns." He looked at Tamyn. "I mean, I know we're looking for a magic woman, but, really?"

Tamyn didn't say anything to that.

They walked a little further. Then, in front of a small house, Tamyn stopped. "You'd better stay out here," she told Shy.

"Sounds personal," Shy told her.

Tamyn nodded. "More than you know."

She stepped up to the front door and knocked. She waited. A young woman answered the door. "Can I help you?" she asked.

"I'm here to see Valera," Tamyn told her.

The woman smiled, politely. "Do you have an appointment?"

Tamyn shook her head. "No. But if you could tell her Tamyn Taval is here to see her..."

"I can't guarantee an audience," the woman said, "but I will convey the message."

Tamyn said, "Thank you."

The young woman closed the door.

Tamyn waited. Eventually, Shy stepped up. "You going to stand here all day?"

She shook her head. "No," she said. "She's making me wait."

"You two really do have history."

Tamyn nodded. "Yeah."

The door opened. The serving girl on the other side said, "Please come in."

Tamyn looked at Shy. "Stay here," she said. "I'll be right back."

"And if you're not?"

Tamyn took a breath. "That could be a good thing or a bad thing."

\*\*\*

The room was exactly how she anticipated. The bed in the center, shrouded with

silk. Candles lighting the room. The shades drawn. Everything in dim light. A slight aroma in the air. Thin smoke.

Tamyn looked but did not see anyone in the room. She stood by the door, waiting.

“How long has it been?” a voice asked.

Tamyn felt old emotions shudder through her. “Five years,” she said.

“Five years...” the voice moved through the room. Tamyn saw nothing but shadows. Then, behind her, “And now you’re back.”

Tamyn turned, but saw nothing. Only the door she came through.

“Stop playing games, Valera,” Tamyn said. “This is me.”

One of the shadows breathed. Then, it stepped forward. Valera shed the shadows like silk veils. “You used to like my games,” she said.

“That was five years ago.”

Valera frowned. “Yes. It was.” She walked toward the bed and poured herself a glass of wine from the pitcher beside it. “And now you’re back.”

“I came for you,” Tamyn said.

Valera raised an eyebrow. “For me?” she asked. “You should know that when you throw something away, you don’t get to ask for it back.”

Tamyn felt herself biting her tongue, then she stopped it. “I didn’t throw you away.”

“If we are going to be friends again,” Valera said, “we’ll have to be honest

with each other.” She sipped the wine. “You were the one who left.”

Tamyn nodded. “I did.”

“Without even a note. Or a goodbye.”

Valera stood and walked toward her. “I would have appreciated a goodbye.”

“I need you,” Tamyn said.

Valera laughed. “You need *me*?” She laughed again. “Since when have you needed *anyone*, Tamyn Taval?”

“I need a sorceress,” Tamyn said.

“And what do you need a sorceress for?”

Tamyn swallowed. “For a Courage.”

Again, Valera’s laughter echoed around the room. “A Courage?” she asked. “You want me to join a Lord’s Courage?”

“Yes, Valera.”

Valera spun about, dancing on bare feet. She took another sip of wine, found a plate of grapes and lifted it with her other hand.

“A Courage!” she said again. “A Courage!” She put down her cup and plucked a grape from the plate, biting it in half. “And tell me, Tamyn Taval. Why would I do something like that?”

Valera gestured around the room. “I have money now. I have clients. I have luxury. I have turkeys and pheasants and spices delivered to my door.”

She stepped toward a shelf with a glass door. It held gold and silver and jewels. “I have admirers,” she said. “Wealthy admirers.

Lords and ladies who give me treasures for the illusion of love. The *illusion* of love.”

Valera paused and looked at Tamyn. “Something far less complicated and wounding than the real thing.”

She picked another grape from the plate and bit into it. “Tell me, Tamyn Taval. Famous, glorious, brave and daring Tamyn Taval.” She paused, watching. “Tell me why I would leave all of this for mud and horse shit and rain and orks shooting arrows at my head?”

“Because I need a sorceress,” she said.

Valera ate the rest of the grape. “Find another,” she said.

“I need the best.”

Valera smiled. “She’s not available. Find the second best.”

“Second best won’t do,” Tamyn said. “I need you.”

Valera stopped. She looked at Tamyn, stepping close. “Say that again.”

Tamyn felt her breath catch in her throat. “I need you.”

Valera stepped even closer, her bare toes touching Tamyn’s muddy boots. Tamyn could feel Valera’s breasts under her sheer gown touch her chest.

“Say it a third time,” Valera told her.

Tamyn felt something stirring in her. Her lips trembled to speak the words. “No,” she said. “I’ve done so twice. That’s enough.”

“Say it a third time,” Valera told her, “and I will come with you, no questions asked.”

“Never make a promise to a sorcerer three times,” Tamyn said. She raised her finger, pointing at Valera. “You taught me that.”

“This is different,” Valera said. “This is me.”

Tamyn nodded. “You’re right,” she said. “That makes it even *more* dangerous.”

A silence fell between them. Valera went back to the darkness of her room. “Your lord,” she said. “Is he a good man?”

Tamyn nodded. “Yes.”

“You said that about the last one,” Valera told her. “Look how that turned out.”

Tamyn said, “Yes.”

“How much is he paying?”

Tamyn told her. Valera laughed.

“What he pays in a month, I make in a week,” she said.

“I know,” Tamyn said. “It was all he had.”

“What is his name?”

“Catalan.”

“*Catalan?*” Valera hissed. “That wretch?”

“No,” Tamyn told her. “His brother.”

“Apples that grow on the same tree do not fall far from each other, Tamyn.”

Tamyn shook her head. “Sometimes, they do. They roll down the hill, far from where they were raised.”

Valera walked back from the shadows to the door. She looked at Tamyn. Stared a long time.

"You trust him?"

Tamyn nodded. "I do."

Valera paused, waiting for something. Then, she said, "No."

Tamyn said, "Tell me why."

Valera shook her head. "I've been telling you why. You won't listen."

"You would rather be a whore than a hero?" Tamyn asked.

Valera spun, shadows spinning with her. "Do not judge me!" she hissed. "You cannot judge me, Tamyn Taval! You have no right!" Her eyes burned with a dark fire. "You forget... I know you."

Tamyn put her hands on her hips. "Is it even *you* they lie with? Or is it a shadow?"

A dark fire lit on Valera's skin. "You best choose your words carefully, half-elf bastard," she said.

Tamyn nodded. "You know me," she said. "And I know you. I know what you are doing here in your dark room, tricking men into believing you love them. Fooling them into believing you cannot be with them."

"Give me wisdom," Valera said. "Show me the error of my ways."

Tamyn said, "Lord Trent."

The fire around Valera flickered for a moment. Valera opened her mouth to speak, but said nothing.

"I know," Tamyn said. "I know what happened."

Valera's breath came out in staggers. "What do you know?"

Tamyn said, "I know about the scar." She paused, then said, "And the curse."

"H-how?" Valera asked.

"I have a man who finds people. And their secrets." Tamyn stepped forward. "I know what happened. And I know why you're hiding."

Valera took a step back. "You don't know anything."

"Come with me," she said. "We can protect you. Lord Catalan can protect you."

Valera shook her head. "If he finds me..."

"I *want* him to find you," Tamyn said, reaching forward. "Because I'll be there, too."

Tamyn reached forward, but Valera stopped her. "No," she said. "It can't be like before." Tamyn saw a tear on Valera's cheek. "You broke my heart," she said.

Tamyn nodded. "I did," she said. "I was a coward."

Valera stepped away. She stopped at the bed, half-hidden in shadows.

"I promise," Tamyn said. "We will help you."

Valera shook her head. "No," she said. "You promised me once before and you broke that promise." She looked at Tamyn. "You don't get to break my heart twice, Tamyn Taval."

Tamyn nodded, her head bowed. "I'll go."

Valera said nothing. But when the door closed, she fell on the bed and wept into the pillow.

## 4

When Gimmi called Rhuk “a dirty ork,” Rhuk clubbed Gimmi across the face with his tankard. Beer and Gimmi both fell to the tavern floor and Gimmi made the kind of sound a man makes when he has a broken jaw. Rhuk knew that sound. He had heard it before.

Everyone stopped what they were doing and looked at Rhuk. He paid no notice. Gimmi tried crawling back to his feet, but Rhuk kicked him down. “Don’t move,” Rhuk said, his voice thick and full of deep vowels that almost smothered the consonants.

Gimmi didn’t obey. He tried to get back up again. Rhuk grabbed Gimmi’s ankle and twisted it until he heard bones snap. Gimmi screamed through his broken jaw. Rhuk shook his head, long black braids falling over his eyes. “I told you,” Rhuk said.

Gimmi tried to call for help, but the sound that came from his lips sounded more like, “hurp.” Regardless, a few large men stood up from their tables. Rhuk noticed them. He turned and said, “He owes King Rat. Want to stop?”

The three large men paused, shook their heads and sat back down.

Rhuk picked Gimmi up. The man screamed, trying to clutch his ankle.

“You ran,” Rhuk said. “Came here.” Rhuk shook his head. “Mistake.”

Gimmi uttered something that sounded like *sorry* and *please*.

Rhuk said, “King Rat pay me you alive or you dead.” Rhuk smiled, showing his ork fangs and tusks. “Run again?”

Gimmi shook his head, tears running from his eyes. Rhuk nodded. “Good.” Then, he picked up Gimmi and threw the man over his shoulder. He walked out of the tavern, ducking so he wouldn’t hit his head on the doorway.

\* \* \*

Shy said it again: “You want to recruit an ork?”

Tamyn kept walking. The busy streets walked with and against her. She kept her hand on her purse. This was Jinix after all. The City where purses wandered away.

Shy was just behind her, keeping his eyes on the streets. “You know, if you need someone who can use a sword, we can find one.”

She shook her head. “I don’t need someone who can use a sword, Shy,” she told him. “I need somebody who can break one.”

“But an ork?” Shy spotted a couple men he did not like and lowered his cowl over his head. He rushed up next to Tamyn. “And here?” he whispered. “You know, there’s a price on my head in this City.”

She smirked. “Exactly which City *doesn’t* have a price on your head, Shy?”



He sighed. "Good point." He ducked under a meat pie merchant's stall and came away with a meat pie in his hand, hidden under his cloak. "Good point."

They moved further through the market, hearing the calls and cries of the baker and the butcher and the pastry maker. When he was a safe enough distance away, Shy ate his pie. He offered some to Tamyn, but she shook him off.

"Still," Shy said, his mouth full of pie. "An ork. First, a crippled uvandir. Then, a prostitute. And now, an ork. I think I have a problem with that."

She looked at him. "Think the others have a problem with a convicted thief wanted by half the Reign?"

"Well," he said, stretching the word out as far as it would go. "That's just between us, right?"

She nodded. "Right." And she kept walking. "Besides," she said. "The prostitute isn't coming."

Shy finished his pie. "She said no?" He sounded surprised. "I thought serving in a Courage would be enough to tempt a harlot from her den of iniquity."

"Apparently not," Tamyn said.

Valera's rejection still stuck in her head. Seeing her again made her heart ache against her chest. She made a promise to herself not to feel what she felt in that room, but it was just another promise she broke. She failed. She failed Valera and she failed herself. And her Courage had no sorcerer. But she could not ignore the fact that she wanted Valera more than she wanted a sorcerer.

They passed by a corner and saw a gang of roddun watching them. The rat men bared their teeth. Shy made sure they didn't see his face.

He asked Tamyn, "How are we finding all these people anyway?"

"Errol," she said. "Lord Catalan's haffun. He asked for a list. A week later, he gave me places to look along with a few important details."

"How did he do that?" Shy asked.

"Not sure," Tamyn told him. "It's one of the things I'm going to ask Ashavendall when we find him next."

"That old coot?" Shy asked. "He could barely walk the last time we traveled with him. And that was two years ago."

She stopped and looked at street signs. Then, she turned down Brecken Street. "We need a wizard," she said. "And he's our best bet."

"Hope he can wizard himself upright," Shy told her. "Otherwise, we'll be carrying him in a bed strapped to a carriage."

Tamyn stopped at a building. She looked up, checked the address on her paper. "This is it," she said.

Shy looked confused. "He's living in there?" he asked.

"No," Tamyn told him. She started walking down the alleyway between the buildings. "Down here."

\* \* \*

The little shack sat behind the building, squat and simple, near the center of a small courtyard. Tamyn saw it and wondered how the ork would fit inside.

She walked up to the shack and said, "Rhuk!"

Shy felt the ground shake. He was sure of it. There was a growl from inside the shack that made his belly and chest shudder. The ork stepped from the shack and stood. It stood taller than any man Shy had ever seen. Two heads taller. And its shoulders and arms eclipsed sky, casting a shadow down on them. It scowled.

"Taval," it said. When it spoke, Shy could feel it in his feet.

Tamyn didn't move. "Rhuk," she said.

"No see you long time," the ork said.

Tamyn nodded. "Yes," she said. "Long time."

"What you do?" the ork asked. It sounded more like *wuchoodoo?*

She shrugged. "This and that."

The ork's scowl turned into a grin. For Shy, that the grin was more frightening.

Tamyn said, "What you do?" She said it the same way the ork did.

Rhuk nodded. "King Rat work. Men owe him. I make pay."

The simple joy on the ork's face almost made Shy turn and run.

Then, the ork said something in another language. Tamyn replied, but slower. They started talking together.

*I didn't know she spoke Ork*, he thought, and watched her grunt and spit what he assumed were words.

\* \* \*

"We speak Ork, yes?" Rhuk said. "Easier this way."

Tamyn nodded. "Yes. I can do that."

The ork smiled. "Good. I like that. Your words. I always bite my tongue."

"You are too big for little pains," she said.

Rhuk laughed. "You remember our ways," he said. "Good. I like you always, Taval."

Tamyn nodded. "I like you always, Rhuk." She looked at Shy. "He has the fear," she said.

Rhuk looked at Shy, then looked back at Tamyn. "Give him more fear, yes or no?"

Tamyn almost laughed. "No. He quick. Good scout." The word meant more in the ork tongue than the human tongue.

"He rob many?" Rhuk asked.

She nodded. "Many. Good tricks."

Rhuk looked back at her. "You want Rhuk?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "For Courage."

The ork laughed. "Man Courage?"

She laughed, too. "Yes," she said. "Man Courage."

He put his huge hand on Tamyn's head. His fingers could have reached all the way around and picked her off the ground.

“Yes,” he said.

Tamyn blinked. No bargaining?  
No deals? “Yes?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said. “King Rat boring.  
Never laugh.” He smiled and nodded  
at her. “Taval make Rhuk laugh.”

Then, something caught his eye. He  
knelt down, his grin vanishing, he looked  
closer at her. He touched her cheek  
where the arrow ran across her skin.

“Good scar,” he said. “Good pain?” he asked.

“Good pain,” she said.

“How got you?” Rhuk asked.

She smiled. “Running away.”

The ork burst out into a laugh that  
rattled window panes. “Taval,” he  
said. “Rhuk is glad to see you.”

She laughed. “We will earn  
scars together,” she said.

He waved a finger at her. “But  
no running away.”

## 5

Ashavendall coughed so hard, he buckled over.  
His apprentice, Salvenj, rushed up to help.  
Ashavendall coughed a little more, then smiled  
at the young man. “Thank you,” he told him.

Salvenj nodded. “Of course, Master.”  
He returned to the small stove and  
continued stirring the steaming pot.

“The stew is almost ready,” Salvenj said.

Ashavendall nodded. “Good.” He chuckled  
a little. “You make good stew.”

The apprentice continued to stir. He  
looked around the tiny room. He knew it  
so well. Eight years well. The tiny cracks  
in the walls, the hinge on the window

that squeaked, the loose board next to the  
bed. He knew all of it. Every inch of it.

Salvenj looked at his Master, lying in the  
bed. He had never seen the man so weak. So  
helpless. He heard Ashavendall was over one  
hundred years old. Even then, the man was  
always daunting. Standing like a tower, casting  
his shadow over Salvenj, chilling his bones.

When he was younger, the Master seemed  
like a ghost. Terrifying and impossible to  
understand. His voice like a wind through  
his heart. As he grew, he began to understand  
the man more, but he was always mysterious.  
Salvenj knew this room. Eight years long, he  
knew it. But he never understood the Master.

“How are your studies?”  
Ashavendall asked him.

Salvenj nodded. “Good, Master.”

“Better than good, I hope,” Ashavendall said. He coughed again. Not as rough as the last time, but it still made the old man’s eyes tear. He recovered and said, with a shredded voice, “You will have to be better than good to call yourself my apprentice.”

“Yes, Master,” Salvenj told him. “I understand.”

The door to the tiny room opened and Pertri stepped in. The old man—short and bald—said nothing, but looked at Salvenj with ice blue eyes. He had served the Master for over fifty years, cleaning the tower. He never spoke. But the glare he gave Salvenj said enough.

*“You’re nothing special.”*

Their relationship over the last eight years had not changed. And Salvenj didn’t hear him say another word. Not for eight years.

Pertri gestured for Salvenj to exit the room with him.

“Yes,” Salvenj said to Pertri. Then, he turned. “One moment, Master.” The wizard nodded and waved his hand, coughing into his other.

Salvenj closed the door behind him and looked at Pertri. “He will not last much longer, I think,” he said.

Pertri just stared at the door and said nothing.

Salvenj turned to look at the door as well. “If he dies... my apprenticeship is over.”

Pertri squinted, anger flashing in his eyes.

Salvenj saw this when he turned back. His own eyes blinked with the understanding of what he just said.

“No!” he whispered. “I did not mean that!” He raised his hands. “I love him. I love the Master. He’s... I do not even know my own father.”

Salvenj felt a swelling in his throat and in his eyes. “I don’t want him to die, Pertri.” His voice quivered when he said, “I love him. I would be lost without him.”

To Salvenj’s surprise, Pertri’s gaze softened. He touched the boy on the shoulder. Salvenj nearly melted under the silent man’s touch.

A bell rang. The visitor bell. Pertri looked back at Salvenj.

“I will answer it,” Salvenj said.

Pertri shook his head and pointed back at the room.

Salvenj nodded. “All right,” he said. He stepped back into the Master’s chambers and Pertri walked down the stairs toward the tower’s iron door.

\*\*\*

Shy pulled on the bell rope again. Then, he wrapped himself in his cloak a little tighter. “Cursed wizards,” he said. “Why do they always pick such cold places to retire?”

Tamyn had to admit: her teeth were chattering. It was a long journey out here. And nobody was answering the bell.

“Maybe he’s dead,” Shy said. “He’s an old man.” The wind whipped his cloak open

and he cursed. "I heard he was over one hundred when he served with us."

"Wizards lie," she told him.

"Everyone lies," Shy told her. Then, he winked. "Even me."

The door opened. Tamyn recognized the man who opened it.

"Pertri," she said.

The bald man bowed, the tattoos on his skull shining in the light. He recovered from his bow and stepped back, ushering them in.

Tamyn stepped through the doorway. When Shy stepped through, he gave Pertri a slight nod. "How you been?" he asked.

Pertri looked thoughtful for a moment, and then he gave a half-smile, half-frown.

"Still not a word, huh?" Shy asked.

Pertri shook his head, slowly.

Shy grinned. "One day, my friend."

Pertri raised an eyebrow at him. Shy knew exactly what that meant.

*One day, perhaps. But not today.*

The three of them walked up the stairway to the top of the tower. To Tamyn, the climb seemed to take longer than it appeared on the outside. She wondered if that was a trick of perception or wizard's magic. She knew better than to ask.

They reached the door and Pertri knocked. They heard a hoarse voice croaking on the other side, bidding them to enter. Pertri opened the door and invited them inside.

Tamyn saw the old man and nearly gasped. He looked as if he had been underwater for a week. He was so thin, a fall could break him in half.

"Ashavendall," she whispered. She rushed to him, grasping his hand. As soon as she did, the old man began to cough.

She said his name again, kissing his hand. It felt as cold as a wet rag. "My friend," she said. "What can I do?"

He smiled, his lips wet with phlegm. "That is always the first question you ask, isn't it? What can you do? How can I help?"

She felt her cheeks blush. "I learned from you," she said.

He coughed again. Gentler this time. He waved at the boy in the room. "This is my apprentice, Salvenj."

The boy bowed. Tamyn looked at him. He was barely a man. Maybe fifteen... maybe sixteen springs under his belt.

She blinked the tears from her eyes and rose up, offering her hand. "I am Tamyn Taval," she said.

The boy's eyes turned wide. "Tamyn Taval?" he asked. "My Master has spoken of you often!"

And in that moment, all the worry fled from her face as she turned back to the wizard lying in the bed.

"Has he now?" she asked, smiling wide.

"Oh yes," the boy said. "He told me of all your adventures."

"I bet he did," she said, looking at the old man.

The wizard nodded. "I may have... exaggerated a bit here and then, but I told the truth."  
Ashavendall smiled. "For the most part."

She knelt down by the bed again and grasped his hand. "You old fool. You kind, generous old fool."

Shy stepped up. "Hello, lad. My name's Shy. I don't suppose the old man mentioned me at all."

Salvenj looked puzzled, then embarrassed. "Um," he said.

The old man spoke up. "All I said about you, Shyver Wek, is that men like you are to be avoided at all costs."

Shy smiled. "Only nice things then," he said. "Good."

The old wizard returned Shy's smile but then began coughing again. Tamyn held his hand tight, but then eased her grip, afraid she might hurt him.

Ashavendall finished his cough, then nodded at her. "You've come looking for me for your Courage," he said.

She nodded, confused. "Yes," she said. "How did you know that?"

He gestured at the framed black glass mirror, sitting in the window sill. "My scrying stone showed me," he said. "I've been watching you."

"Watching me?" Tamyn asked.

He nodded. "That is how your friend found us. That 'Errol,' or whatever he calls himself. With a scrying glass of his own."

Suddenly, it made sense. The request for a list, the instructions...

Then, he pulled her closer. "Do not trust him," he said.

"Lord Catalan?" she asked.

Ashavendall shook his head. "No," he said. "The haffun with the spying glass. He has plans within plans. Do not trust him."

She nodded. "I understand."

Ashavendall touched her scarred cheek. "You got careless," he said.

Tamyn nodded. "I did."

"Do not do it again."

She shook her head. "I will not."

Then, Ashavendall spoke something in Elven. Tamyn heard it and looked at Salvenj. "I understand," she said.

Ashavendall grinned, a little sad. Then, he said. "I cannot go with you. I cannot join your Courage."

Shy sighed. "Curse the wind," he said.

Ashavendall looked at him. "May as well curse the sun and the moons and the stars, Shyver. May as well."

"Curse all of them," Shy said. "I do not want to watch you go like this." His voice trembled as he said it.

Ashavendall took his hand from Tamyn. "Come here, lad," he told Shy.

Shy stepped forward and knelt at the bed. "I cannot go with you," he said. "But Salvenj can."

Both Tamyn and Shy looked at the boy. His hand stopped stirring the soup.

“What?” he asked.

“You heard me,” Ashavendall said. “You can go with them.”

Salvenj ran to the bed, falling to his knees. “Master, I should be with you!”

Ashavendall shook his head. “No, boy. You should be with them.” He gestured at Shy and Tamyn. “I can teach you no more from this bed. On the road, they can teach you more.”

Salvenj’s eyes teared up. “I won’t leave,” he said. “I won’t.”

Ashavendall’s voice went low. For a moment, Tamyn and Shy recognized the old man. “You will,” he said. “You will do as I say.”

Salvenj hesitated, gasping between his tears.

“I am still your Master,” he said. “And you will honor my orders. And this, my last order, is to leave me.”

Salvenj held the old man’s hands in his. His tears fell freely now, his whole face full of pain. “You,” he stammered. “You—you are—my fah-fah-fah...” Salvenj couldn’t finish.

Ashavendall grabbed the boy and pulled him close, his weak arms wrapping around his shoulders. “I know,” he said. He looked at Tamyn and saw her own tears. Just behind her, Shy tried to hide his.

He pulled the boy’s face up from his chest and looked at him. “Remember the things you learned here. Listen to Tamyn,” he said. “She will teach you well. The things you learn from her will save your life.”

“I will never forget you,” Salvenj said.

Ashavendall kissed the boy’s cheek. “Nor I you,” he said. “Salvenj, you were my favorite apprentice.” The boy burst into tears again. The old wizard looked at Pertri.

“Help him pack,” he said.

Pertri nodded and offered his hand to the boy. Salvenj took it and stepped away. Then, he looked back at the old man.

Ashavendall smiled. Then, coughed so hard, he almost bent in half.

Pertri led the boy from the room. When he was gone, Ashavendall pointed at the steaming pot. “The boy’s stew,” he said. “It really is very good. Pour me a bowl before you leave and have some yourself.”

Tamyn smiled. “Yes,” she said. They all sat together and ate the stew without saying another word.

Finally, Shy and Tamyn said their goodbyes and left the old man alone in the room.

In the corridor, walking down the stairs, Shy asked her, “What did he say to you?”

She sniffed, wiping away tears. “When?” she asked.

“The Elven,” he said. “I think it was Elven. What did he say?”

She smiled and even laughed a little. “Oh,” she said. “He hasn’t changed at all.”

“Yes,” Shy told her, “but what did he say?”

She paused and turned, whispering.

*“Sometimes, you have to kick them from the nest.”*

## 6

Valera spilled the ink and cursed. Three times she tried writing the letter. Three times, she failed. This time, the ink smeared all over the parchment.

She applied some ointment to a rag and wiped her hands clean.

Then, she thought of Tamyn. She dismissed the thought and turned back to business.

A knock on the door. "Yes?" she asked.

Simone stepped in. "Madame," she said. "Your prospective is here."

Valera had forgotten about her appointment. Tamyn always distracted her. She nodded. "Send him in," she said.

The man who entered smelled like vanilla. Most of them did. He hid his hair under a powdered white wig and wore makeup. A disguise. An obvious disguise. He would have a pseudonym, as well. "Lord Wig," perhaps.

Still, Valera smiled and stood. "Good morning," she said, turning her voice to charming. "Are you the lord or his representative?"

The man bowed, low. "I am his representative," he said.

Very well. Not "Lord Wig," but "Master Wig." Valera curtsied. "Shall we discuss business, then?"

The man nodded. "We shall."

She gestured at the table with two chairs. He sat in one and she sat in the other.

Valera withdrew a contract from the table. "This is the standard contract," she said. "Unless your lord wishes something specific."

He shook his head. "No, no," he said. "My lord's needs are most basic."

She noted he was not looking at the contract. "Well," she said. "What is your master's name?"

Master Wig smiled. "Lord Trent."

Valera felt her heart freeze. It pumped ice cold blood to her fingers and made her body shiver.

She pushed back from the table. He made a gesture with his hands and light flew from them. It reached her eyes, pulled into her skull and stunned her. She could see nothing. Hear nothing.

"My master has been looking for you for some time," she heard him say. She could not tell from which direction. "And you were hiding right under his nose. How clever."

Valera knew the room. She knew where the window and door were. She tried to shout to Simone, but no words came from her mouth.

"Such a pity," Master Wig said. "All the things I would do to you. But the master wants you intact and unharmed."

She felt strong hands on her wrists and a rope. She kicked forward but found nothing. Then, the hands shoved her on the bed and lifted her legs. She struggled, but rope bound them tight.

"Now," he said. "It is time to go."



She screamed, but it only came out as a whisper. She felt something rough against her skin. He was putting her in a bag.

Her hands were bound. She could not speak. There was no sorcery to save her.

“Don’t struggle,” he said. “I have orders not to harm you, but if you struggle, I know ways to do it without leaving marks.”

She tried to scream again. This time, it was only a murmur. The spell was fading, but not soon enough.

Valera felt him lift her to his shoulder. Then, she felt him stop. He said something, but Valera could not hear or understand it. Then, she fell to the floor.

She kicked and screamed. Her voice was coming back. She could see only blotches of darkness, but spangles of light were coming through. Valera heard a tearing sound and then she saw the room with blurry vision.

In front of her was Simone. In her hand was a bloody knife. Master Wig was behind her, a wound in the back of his neck oozing blood onto her carpet.

“Mistress,” Simone whispered. “Are you hurt?”

Valera shook her head. “No,” she said. “Help me get these ropes off.”

Simone did just that. As soon as she was free, Valera started packing.

“Mistress?” Simone asked.

“We’re leaving,” Valera told her. “Now. Take one bag. And one bag only.”

Simone nodded and rushed from the room.

*Curse you, Tamyn,* she thought.  
*You led him right to me.*

She finished packing her bag and walked out of the room, not looking back. In a moment, she and Simone were on the street. She had no need to notice the sweet-smelling haffun standing on the other side, watching them flee.

\* \* \*

Tamyn never saw the punch coming.

Valera hit her solid across the jaw and Tamyn fell to one knee.

“You bitch!” Valera shouted.

The whole tavern stopped and looked. Shy was getting used to that sensation. He jumped up and grabbed Valera.

“Woah, there!” he said.

Valera kicked backward. Shy tried to dodge it, but she caught him close enough. He made a painful sound and bent over, but he kept hold of Valera’s arms.

“I will *burn you*, you bastard!” she said. Her skin began to glow with a dark fire.

“No magic!” the innkeeper shouted from behind the bar. “No weapons!”

Shy and Valera looked at the man. Shy let Valera go and Valera calmed the fire.

The innkeeper shouted, “Keep it down or I’ll call the Watch!” Everyone settled in. Everyone except Valera. She was still standing with Simone right behind her, looking as frightened and fragile as a doll.

Valera looked at Shy. “Never touch me again,” she said.

He held up his right hand and put his left hand on his heart. "Swear and sworn," he said.

Tamyn got up off the floor. Her lip was broken. She looked at Geir and Salvenj. Geir's face was as stoic as stone. Salvenj looked terrified.

She licked the blood on her lip and glared at Valera. "What is this about?"

"You led him to me," she said.  
"Right to my bloody door."

Tamyn was confused. "Led *who* to your door?"

She hissed, "You know."

Tamyn shook her head. "Valera, I..."

"Either you did it by accident, out of foolish carelessness," she said, "or you did it on purpose, hoping I'd run to you for help." She threw up her arms. "Either way, you failed. He found me and I'm not joining you."

"Did someone..." Tamyn started, but Valera interrupted.

"At my bloody door!" she said, a little too loud. Tamyn noticed the innkeeper was looking at them again.

"We need a room," Tamyn said. "So we can talk about this privately."

Valera shook her head. "We aren't talking about anything. You bungled it, Tamyn. Just like you always do."

That was when the ork walked in.

Rhuk saw Tamyn's table and walked over. He stood right behind Valera.

"Witch," he said.

Valera stopped and turned. She looked up at the ork.

"Rhuk?" she asked.

The ork nodded and smiled. "Me," he said.

Valera jumped up and wrapped her arms around the ork's neck. He laughed. She said his name again and again.

Shy looked at Tamyn. "Seriously?" he asked.

Tamyn shrugged, touching her swelling lip. "They're friends."

Shy just stared at the sorceress hugging the ork with every bit of strength she had. The ork just smiled.

"Rhuk," Valera said, still holding on to his neck. "You have to come with me. Please."

The ork looked confused. "You not stay?"

She shook her head. "With her?" she looked at Tamyn. "No."

"Rhuk go with Tamyn," he said. Then, he said, "You, too."

The sorceress dropped down, a wounded look in her eyes. Then, she looked at Tamyn. "Is he with you?" she asked.

Tamyn nodded. "Yes."

Valera took a breath. Then sat down at the table, holding Rhuk's hand. "Then, I'm with you, too."

Rhuk smiled. "Valah stay?" he asked.

Valera said, "Yes." Then, she looked up at the ork. "Because there is nowhere in the world safer than standing next to you."

## 7

Shy sat at the table in the tavern, his tankard of beer in front of him. He sat with an ork, a crippled uvandir, a prostitute and a boy who was probably a virgin.

He leaned forward. "So," he said, taking a quick drink, "this reminds me of a joke."

"Be quiet," Valera told him. She wasn't even looking at him. She was looking at the door.

The uvandir said nothing. Didn't move. He was like a statue. A statue with a beer in his hand.

The ork was asleep. His snoring found every corner of the room. Nobody dared wake him up.

And the boy was reading one of the books he insisted bringing with him. Wizards and their books. Something Shy just didn't understand. But every once in a while, Salvenj looked up from his book and glanced at Valera.

*Definitely a virgin,* Shy thought.

"Sorry," Shy said, raising his hands. "Just trying to lighten the mood."

Valera said, "I will give you a copper coin for every ten ticks of the uvandir's clock that you can keep your mouth shut."

"Starting now?" he asked.

"Starting from the day you were born," she told him.

The uvandir made a sound that may have been a guffaw. The boy kept reading (occasionally glancing) and the ork kept snoring.

"Well," Shy said, mostly to himself, "this is fun." He stood up, but Valera glared at him.

"Sit back down," she said.

"Why?"

Valera said, "Because Tamyn told you to stay in that chair. And she told me to keep you in that chair. And she said, 'Especially if he tries walking over to the card game,' which is *exactly* where you were headed."

Shy nodded and sat back down. "I can't argue with logic."

Valera told him, "Especially when you keep your mouth shut."

Shy frowned. Then, he said, "I'm going to get a beer." He glared at Valera. "Any problem with that?"

"Not as long as you walk the long way around the card table," she said. "And bring me some mead, would you?"

Rhuk awoke, as if the word had wakened him. "Mead!" he shouted.

"Anyone else?" Shy asked. Geir looked at him, but didn't say anything. "I'll get you one, too."

Shy left for the bar. Valera leaned back and felt Rhuk's arm wrap around her shoulder. Strong and sure. Safe. She closed her eyes and sighed.

When she opened them, she caught Salvenj peeking at her over his book. He looked back to the pages.

"It isn't a crime to look at me," she told him.

Salvenj blushed and looked at her over his book. "I apologize," he said.

She shook her head. "No need," she said.

He looked back at the book, then raised his gaze again.

"Um," he started, then stopped.

"Yes?" she asked.

He kept the book tight in his hands. "Um," he said again. "Shy said you were a..."

"Yes?" she asked again.

"Um," he said.

"Go on," she told him.

He nodded quickly. "Well," he said, pausing again. "I was wondering why... um... a sorceress would be a... um... a p-prostitute."

She smiled. "I'm not a prostitute," she said. "I'm a courtesan."

His face changed. "Oh!" he said, smiling. "That's different."

She raised an eyebrow. "Is it?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," he said. "A great difference."

She leaned forward a little. "Tell me," she said, suddenly interested.

"Prostitutes tend to be from the poorer class," he said. "Most prostitutes cannot read or have only rudimentary reading skills. Most are homeless, 'protected' by pimps, only have enough money to live day-by-day and die poor."

Valera nodded. "Go on," she said.

"On the other hand," Salvenj said, "courtesans come from the wealthier classes, are literate and choose their clients." He smiled. "You pay a prostitute for sex, but a courtesan? You pay for her *company*." He blushed again. "Sex is optional."

"Is it?" she asked.

She saw a look in Salvenj's eyes. He sensed a misstep. "Well," he said, "that's what I've read."

"What you've read," she said. Then, she leaned back in Rhuk's arm. "You read about courtesans in a wizard's tower?"

He nodded. "Master had many books," he said.

"Pennybooks?" she asked, grinning.

He nodded. "Yes," he said. "He had a whole collection. He even said some of them were inspired by a woman he served with in a..." he paused.

Valera laughed. "No," she said. "Not me. I turned to a life of vice after we parted ways." She tilted her head and asked, "What else did you read?"

"Many books," he said. "Almost everything in the library. Master always said that books were like friends. You discover them, spend time with them, even fall in love

with them. And if you leave them for a while, they're still there, waiting for you."

"That's very romantic," she told him. He smiled. Then, she asked, "Did you have any *real* friends?"

His eyes turned confused. "What?"

"At the wizard's tower," she said. "Did you have any friends who weren't books?"

He looked back down at his pages. "Sometimes, when people came to ask Master for assistance... I would talk to them."

Valera looked at Salvenj from across the table. Then, she asked, "How old were you when you were apprenticed?"

Salvenj kept his eyes on his book. "Ten years," he said.

"That's late," Valera told him. He didn't say anything. "How long were you apprenticed?"

Valera saw him considering a lie, then change his mind.

"Nine," he paused. "Eight. Almost nine years," he said.

That caught her off guard. She knew he was young, but *nineteen years?*

"Nine years?" she asked. "Did you spend all that time in the tower?"

Just then, Shy returned. "Beer and mead," he said, putting mugs down on the table.

Valera kept looking at Salvenj. "Go play cards," she told Shy.

Shy said, "What?"

Valera took some coins from her purse and put them on the table. "Go on," she said. "On me."

Shy smiled. "All right," he said. "Never say no to a given coin." Then, he walked away.

\* \* \*

The uvandir and ork were throwing darts and Shy was losing more of Valera's money. She didn't care. Over the hour, she went through three cups of mead and pulled herself closer to Salvenj. Easy. Slow. The boy didn't notice. She only just noticed herself. She felt the mead in her head and she was smiling.

"You read Foshier?" she asked him.

"Yes," he said.

"Josh Foshier's *101 Nights of Wine and Song?*" she asked.

"Yes," he said, smiling.

"All five volumes?"

He nodded. "Yes," he said. Then, he looked away. "I skipped most of volume three," he told her.

"Everyone does," she said, smiling. "But you found that in a wizard's tower?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"In *Ashavendall's* tower?"

He nodded. "Yes," he said again.

"Impressive," she said. Then, she slid a little closer.

“Well, it was there. I thought I’d read it.”

She took a sip of mead. “Did you start at the beginning of the library and just go to the end?”

He nodded. “Pretty much,” he said.

She put her hand on his hand. “I like you, Salvenj,” she said.

He blushed. “I’m glad.”

The mead was swimming in her head. Valera could feel it. She didn’t care. “Have you ever…”

The door of the tavern opened and Tamyn walked through. Valera stood. Shy looked up from the card table. Tamyn looked at him.

“It was her money!” he said, pointing at Valera.

Tamyn looked at Valera. The sorceress slid back to the ork’s arm and Salvenj picked up his book.

Shy collected his winnings—what winnings there were—and came back to their table.

“Where’s the bard?” Shy asked.

Tamyn sighed. “He’s in jail,” she said.

“Jail?” Valera asked. “For what?”

Tamyn sighed again. “The usual.”

\*\*\*

Sitting together, around a fire, Valera was the first to ask the question. She thrust a stick into the coals, stirring them slowly and asked, “Is he really worth it?”

Tamyn nodded, her face framed in shadows. “Yes, he is.”

Valera did not look convinced. “I know bards. I can get us a bard, if that’s what you want.”

Tamyn shook her head. “No,” she said. “I want *this* one.”

Valera crossed her arms and sat back against the tree behind her. “Convince me.”

Tamyn looked at the sorceress and scowled. “I don’t have to.”

“You do if you want me to help,” Valera said.

The uvandir looked as if nothing was happening. He sat still, drank his beer, and said nothing.

Tamyn sighed. “There were plenty of sorceresses,” she said.

Valera made a small sound. “Fine,” she said, and looked away.

They sat quietly for a while. A few moments later, Shy stepped into the light.

Tamyn looked at him. “Well?”

“Well,” he sighed, “it isn’t impossible.”

He pulled rolled up parchment from his coat and laid it on the ground. Tamyn leaned in, looking at Shy’s hand-written map.

“They’re holding him in the dungeon,” he said. He pointed at the map. “Me getting in won’t be a problem.” Then, his tone changed. “Getting him out *will*.”

“Tell me more,” Tamyn said.

He pointed at the map. "Your friend must have really gotten his master mad. He's been beaten. Badly. And he's got the shakes."

The uvandir looked up from his mug. Shy saw and said, "When men drink too much and then get cut off. We get the shakes."

The uvandir pursed his lips. "Too bad," he said, then he went back to his drink.

Shy looked back at Tamyn.  
"He's in bad shape."

Tamyn nodded. "Can we get in?"

Shy shook his head. "No. You'd all have to go over the wall. Gate has too many guards. And the wall has two guards per side."

Valera said, "You got in."

Shy looked at her. "You aren't *me*."

Tamyn pointed at the map.  
"No sewer entrance?"

"Too far to swim."

"No swimming," Geir said.

Shy nodded. "I thought as much."

Tamyn looked again at the map. "We could go in honestly," she said.

"No trick?" Rhuk smiled, touching his axe.

"No," Tamyn told him. "We go in, say we're with Lord Catalan's Courage and ask for the bard."

Shy sighed. "No," he said.

"Why not?" Tamyn asked.

"You didn't see." He thought for a moment. "This, this is a dead man we're talking about. He's getting hung or drawn and quartered or something. There's no way he's walking out of that place alive."

Tamyn looked at the map again. There had to be a way. There was always a way.

Valera said, "Tamyn. Let's sleep on it. You'll come up with something tomorrow."

Tamyn nodded. "All right."

She laid back, pulling up her blanket. She tucked her shoulders underneath and closed her eyes.

## 8

Valera heard coughing. She sat up, her vision blurry. Morning dew was still wet on her hair. She looked around, seeing the remains of the fire. She was cold. And she remembered why she hated “adventuring.”

She shivered for a moment, rubbing her arms with her hands. She saw Tamyn and Salvenj still asleep, but the ork, the uvandir and Shy were not in their blankets. She did not see Rhuk and Geir, but Shy was already awake. She looked at him... then looked again.

He was sitting on the fire side of the fire’s remains. He sat with a man Valera did not recognize. The man was bundled in Shy’s blankets and his cloak. His skin was like a dead fish and he was wet. He labored to breathe.

Just beside the man, Shy sat, taking a bandage from his arm. Under the bandage was a bloody wound. He winced a little, biting his lip.

“Whu—what happened?” Valera asked.

Shy said nothing.

“Shy?” Valera asked.

He looked at her, but did not answer.

She got up, walking toward him. “Who is that?”

Shy kept his gaze low. “Do you need to be told everything?” he asked her.

The ork and uvandir walked in from the forest, each carrying a string of fish. The two

looked like a mismatched set of candles: one burned almost to the bottom and the other still waiting to be lit for the first time. Both of them set down next to the remains of the fire and began working on a new one.

Salvenj woke then, as if from a dream. He started up, half gasping. Everyone turned to look. He blinked a few times, realized what happened, then frowned. “Apologies,” he said.

Valera still stood over Shy. “I’m waiting,” she said.

Salvenj rubbed his eyes. “Waiting for what?”

Tamyn woke. She stretched her arms and rubbed her eyes, then looked at the source of the noise. Valera looked at her, pointing at Shy.

“He went into the castle,” she said. “He went into the castle and took the bard.”

Tamyn looked at Shy. He still said nothing, applying a new bandage to his wound.

Valera looked at both them. Then, at Tamyn, “Why aren’t you saying anything?” she asked, almost shouting.

Tamyn stood, putting her blanket over her shoulders. She walked to Shy and sat down next to him. She looked at the man in the blankets, shivering and gasping.

“What can we do for him?” she asked.

Shy said, “I’ve already gotten some of what we need. Best to get to a City for the rest.”



“A City far from here,” she told him.

Shy nodded. “We should be moving soon. They may come looking.”

Valera nearly screamed. “What is going on?” She stomped over to Tamyn. “You ordered him to go in there by himself?”

Shy shouted from the other side of the fire. “She didn’t order anybody.” Then, he lowered his voice. “I went on my own.” He took a breath. “And you’d better keep your voice down. If there *are* any guards looking for us, your shouting will let them know where we are.”

Valera opened her mouth, then shut it. She looked back at Shy. “Did anyone see you?”

He looked at her. “Not anyone who can say anything.”

Rhuk made a sound that could have been a chortle. Valera turned and looked at the ork. His big grin spread across his mouth, all teeth, all sharp.

Valera shook her head. “Stupid,” she said.

Shy stood and said, “Come with me.” Then, he turned and walked into the forest. Valera looked at Tamyn. Tamyn looked down at the fire.

Valera cursed, then followed Shy.

\* \* \*

He sat on a fallen tree. Valera stepped up to him.

“Well?” she asked.

Shy looked at her, his face dour. Then, tossed off his cloak and started untying his jerkin.

“What are you doing?” she asked, taking a step back.

He pulled aside the leather and pointed at a scar, just above his heart. “See this?” he said.

She took a step closer and looked. Then, she smiled and said, “Is this some kind of story about how Tamyn saved you from a fatal blow? Because I’ve heard those stories before.”

“My father gave me this,” Shy said.

Valera stopped smiling.

He tied his jerkin back up, put his cloak back on his shoulders. “Your accent. Makes me think you were born in Vinnick. Am I right?”

She nodded. “Yes.”

“Your parents could afford to send you to one of the colleges?”

“What does this have to do with...?”

“I was born in Jinix,” Shy said. “I think. At least, that’s my earliest memories. Jinix.”

She put her hands on her hips. “I’m not interested in heredity. I want to know what happened back there.”

“I’m getting to it,” he told her. “Just listen.”

She paused, then shifted her stance. “All right,” she said.

“My mother,” he said, “was a woman like you. Educated. Beautiful. But she

made a mistake with the wrong man and her family threw her out.”

Valera blinked as a memory flashed behind her eyes. “Keep talking,” she said.

“She didn’t have any money. All she had was her looks. She hoped the man would help. And he did for a while. Until she got too fat. You understand what I mean?”

Valera nodded. “Yes.” She knew exactly what he meant.

He kept talking. “After I was born, so I’m told, he put her to work. I grew up in that house. Women everywhere. I learned a lot. I learned how to watch a man beat my mother and keep my mouth shut. That was the first lesson I learned.”

Valera felt her breath catch in her chest. She also noticed Shy saw it.

“When I was a little older, I told him to stop beating my mother. He was drinking, so I broke the bottle across the table and threatened him with it. He laughed, took it out of my hands and thrust it into my chest.”

Valera could feel her chin shivering. She felt herself stepping closer.

“I didn’t know much,” Shy said, “but I knew I was going to die. I could feel that. He turned his back on me and went to my mother. She tried to struggle, tried to get to me, but he held her back. I looked around and saw the pistol he kept under the bed. I got it, held it my hands, pointed it at him, and pulled the trigger.”

She tried to speak, but her voice caught in her throat. “You killed him?”

Shy shook his head. “No,” he said. “I shot my mother.”

Valera felt her knees buckle. She caught herself on a tree. She tried speaking, but only syllables escaped her lips, no words.

“He left us both there. The other women came in. They tried to help my mother, but she was already gone. They managed to keep me from following her.”

Valera said, “Shy... I don’t know...”

He held up his hand. “Listen,” he said. She nodded.

“The women went to the magistrate. He came and asked me questions. He said my father was protecting himself. That meant no charges.”

Valera felt the sadness in her belly slowly churning into anger. “Did you find him?” she asked.

Shy nodded. “Yes.”

Then, she asked. “Did you kill him?”

Shy didn’t answer at first. Then, he said, “Tamyn believes in the law. She believes that if we do not follow the law, we make ourselves as wicked as those who break it.”

Valera said, “I know.”

Shy bit his lip. “You two know each other really well, don’t you?”

Valera paused before she nodded. “Yes,” she said.

“You love her,” Shy told her.

Valera began to protest, but Shy held up his hand. “You wouldn’t be so angry if you didn’t.”

Valera said, “Tamyn believes in the law. But you don’t?”

Shy shook his head. “No,” he said. “I agree completely. If we don’t follow the law, we become monsters.”

“Then why...”

He looked up at her. “Because my hands are already bloody. Hers are not.”

The sun was still rising and for a moment, she saw a light pass across his face. *For the first time, she thought, I’m seeing you.*

She nodded and said, “Fair trade.”

Shy cocked his head. “What?”

“Fair trade,” she said. “You told me a story. Now, I tell you one.”

\* \* \*

When Atellus woke, he was covered in blankets. Tamyn Taval was sitting by his bed. She held a spoon and a bowl of hot oats.

“Hello,” she said.

She spooned up some of the oats and took a bite. “Mm,” she said. “They put honey in it. And hot milk.” Tamyn held the bowl toward him. “Do you need my help?”

Atellus shook his head. “No,” he said. He sat up and took the bowl from her. He put one bite in his mouth, then ate more quickly.

“Hungry,” she told him.

He just nodded, spooning up the oats, honey and milk. Tamyn waited until he was finished.

Atellus put the bowl down on his lap and looked at her. “Sorry,” he said.

“It’s all right,” she said. “I understand.”

Atellus slouched back in the bed. “How much do I owe you this time?” he asked.

“No coins or paper,” she said.

He tried to smile. “That bad?”

She nodded. “Yes.”

He looked back in the bowl, scraping the bottom. “Is there any more?” he asked.

She shook her head. “No. And you shouldn’t eat too much.”

He pushed himself up by his elbows. “How long have I been like this?” he asked.

“Like this?” she said. “Only a few days. You were worse a red moon ago.”

“A red moon?”

Tamyn nodded. “Lord Catalan brought in the town philosophers to work on you. They’ve been using medicine and meditations every day.” Her mirth faded. “We almost lost you.”

“How close?” he asked.

She held up two fingers, almost touching. “This close.”

He sighed. “I’m sorry,” he said. “And, thank you.”

"You can thank me by signing up," she told him.

"Singing up?"

"Lord Catalan's Courage."

He laughed. "Are you joking?"

"No."

"You remember the last time that happened?" he asked.

Tamyn nodded. "I do."

"Certain words come to mind," he said, rolling his eyes, pretending to remember. "Words such as, *catastrophe*. Or *disaster*."

She smiled. "Yes," she said.

"*Baleful, tragic, ruinous...*"

"Now, you're just showing off," she said.

"I'm serious," he said. "After what happened with you and Valera..."

"She's here," Tamyn said.

His eyes grew wide. "You aren't serious."

Tamyn nodded. "Yes, she is." Tamyn poured a cup of water and handed it to him, pouring another for herself.

"What is this?" he asked.

"Water," she told him.

"Ewww," he sniffed the cup. "Do you know what fish *do* in water?"

"It's been boiled," she told him. "Drink it."

"I shall," Atellus said. But then, he added, "Reluctantly."

He sipped the water.

"All of it," she told him.

Atellus made a face at her, then drank the rest of it. "You couldn't have a wizard cool it down?" he asked.

"You're not that important," she told him.

Atellus set the cup aside. "I'm glad I know where I stand."

She said, "I have Valera, Rhuk and Geir," she said. "They're all waiting for you to get well."

He laughed, then flinched. "Now I know you're lying to me, Tamyn Taval," he said, holding his side. Then, he asked, "How did you get me out?"

"Shy did it."

"Shy?"

"You can meet him later."

He nodded. "It sounds like you have a Courage ready to go."

"All I need is a bard to write down what we do."

"And to make sure you don't get *all* the pretty girls," he said.

Tamyn tried not to smile.

"I missed you," he said.

Tamyn said, "I missed you, too, Atellus."

## Part Three Caphin Village

### 1

It's a small village, just north of Ashcolmb, about thirty leagues from Catalan Castle. In the center of the village is a statue of the village founder: Harrod Caphin. He stands with a lute in one hand and wheat in the other with a hammer at his feet. Caphin was a bard who led people to this place, where the soil was rich from the flooding river. He sang while he built, his hands calloused from the lute and the hammer.

That was seventy years ago. Caphin provides almost all the wheat to Catalan Castle, nearly one fifth of the wheat to Ashcolmb in general. And, tomorrow morning, it is the time for the harvest.

For tonight, it is time for festival. Willam Harvester steps out of his house, pulling suspenders over his shoulders. He looks over the village and lights his pipe. Little Shendon Vin runs by him, waving. His father, Dannel Vin, stops by to say hello.

"Good harvest this year," Dannel says.

Willam smiles. "Best in a long year."

When Willam talks, he speaks with a rural accent, his vowels swallowing the consonants. When Willam speaks, it sounds, "Bess een a loun yeeah."

Dannel comes from the City. He left it ten years ago, coming to the village to begin a new life. He has City marks on his arms and a past he doesn't want to talk about. Willam only asked once. Dannel started working in the blacksmith's, helping old Qent Sur. When Qent died, Dannel took it over. He was Dannel Vin, City brigand. Now, he's Dannel Vin, village blacksmith. And he's a happier man.

Dannel watches his son run towards the lights and sounds of the festival.

"Who's taking the paper?" Dannel asks.

As is the tradition, every equinox and every solstice, the village sends a messenger to the castle to report on the harvests. Willam thinks for a while.

"Little Shen is getting tall," he says.

Dannel tries to hide his smile.  
"Yeah. Like a weed."

Willam says, "Mayhap he can go with Tullard this year. Learn the way."

Dannel nods. "Mayhap he can."

The men talk a little longer, then shake hands. Dannel walks away. From the door of his

house, Willam's wife comes out, carrying a pie. Willam can smell it before he sees it.

"Was that Dannel Vin?" she asks.

Willam nods. "Sure, it was."

She steps up beside him. "He asking about his boy?"

Willam's pipe went out and he relit it. "Uyah," he said.

"I'm sorry I didn't see it," she told him.

Willam sucked on the pipe.

"Ain't nothing like a proud father, is there, Willam?"

Willam Harvester nodded and put his hand around his wife's shoulder and squeezed. Then, the two walked down to the lights and sounds of the festival.

\*\*\*

Errol told Tamyn, "We have not heard from Caphin Village."

They were standing in the great hall of Catalan Castle, Tamyn and Errol. The thin man gave her a map.

"This is the way," he said.

"How long?" she asked.

Errol rubbed his chin. "Usually, they send a messenger with the turning of the season. One or two days later, the messenger arrives."

"Four days, then?" Tamyn asked.

Errol nodded. "Yes."

"Are you sure the messenger isn't just late?" Tamyn asked.

He shook his head. "No," he said. "Caphin Village is always prompt. The cause is not lackadaisicalness."

Tamyn looked at the map. "We can ride out tomorrow."

"You can ride out *now*."

Tamyn looked at the majordomo. "Did you say something to me?"

"Indeed, I did." He stepped around the side of his desk and looked at papers. "Caphin Village is a major source of wheat and therefore is a major source of income. If we lose the crops, you don't get paid."

"I'm not doing this *for* the coin, Errol," she said.

"Then why did you haggle over the price?"

He asked the question without looking up. Tamyn felt her anger boiling, but decided not to let it out.

"I'll ignore that for now," she said. "I don't want to argue."

"Good," he said, "because you're no good at it."

Errol looked up from his papers. "Now," he said.

"I'll get the Courage together," she said, walking away. She slammed the door behind her.

\*\*\*

With rain falling off her wide-brimmed hat, lightning scoring in the distance, Tamyn said, "Arrogant prick."

Atellus sneezed and asked, "Is there any other kind of noble?" He tried to wrap his cloak tighter to keep out the rain.

Shy just nodded. Then, he looked up at the dark sky. "Glad I had rain gear," he said. He looked back at Valera, shivering in a cloak. "Luckier than others," he said.

Lightning shot across the dark sky. The road was thick with mud, so they rode to the side.

To the rear, Rhuk made a loud, happy sound. He laughed and shouted, "The sky sounds for battle!" He didn't ride a horse, but an elk. Shy noticed it had red eyes. He also noticed the ork fed his mount raw meat.

Beside him, the uvandir rode his mule. Unlike the other mounts, the mule didn't seem to mind the lightning. He just strode on. Of course, earlier, the mule stopped under a tree, out of the rain, and stayed there. For an hour. Shy said, "The mule is more stubborn than an uvandir."

Geir said nothing, just sat on his mule, and waited.

"How much further?" Salvenj asked.

Tamyn turned his way. The boy looked drowned and miserable. "Only a little further," she said. She pointed ahead. "See? That's the last way station. Only ten leagues after that."

"Only ten leagues!" Atellus said. "Perhaps we can sing a song to pass the time?"

Nobody wanted to sing a song.

They stopped at the way station, shaking off the rain. Shy and Rhuk tended to the horses and his elk, then came in to join them.

The roadman assigned to the station was Sajsh. She gave them coffee, warmed bread and dry blankets. When she saw what Valera was wearing, she said, "I have some warmer clothes if you want them."

Valera shook her head. "No," she said. "Those are yours."

Sajsh insisted and Tamyn said, "Thank you." She took the clothes from the roadman and gave them to Valera.

They spent the night in the way station on cots and under warm blankets. In the morning, they left for Caphin Village.

As they left, Valera left three silver coins, making sure Tamyn didn't see.

\*\*\*

Overlooking the village, Salvenj asked what everyone else was thinking.

"Where are they?" Salvenj asked.

The rain had trickled down to a sprinkle and a thick mist covered the grass. The riders stood at the top of a hill. They saw the statue and the houses. But nobody was moving. Nothing at all.

Tamyn looked over the village. Empty streets. Doors wide open. She said, "Rhuk?"

The ork urged his elk forward. "Not ork," he said. "No blood."

Tamyn asked, "How about gnolls?"

The ork shook his head. "No smell." He looked at the ground. "No tracks. Not here."

"Circle around," she said. Then, she looked at Shy and Atellus. "Go with him."

Rhuk waved at them. "Singing man and little funny one," he said. "Ride with Rhuk!"

Shy looked at Tamyn and mouthed the words, "little funny man?" Tamyn winked at him. He and the bard followed the ork as they rode to the other side of the village. As Rhuk passed by the sorceress, Tamyn saw Valera touch his shoulder. "Be safe," she said.

Rhuk laughed. "No glory for safety!" he said and rode away.

Tamyn looked at Valera and Salvenj. "I need to know what happened here. What can you tell me?"

Valera said, "I need to get closer."

Salvenj nodded. "Yes," he said.

"All right." Tamyn gestured at Geir. "Let's go. Stay close to them."

Geir said nothing, but urged his mule. The four of them rode down into the village square.

When they got there, Salvenj got off his horse and opened his pack. He closed his eyes and moved his fingers, softly.

Valera told Tamyn, "Boy's got the gentle touch."

Tamyn nodded. A moment later, Salvenj spoke with his eyes still closed. "There was something here. A spell."

"Must have been powerful if you can still sense it," Valera said.

Salvenj nodded. "Yes. Very powerful."

Tamyn asked, "What kind of spell?"

Salvenj refocused, turning and muttering. "Necromantic," he said.

Tamyn asked, "Doesn't the Wizard's College forbid necromantic magic?"

With his eyes still closed, Salvenj said, "It may not be a wizard." He clenched his eyes tighter. "Something bad happened here," he said. "Something... *old*."

The uvandir sat up in his saddle. "Old?" he asked.

Salvenj nodded. "Yes," he said. "I've never felt anything like this before. It feels... wise. Wicked." He opened his eyes. "It's evil. Whatever it is."

Geir shifted in his saddle. Tamyn asked him, "You know something?"

The uvandir just looked at her. *No*.

Rhuk and Shy rode back. "Tracks," Rhuk said. "All human. Going toward the mountain."

Shy said, "There was some blood."

Rhuk nodded. "Not enough for kill, but enough to hurt."

Valera moved her horse next to Rhuk. The ork said, "More tracks. Come from mountain. Same way."

Tamyn was confused. "How's that?"

Rhuk put out his right hand flat and made walking gestures with his left fingers. "Tracks come down from mountain, tracks go back up. More tracks go up than come down."



Atellus said, "So, they came down from the mountain, used something magical and powerful, then brought all the villagers back up to the mountain with them."

"Something old," Salvenj said.

"Powerful and old," Atellus laughed. "Wonderful. Always a perfect combination for trouble."

Shy said, "You'll get a story out of it."

Atellus frowned at him. "Only if I don't get killed."

"Come on," Tamyn said. "Let's search the village. Find out what happened here."

\*\*\*

After an hour of searching, they found little. Dinners on plates, uneaten. Cups of wine.

Atellus said, "It's as if they just got up and walked away." Then, he sneezed. "Cursed cold," he said.

Tamyn agreed. They found blood in one place, but it was drops only. Not a serious wound.

Then, Shy called her name. She went out into the street. He was waving at her from across the way. She followed and saw what he found.

"I was wondering where they would be," he said, pointing at a hole in the ground. Tamyn looked and saw the charred remains of dogs. All the bodies were tied by the neck to an iron post.

"A place like this," he said, "out here in the middle of nowhere. Best friend you have is a dog."

"Th—they burned them al..." Tamyn's stomach turned. She walked away from the hole. Shy stepped closer. "Sorry. I thought you should see it."

She said, "You could have warned me."

"I didn't figure you would... I mean, you've seen bodies before."

She put her hand over her mouth and gagged. She bent over, expecting her stomach to heave, but it didn't. In a moment, she recovered. "They didn't need to do that," she said.

Rhuk stepped up to the pit and nodded. "Aya, they did," he said. "Dogs train to fight, to kill. Best way to keep them down."

Tamyn said, "They could have just left them! Tied them up and left them!" Her voice was louder than she wanted it to be and she saw that on Rhuk's face.

The ork nodded and walked away.

Another voice called her name. It was the bard.

"Tamyn!" Atellus said. "Come quick!"

Shy opened his water flask and offered it to her. She took it and drank, then gave it back. "Thanks," she said. Then, she and Shy followed the bard's voice.

\*\*\*

He was outside the village, to the north, toward the mountain. Atellus stood still, his back to them. Salvenj was with him. When they got closer, they saw what the two had found.

"Every village has one," he said. "I just didn't expect to find this."

Tamyn saw the graveyard. About twenty stones. And the graves were all empty.

Salvenj looked at her. "Necromancy," he said.

Tamyn was still trying to catch her breath. "I've never seen anything like this."

"I have."

Tamyn turned and saw Valera with Rhuk. "I've seen it before," she said. "In Ashcolmb."

Atellus asked, "Is everything I hear about that City true?"

Valera nodded. "Yes," she said. "And worse."

Rhuk was on one knee, looking at the ground. "Tracks," he said. "Here to village."

Tamyn looked at Salvenj. "The Wizard's Academy..."

Salvenj shook his head. "No," he said. "Such knowledge is known, but not taught."

Tamyn thought for a moment. They were dealing with more than just a missing messenger. Raised corpses. The entire village missing. And the dogs.

"We need to know more," she said.

Valera shook her head. "We need to go back and get Catalan's guard."

Shy said, "That's six days journey, at least." He pointed at the mountain. "They could all be dead by then."

"They could all be dead *now*," Valera told him. "We don't know."

"We have to find out," Atellus said. Tamyn looked at him. He was still pale, still shaking

in his cloak. She should not have brought him. She should not have let him insist.

"We will go to the mountain," Tamyn said. "Scout out what is there. We can't act without knowledge."

"Who goes?" Shy asked.

Tamyn said, "You and Rhuk." She looked at the rest. "We'll stay down here. We don't want to raise too much attention."

Rhuk nodded. He put his huge hand on Shy's shoulder. "Funny little man, come with Rhuk."

Shy smiled at Tamyn. "Funny little man," he said. "Right."

Tamyn watched them ride off together toward the mountain. Then, she turned her attention to Atellus.

"I shouldn't have brought you," she said.

He nodded. "I know. But I insisted."

She asked Valera, "Is there anything you can do?"

Valera shook her head. "Other than keep him warm and feed him soup? No."

Salvenj said, "I might be able to." He took one of his books from a saddle bag. "I have something. But it will take me time."

Tamyn nodded. "Let's put him in a bed in one of the houses."

Valera and Salvenj helped the bard through a door. Then, Tamyn turned, looking for Geir.

The uvandir was gone.

## 2

Shy could not believe how quiet the ork could be. He moved like a cat, silent as silk.

They left the horses behind when they saw the cave opening in the side of the mountain. Two guards stood watch. Since then, they were on foot, moving as close as they dared.

“We can’t get to them from here,” Shy said, pointing at the empty space between their cover and the cave opening. “At least ten ticks of running between us and the cave.”

Rhuk nodded and drew his bow.

“Wait a tick,” Shy whispered. “You aren’t going to kill them?”

Rhuk nodded. “They take slaves,” he said, knocking two arrows, “they die.”

Shy looked at the two arrows. “You aren’t going to hit both with one hit, are you?”

Rhuk pulled back on the bow, looked at Shy and smiled. Then, he let go of the string without looking. Shy saw the two guards fall, each with an arrow in his chest.

Shy caught his breath, then he looked at the ork. “I guess you are.”

The ork slung his bow back over his shoulder. “Tamyn not glad if Rhuk kill,” he said as they slunk up to the cave opening.

Shy shook his head. “What she doesn’t know, she can’t be unhappy about.”

Rhuk nodded. “She no ask, I no tell.”

Shy and Rhuk picked up the bodies and dragged them to cover. “I know exactly what you mean, friend.”

\* \* \*

Inside the cavern, they heard the sounds of digging. The cave was dark, only lit by occasional torches. Most of them had burned out. Shy followed Rhuk. The ork seemed to know where he was going.

Shy had seen mines before. This was not a natural cave. It may have started that way, but it wasn’t that way anymore. Large, wooden beams supported the walls and iron rails ran along the ground.

“What this?” Rhuk asked, pointing at the rails.

“This is an uvandir mine,” Shy whispered. “They use the rails for carts. Iron carts.”

Rhuk shook his head. The ork didn’t understand. Shy saw a cart with broken wheels. “Like that,” he said. “They go on the rails.”

Rhuk stopped to look at the cart. He looked at the wheels, then he looked at the rails. Then, back again. Finally, he nodded. “Rhuk see,” he said.

They moved deeper into the mine.

At an intersection, a guard marched by them. He missed them in the darkness, moving through the cave while they remained close to the wall. Shy moved fast, caught the guard by the throat and pulled him back. The guard fell silent at Shy’s feet.

“No kill?” Rhuk asked.

Shy shook his head. “Not if I don’t have to.”

“Dead enemy stay dead,” Rhuk said.

“Remind me to tell you about Lord Pallenor,” Shy told him. He went through the guard’s pockets. He found a few coins and some salted meat, but nothing else.

“Help me out,” he told Rhuk and started stripping the guard.

“Ah,” Rhuk said. “Good trick.”

“Too bad we can’t find a guard big enough to fit your shoulders,” Shy told him.

Rhuk chuckled. “Too bad.”

\*\*\*

Luckily, the guard’s helmet fit. It was tight, but Shy got it over his head. He walked ahead of Rhuk, making a gesture when the coast was clear. The ork moved quickly from shadow to shadow, following Shy’s lead.

Shy followed the sounds of workers: iron on stone, manacles and moans of pain. They were sounds he knew from a previous life. The one he left behind before meeting Tamyn. He put that thought away and kept moving.

In a tight corridor, he saw a guard leading a group of men and women in chains. Another guard stood behind them. The prisoners were all but naked and their ankles and wrists looked bloody. Shy stepped aside and let the line go through. He looked at each of the faces, but found no hope in any of them. Only a dim light of despair in their eyes.

When the line passed, Shy decided to follow them. Rhuk stayed close behind. After a few turns, they passed into a larger room. This was where the sounds were coming from. Shy looked at it and understood why these men took the villagers.

Shy and Rhuk stood up above the chamber, looking down. From their vantage, they could see the soldiers leading the villagers down a stone path along the wall down to the chamber.

The chamber was as big as an opera house. Along the walls, there were statues and carvings. They were not human. They were fat and bloated things squatting on pedestals and thrones. All their heads were broken from their bodies and their bellies were covered in graffiti that Shy could not read.

In the middle of the room, the villagers dug. The pit they stood in was at least twenty feet deep.

Rhuk said, “Twenty.”

Shy looked at him. “What?”

“Twenty guards,” Rhuk said. “Here, can fight all them. No bows. Only spears and swords.” He pointed at the dirt path leading from the bottom of the chamber to where they stood. “Only two come at Rhuk, then two, then two,” he said. “Rhuk fight all them.”

Shy shook his head. “Now *that* is something that would make Tamyn angry at us.”

Rhuk snarled through his teeth. “They slaves,” he said, pointing at the villagers. “No more slaves.” He took his bow from his shoulders.

Shy grabbed the bow. “No,” he said. “No, Rhuk. Not now.”

Rhuk growled low and put his face close to Shy. Shy saw the ork's eyes. They were nearly black, but an inky redness started to spill in.

"You do not tell Rhuk," he said, spittle in his mouth and teeth.

Shy let go of the bow. "I was wrong," he said. "I shouldn't have done that." Then, "But we are under orders to *look*. Not to kill. Not without everyone else."

The ork's growl got louder.

Shy said, "I promise. We will come back, we will let the people go. No more slaves."

Shy held up his wrists and pulled aside the leather bands. He showed Rhuk the scars. "No more slaves," he said. "I promise."

Rhuk looked at Shy's wrists. The red in his eyes faded. Then, he nodded.

"Get Tamyn," he said. "Free slaves."

Shy patted the ork on the shoulder. "I promise." Then, he started breathing again.

### 3

"How is he?" Tamyn asked.

Salvenj held Atellus's hand and looked up. "Better," he said. He smiled. "I haven't used that spell in years."

Valera took Tamyn aside. "Where's the uvandir?" she asked.

"I don't know," Tamyn said. "And I'm starting to get worried."

"He went off without telling anybody where he was going," Valera said.

Tamyn had nothing to say about that.

"I can find him," Valera said.

"Casting magic at him may be a mistake," Tamyn told her.

"Trust me," Valera said. "He won't feel a thing."

Tamyn considered it. Casting magic at uvandir always carried a risk. There was a chance he'd notice. There was a chance he wouldn't take it well. Both of those chances were high.

"Do it," Tamyn said.

Valera closed her eyes. An inky blackness spilled from her hands and arms, swirling around her. It stretched out like tendrils, reaching through the windows and doors.

Tamyn stepped back. She didn't like human magic, let alone trust it. Something about it always felt wrong. An itch she couldn't reach. Rubbing her teeth on cotton. She watched Valera concentrating and old emotions swam back into her head. Old desires, old mistrusts.

"Got him," Valera whispered. She opened her eyes. "He's north."

From Atellus's bedside, Salvenj said, "But that's toward the..." then, he stopped himself.

“Curse his eyes,” Tamyn said. “He went after Rhuk and Shy.”

Valera said, “That means one of *us* has to go after *him*.”

Tamyn shook her head. “No,” she said. “We can’t leave Atellus here.”

“I’m feeling better,” Atellus said from the bed. “You can go.”

Tamyn looked at him. There was some color in his skin and the coughing stopped. His lips were still dry and his eyes sunken. Tamyn looked at his hands. His fingers were still shaking.

“Not yet,” she said. Tamyn looked at Valera. “I don’t want Salvenj or you going out alone.”

Valera nodded. “I agree with that.”

“And I don’t want to leave you here with Atellus.”

Valera said, “Go.”

Tamyn shook her head. “No, I don’t...”

“Go,” Valera told her. “I’ll take care of them.”

Tamyn thought about it for a moment. “I could just trust him,” she said.

“Your instinct is to go after him,” Valera told her. “Trust that. Don’t second guess yourself.”

Valera winked. “That’s gotten you in trouble before.”

Those emotions stirring in Tamyn’s stomach reached up and squeezed her heart. “I’m going,” she said. “But when this is done, we need to...”

“No, we don’t,” Valera said. Then, she turned away and sat next to Atellus’s bed.

Tamyn thought of objecting, then thought better of it. She grabbed her bow from the corner of the room and headed downstairs.

\* \* \*

When the first arrow struck Rhuk in the shoulder, Shy ducked. The second arrow nearly shot through his ear, caught some skin, and took it away. He cursed and threw up his hand, feeling blood ooze from the bottom of his ear.

Shy saw the ork look at the arrow, then he saw the ork smile. Rhuk reached up with his massive hand and pushed the arrow straight through. He screamed when he did, making every tree around them shake.

More arrows fired. Rhuk ducked down with Shy. He pointed at the arrow, nearly through his back. “Pull!” Rhuk told him.

Shy felt his stomach lurch. He reached up, his hands trembling, and gently tugged on the arrow.

“Pull!” Rhuk screamed again. “Or I’ll eat your heart in front of you!”

Shy grabbed the arrow and pulled. The ork screamed again, but Shy couldn’t tell if it was pain or joy.

Rhuk stood back up and laughed. He rubbed his hand on the wound, spreading the blood on his face. Then, he charged in the direction of the archers.

Shy looked through the tall grass, hoping to catch sight of the archers. Rhuk was still charging, arrows flying toward him. He made no effort to dodge. Shy felt

the ork's screams trembling the ground below him, felt it in his chest.

He saw Rhuk slam into something hidden in the tall grass. He tackled it to the ground. Shy heard a human scream, then saw Rhuk's massive hand lift above the grass. It held something wet and red. The screaming stopped. Rhuk popped up again, looked left and right, then charged. Shy saw another arrow fly wild, missing Rhuk entirely. He saw the ork lift a man from the grasses by his neck and feet. Rhuk pulled his hands apart and Shy closed his eyes.

When he opened them again, he saw feet next to his head. He looked up and saw a sword pointed at his eye. The man holding the sword was dressed in black leathers. He had murder in his gaze.

"Stay there," the man said. "Don't move."

Shy showed his empty hands.  
"I'm not moving," he said.

The man kept the blade pointed at Shy's head and shouted, "Ork! Ork! I've got your friend!"

Shy saw Rhuk stop. He had another man in his hands. Rhuk squeezed and Shy heard something crack. The man fell to the ground.

"I don't think this will stop him," Shy said.

Rhuk stood still on the other side of the grassy plain.

Shy shrugged. "Or, maybe it will."

"You move," the man said. "I kill your friend."

"You make slave!" Rhuk shouted across the glen. "You die."

"One day, yes," the man said. "But not today."

"This won't work," Shy told him.

The man nodded. "Yes, it will. I can't kill your friend, but I can kill you. And he doesn't want to kill me." He looked at Shy. "Now, get up. We're walking back to the mine."

Rhuk took his bow off his shoulder.

The man ducked behind Shy. "Don't get stupid, ork!" the man shouted. "You shoot that bow and your friend gets a sword through his neck."

Shy knew the man would kill him the moment he got out of sight of Rhuk. He had to do something.

"Say," Shy said, "we're working for Lord Catalan. He could always use an extra man. How much are they paying you in that mine?"

"Shut up," the man said. He pulled Shy back. "Keep walking."

"I bet Lord Catalan would pay more."

The man pulled harder. "I ain't getting paid in gold, kid," he said.

Rhuk knocked an arrow.

"I told you!" the man shouted. "You don't put that down, your friend dies!"

Rhuk shouted back, "He dies, you die then."

"I'm not joking!" the man shouted.  
"Put your bow do—"

Shy felt something wet hit the back of his neck. Then, a moment later, heard a loud *crack*. Like a whip right next to his ear. He felt the man's grip loosen, then felt him fall. He

looked behind him and saw the man, dead on the ground, one side of his head collapsed.

He saw Rhuk lower his bow. Shy looked around and saw smoke from the distant trees. Then, he saw Geir step out into the glen. The uvandir was holding a long staff that smoked on the end. Geir walked up to the dead man and looked down.

“Good,” he said. Then, he looked at Shy.

Shy smelled an awful, burning stink. Rhuk joined them and looked down at the body.

“What kind of magic is that?” Shy asked, pointing at the staff.

“Uvandir,” Geir said. Then, he turned and walked away.

\* \* \*

When Tamyn found them, she could feel the fury building inside her. When she heard what happened, it burned out of her control.

“They know we’re here now?” she shouted at the three of them. “You were *supposed* to look. Not kill!”

Rhuk shook his head. “They make slave. They attack us.”

She looked at Shy. “How did they see you?”

Shy shrugged. “I don’t know. We were quiet. They just showed up in the glen and started shooting.”

“Magic,” the uvandir said, lighting his pipe.

Tamyn sucked air between her teeth. “Don’t get me started on *you*,” she said. “You went off on your own without telling anyone.”

“Magic,” Geir said again.

“What?”

Geir said nothing. He had already said the word twice.

Shy spoke up. “He means, they must have used magic to spot us.” He opened his hands. “Look, Tam. If they’re using necromancy—powerful necromancy—to pull people out of their graves, it only makes sense that they’d use magic to detect intruders.”

Tamyn cursed, “Malik!” and spat on the ground. Shy took a step back. The ork and uvandir did not. They didn’t understand the gesture, but maybe they understood the anger.

After many moments of cold silence, Tamyn turned and looked at Geir. “I did not bring you here to get killed,” she told the uvandir. “And you are *going* to get yourself killed if you go wandering off by yourself.”

Geir didn’t move. He just sucked on his pipe, letting the smoke curl around his mustache and beard.

“Now we *have* to act,” Tamyn said. “We have no choice.”

“All right, all right,” Shy said. “We understand. Let’s get the others and make a plan.”

Tamyn put her hands on her hips and turned her back on them. Then, she turned back. “Any of you disobey orders again, and you’re fired. You understand?”

Rhuk had been quiet. But when Tamyn asked her question, he nodded. “Ayu,” he said. “Rhuk hear.”

The uvandir puffed his pipe and said nothing.



“Let’s go, Tam,” Shy said.

She turned and began walking back to the village. She walked fast and the others stayed a few paces behind her.

After a little while, Shy caught up with her.

“You spit on the ground,” he said.  
“You used the *malik* I’ve never seen you use that curse before.”

Tamyn looked at him. “We lost twelve men,” she said. “Remember that? In one bloody heartbeat, we lost twelve men.”

Shy nodded. “Yes, but to be fair, they were mercenaries hunting blood money. We didn’t know them.” He shrugged. “I mean, can you remember any of their names?”

Tamyn opened her mouth to speak, then shut it. Shy saw her blink and turn away. Then, she turned back to him. She gestured behind her.

“I know *their* names,” she said.

\* \* \*

In the village, they all stood around a table looking at the rough map Shy had drawn.

“Kill here,” Rhuk said, pointing at the spot they stood, overlooking the digging chamber. “Best kill here.”

“Not anymore,” Valera said. “Now that they know we’re here.”

“They knew someone would come.”

Everyone turned to look at Salvenj, sitting by Atellus’s bed. The young man said, “They knew about the messenger. They had to. They just don’t care.”

Shy nodded. “They knew Catalan is still putting things together. He might send a handful of folks to see what happened, but that’s nothing they can’t take care of.”

Tamyn looked at the map.  
“Twenty?” she asked.

Rhuk nodded. “Ayu. Twenty.”

Tamyn asked Valera, “Can you get us in without being seen?”

Valera nodded. “You know I can.”

“I can help with that,” Salvenj said.

“Good,” Tamyn said. She pointed at the map. “We need to hit the head of this thing. The guards mean nothing. They’re mercenaries. We take out the head of it, we can knock the whole thing down.”

“How’s that?” Valera asked.

Tamyn smiled. “Leader dies, they don’t get paid.”

“We get them in small groups,” Shy said, “and catch them off guard, they’ll throw down their arms. They’re in this for a cheap coin. Figure it’s only villagers? They’re in. A Courage shows up? They’ll walk away.”

From his bed, Atellus asked,  
“What about the dead?”

Everyone went silent, as if they were hoping nobody would bring that part up.

“We should have brought a philosopher,” Valera said.

“There wasn’t one available,” Tamyn told her.

Valera’s voice growled low. “Always bring a philosopher.”

## 4

They waited until night.

The men in the cave lit the entrance with torches. Five guards. Rhuk smiled. “Easy,” he said.

“We do this quiet,” Tamyn told him. She looked at Valera. “Do it,” she said.

Valera raised her arms and spoke the words. Shadows swirled from her fingertips and spread at their feet, rising up above their heads. Tamyn felt cold, like a winter wind. Everything was dim. She saw Salvenj with his eyes closed, his fingers twitching. She saw no colors. Then, she saw nothing at all.

She felt a hand on her shoulder. Valera’s hand. Her skin tingled under her touch. “Stay close,” she heard Valera say. Then, there was no sound at all. Elsewhere, she knew Rhuk was doing the same. Valera and Rhuk would lead them to the cave entrance.

There was no sight, no sound. Nothing. She could not even hear her own footfalls. Her own breathing. But she could feel Valera’s hand guiding her.

All was darkness and silence for a long while. Then, the darkness fell away and Tamyn saw Rhuk’s bloody axe and five dead guards. They had twisted grimaces on their faces: the last sensation of death. The bodies stank and Tamyn knew why. She knew what happened to the human body when it died. She tried not to look at them.

“We have *six* guard uniforms now,” Shy said. “Let’s use them.”

Salvenj was too small—none of the armor fit him. “I shouldn’t anyway,” he said. “The metal interferes with casting.”

“Is that it?” Shy asked, putting grieves on his arms. “I always wondered why that was.”

Salvenj nodded. “Arcane incantations draw energy from the elemental planes. Alchemical balance is required. Elemental purity. The elemental planes—earth, air, fire and water—form the base components for all spells. Summon fire and earth, or air and water, or water and fire. Everything in our world is made up of those four elements, even us. We are mostly water, but we have fire and earth and air. But metal is not one of the four. It is unique to our plane, and thus, alien to the elemental planes. Metal interferes with channeling, causing a kind of dissonance, like a mandolin that isn’t tuned properly, playing with other instruments in perfect tune. It is anathema to channeling, causing impurity in the channel, making spellcasting dangerous. And that is why wizards do not use metal armor and try to carry as little metal as possible. Planar disconnect during channeling could result in arcane combustion or even eldritch incongruity.”

Salvenj tilted his head, just a little. “And you don’t want that.”

Shy laughed. “I’m sorry I asked,” he said.

Salvenj frowned. “I was just explaining...”

Shy put his hand on the young man's shoulder. "Don't worry about it, kid. It's good to know." He looked at Valera. "You got the same problems?"

"I've got all kinds of problems," she said, putting a mercenary tabard over her head. "Metal is just one of them."

Tamyn finished changing. "Let's get moving," she said.

"Wait!" Salvenj said. His eyes were closed.

"What is it?" Valera asked.

"A trap," he said. "Inside the cave."

Shy looked down the corridor. "Magic?" he asked.

Salvenj nodded. "Yes," he said. "I can take care of it." He murmured some words and something popped inside the cave. He opened his eyes.

"Taken care of," he said. "It was nothing special. An explosive rune."

They moved on, but when Salvenj was out of earshot, Valera whispered to Shy, "Kid's good."

Shy whispered back, "Don't get any clever ideas."

Valera glared at him. "I'd break the boy."

Tamyn stepped by them. "Get moving," she said. Shy wondered if Tamyn heard them. Tamyn just kept walking.

\* \* \*

"So far, so good," Atellus said.

They stood at the same intersection Rhuk and Shy stood at before. No guards other than the ones they saw before.

"Where is everyone?" Shy asked.

Rhuk gripped his axe and snarled. The uvandir looked down one of the corridors and then another. He bent down and touched the ground. He stood back up, making an unhappy sound.

Rhuk asked, "See any?"

The uvandir looked up at him and grimaced. *Nothing.*

"Twenty guards," Tamyn said. "Where are they all?"

At the same moment, both Valera and Salvenj flinched. Valera fell against the wall and Salvenj just fell down. Shy picked up the sorceress and Atellus grabbed the wizard.

"What is it?" Atellus asked.

Salvenj looked at him. The wizard's eyes were white.

"Tamyn!" he shouted, not caring who heard him.

Tamyn ran to him, seeing what he saw. "What is...?"

"Same thing here," Shy said. "Her eyes." He touched Valera's face and found blood on his fingers. "She's bleeding. Her nose is bleeding."

Atellus looked at Tamyn. "Yes," he said. "Salvenj, too."

“Get them up!” she said. Shy picked up Valera and Atellus picked up Salvenj. “Let’s get to that digging room. I’d bet a harp that what’s causing this is down there.”

“They’re hurt, Tamyn,” Atellus said.

“And they aren’t going to get any better unless we fix this.”

Tamyn turned and saw Rhuk. The ork had a softness in his eyes Tamyn had never seen before. He touched Valera’s hair. Then, he looked at Tamyn.

“Tamyn say ‘No kill.’”

“I did.”

He bared his teeth. “They hurt Valera,” he said.

She nodded. “I know, Rhuk. But we can’t change the plan yet. We have to know what they’re doing.”

Rhuk growled, clutching his axe. “Ayu, Tamyn,” he said.

She looked at the rest of them. “Let’s get going.”

\*\*\*

The digging room was empty. No villagers, no soldiers.

Tamyn cursed. “Where are they?”

“Wasting time,” Geir said. He was looking at his watch. He clicked it shut and put it back in his pocket.

“Tamyn,” Atellus said. “Salvenj is getting worse.”

“And Valera, too,” Shy said.

Tamyn looked around. The tunnels could go on for miles. And they had no way of finding which way they went. She looked at Geir.

“Help me,” she said.

Geir took a breath. He knelt down and put his ear to the ground. He stayed that way for a moment or two, then shook his head.

*Nothing.*

Tamyn cursed again, her voice echoing through the tunnels. “Come and get us!” she shouted. “We’re right here, you bastards!”

Shy said her name.

“Your mothers are all whores!” she shouted at the caves. “And your fathers are all diseased sailors!”

Shy said her name again.

“What?” she shouted in his face. “What?”

Shy said, “They’re not here.”

“What?” she asked again.

“What are you saying?”

“The guards at the cave entrance,” he said. “A distraction. To buy them time.”

“Time to do what?” she asked.

Atellus answered the question. “To use whatever it was they dug up.”

## 5

Lord Baron Aelron Vass looked over the faces of the dying mercenaries and laughed. They stood in a line, held by the arms of the dead. The dead he commanded. One by one, the dead dragged each mercenary before him, and one by one, he plunged the blade into the mercenaries' chests. The typical response was a scream, but sometimes, it was a wet gurgle or a whimper. One of them mumbled, "The cold... the cold..." And one by one, their strength became his strength. And when he took what he needed, he commanded the dead to throw the mercenary aside.

They were not dead, only dying. Forever dying, but never dead. And never again alive.

The Courage was easy to fool. Set a few guards outside the cavern and let them wander around the caves. He even set a simple trap for them to find, to lure them into the deadlier, more well-hidden one. He could not help but smile.

He was miles from the cavern. So far, they would never find him.

And the sword... yes, the sword. Worth the lives of a couple dozen villagers. The maps and legends were right. It lay hidden in the old temple to the lost gods. The one the uvandir dug up and ran from.

Lord Aelron Vass saw the dead drag the last of the mercenaries in front of him. The pretty one who called herself "Maeve." She blurted out something resembling a temptation or a promise. He slid the sword into her belly and laughed at her as she screamed.

Nothing could stop him now.

\* \* \*

"Tracks," Rhuk said, kneeling down in front of the cavern entrance. He looked at Tamyn. "West."

"How many?" she asked.

"Many," he said.

"Can you follow them?"

Rhuk nodded. "Follow, yes."

"Do it," she told him.

The ork ran into the nearby woods, not saying another word.

Then, she looked at Atellus and Shy. "How are they?"

"Recovering," Shy said. "Valera better than Salvenj."

"A trap to disarm our magic," she said. "Clever."

"Why not just kill us?" Shy asked. "They could have set explosions in the mine. Trapped us in there."

Geir shook his head. "No," he said. "No explosives. Just digging tools."

"That's the most I've heard you say all day," Shy said.

Geir kicked Shy's shin and lit his pipe.

“Sonofa...”

Geir raised his eyebrow at him.

“My fault,” he said. “No problem.”

Geir walked over to Valera, removed a flask from his jacket and offered it to her. Without missing a beat, she took it and drank.

“Thank you,” she said. “How’s the kid?”

Geir puffed his pipe. “He’ll live,” he said.

Tamyn sat down on a fallen tree and put her head in her hands. Shy sat beside her.

“It all went wrong,” she said. “I nearly got all of us killed. And I lost the villagers.”

“We don’t know that yet,” Shy said.

“Even if Rhuk can keep up the trail, we’re still miles behind them for all we know.”

Shy said, “They have villagers in chains. Chained ankles. We have horses. We can catch them.”

Tamyn looked at Shy. He saw tears in her eyes.

“You haven’t failed,” he said. “You know how I know that?”

“How?” she said, her voice choking.

He smiled. “I’m not dead yet.”

She laughed. Then, she threw her arms around him and hugged him. She kissed his cheek and held his face close to hers. When they parted, still close, Shy saw a light in her eyes. And he felt a nervousness in his belly.

“Trail!” Rhuk shouted from the tree line.

Tamyn jumped to her feet.

“Where?” she shouted.

Shy swallowed and got up after her.

Rhuk said, “Here! Good! Lots of feet! Fresh! Only soon!”

Tamyn turned to the others, looking at Valera and Salvenj. “Can you ride?”

Valera nodded. “With help,” she said.

Salvenj shook his head. “I don’t think so.”

Tamyn said, “Rhuk, ride with Valera. Salvenj, you ride with Shy.”

Everyone nodded and got on their horses. Tamyn got on hers and saw Shy lifting Salvenj onto his horse. He smiled at her.

And Tamyn knew she had made a mistake.

## Part Four

# Soulcrusher

### 1

Willam Harvester had seen the whole thing. He was locked in manacles, watching.

There was a clearing and a small hill. Atop the hill was a stone altar to the old gods, broken and nearly gone.

The man in black stood at the stone altar to the lost gods, waiting for the bodies of the dead to drag the mercenaries up the small hill and kill them. They screamed and pleaded. And he put the sword through each of their bellies. The mercenaries did not die, but fell to the ground, squirming. Making the sound a child makes when it is in pain.

The bodies moved on the ground, making a carpet of writhing flesh. There was no blood. Only the writhing bodies, making those awful sounds.

Willam watched as the man in black killed them all. Then, he smiled like a man who had just eaten and drunk too much.

“I am satiated,” he said. “For now.”

The man in black saw Willam Harvester looking at him. He gestured at one of the corpses. The dead man shambled toward Willam. His wife screamed, pleaded. Willam told her, “Shh. It’s going to be all right.”

The corpse pulled him to his feet and dragged him to the top of the hill.

The man in black said, “What is your name?”

Willam told him. Then, he said, “What is yours?”

The man in black smiled. “Aelron Vass,” he said. Then, Vass asked, “Are you afraid of me?”

Willam nodded. “I am, sir. And I’m not ashamed to say it.”

Vass moved like a drunkard. He patted Willam atop his head. “Good man,” he said. “Honesty will get you everywhere in this world.” Then, he looked at his sword.

“I am sated,” he said. “As is my weapon.”

Then, he looked Willam in the eyes. “But when I am not,” he said, “you will be first.”

Willam said nothing. The dead man dragged him back to his wife and she hugged him. Willam took a deep breath and looked at Dannel Vin, sitting just near him.

Dannel Vin, the blacksmith. Who came to the village with gang marks on his arms, looking to start a new life.

Dannel Vin, who had just then picked the lock on his manacles.

\*\*\*

The trail led to a clearing only three miles away. Tamyn and the others watched the clearing from the safety of the tree line.

In the center of the clearing stood a stone altar to the lost gods. Around the stone altar there were many bodies.

Twenty writhing bodies.

Rhuk pointed out the dead men to Tamyn, standing in a circle around the two dozen or so villagers.

“We need a philosopher,” Tamyn said.

“I’m not going to say, ‘I told you so,’” Valera said. Tamyn looked at her. She was still pale and looked like she would fall down any moment. Salvenj looked worse.

“Saving the villagers is first,” she said to the others. “I want a plan and I want it now.”

“This is another trap,” Shy said. “The mercenaries are here, but...”

“Where’s the villain?” Tamyn finished the thought for him. “Where’s the mind behind all this?”

“Waiting for us to make a move and save the villagers,” Atellus said. Then, he said, “Look. We know they dug up something. Something powerful. There’s a reason they haven’t killed the villagers yet.”

Tamyn asked, “Any ideas why?”

Atellus nodded. “Yes. They want to kill us first.”

Tamyn looked at him. “You know something?”

Atellus shook his head. “There’s a story about a weapon, locked in a tomb, like the one we saw. A weapon that drinks your will and your life.”

“That doesn’t sound good,” Shy said.

Geir began loading his musket. Rhuk just stared at the dead men, gripping his axe.

“The weapon needs to murder to live. But it gains the most strength from the murder of heroes.”

Shy asked, “Heroes?”

“That’s what the story says,” the bard told Shy. “It sleeps until it drinks the will of a hero. Until then, its powers are only half what they may be.”

Tamyn looked at the writing bodies. “And them?” she asked.

“Bodies with no will of their own,” Atellus said. “No life. Only not-death.”

Tamyn looked at Salvenj and he confirmed her suspicion.

“Necromancy,” he said, leaning on Atellus.

“They killed the mercenaries hoping to find a hero,” Tamyn said. “Think he found one?”

Atellus shook his head. “I’d say, no.”

“Well,” Shy said. “Let’s hope he doesn’t find one in this group, either.”



Geir finished loading his musket. He took a deep breath and took aim at one of the dead men. "Tamyn," he said.

She looked at the uvandir.

"Ready," Geir said.

Tamyn nodded. "When I call," she said.

Geir just nodded.

Tamyn looked at Rhuk. "Get out your bow," she said.

Rhuk objected, but she stared at him.

"Your bow," she said.

Rhuk put down his axe and drew his bow.

She looked at Valera and Salvenj. "Anything from you two?"

Salvenj nodded. "I've got something."

"Something that won't splash on the villagers?"

He nodded again. "Yes."

Tamyn looked at Valera. "And you?"

She nodded. "Just tell me when."

Tamyn looked at Atellus and Shy. "When we fire, you get in there. The villagers will panic. You direct that panic to the tree line. Get them out of sight. We'll cover you."

The two men nodded and moved to the edge of the tree line. As they did, Shy pointed at the altar.

"There's someone up there," he said. "Look."

Tamyn looked. Shy was right. Someone was sleeping on the wreckage of the altar. And as she looked, that someone sat up.

"Target?" Geir asked.

The man on the altar stood up, looking directly at them. Tamyn changed her aim from the dead men to the figure on the altar.

"Target?" Geir asked.

Valera's voice: "Tamyn?"

She moved her aim back to the dead men. "The villagers first," she said. "Now!"

She took aim and let the arrow go. She saw Rhuk's arrow and heard the crack of Geir's musket. And over her head, lightning arced into and across and through the bodies of the dead men.

## 2

Willam's hands were free when the lightning struck. He smelled burning flesh and saw the dead men's arms flail about like a mad dance. Teeth flew from their mouths and ichor oozed from their bodies. His wife and others screamed. He pulled them back and away from the bodies. He saw arrows and heard a noise like fireworks. The dead men were falling.

He got up to his feet and Dannel followed.

"We have to run!" he shouted. "Help me!"

Dannel nodded and began pulling people to their feet.

Willam saw two men running toward him then. One was dark. The other was fair. They rushed up, cutting the dead men with their swords. More arrows flew.

"We're here to help!" the fair haired one said.

The dark one said, "Get to the trees! The trees!"

The villagers were frozen. Dannel was trying to get them to their feet, but they were screaming, their faces full of fear.

Willam looked at his wife. "Martha!" he shouted. "Help me!"

Martha just stared at him, her eyes and mouth agape. He looked at the dark and fair strangers. They were helping Dannel pull villagers to the tree line. For some reason, at that moment, he thought of the two men as salt and pepper shakers.

Then, a dead man grabbed his shoulders. Willam Harvester screamed once. The dead man grabbed him by the head and twisted.

\* \* \*

"The villagers aren't moving!" Valera shouted.

Tamyn fired another arrow, hitting a dead man in the back. It staggered, but kept walking. They just kept walking. Even some of the ones Salvenj fried were still moving.

And, at the altar, the man with the sword was laughing, walking toward them, the moon behind his shoulder, casting a long shadow down the hill.

Shy and Atellus were keeping the dead men away from the villagers, but there were so many. Two of the villagers were on their feet, trying to get the others to move: an older man and a younger man.

"See those two?" she shouted at Geir and Rhuk. "Protect them!"

Rhuk nodded and fired another arrow. Geir fired another shot and a dead man's head exploded. Its body fell to the ground and Geir reloaded.

And at that moment, Tamyn saw one of the dead men grab the older villager. He reached up, put the old man's head between his hands...

"Geir!" she shouted.

“Reload,” he said, moving his hands as fast as he could.

The old man reached up, holding the dead man’s hands, fighting his grip.

She aimed and arrow and shot, but the arrow hit the dead man in the back, accomplishing nothing.

“Someone!” she shouted. “Help him!”

“I can’t!” Salvenj shouted. “Not without hitting the other villagers.”

The old man fell to his knees, still holding the dead man’s wrists.

Tamyn heard a sound. A sound that shook her bones. She looked and saw Rhuk, axe in hand, charging across the clearing.

He moved like water falling from a cliff. The ork was halfway across the clearing when he raised the axe above his head. The old man’s head was tilted to the side, his grip breaking.

Rhuk threw his arm back, then threw it forward, his axe flying through the air, the ork screaming as he released it.

And for a moment that hung in the air longer than any moment Tamyn Taval could remember, she watched the axe fly. It arced through the night, glistening under the moon. It twisted as it flew, the silver of the metal, shining.

Then, finally, it hit the dead man in the back of the head, slicing it in two. It flew over the old man’s head and slammed into the ground, just behind him. The dead man lost its grip and the old man fell to the ground, clutching his neck.

Rhuk looked up the hill at the man walking down from the altar, dark sword in his hand. The ork looked back at Tamyn.

Tamyn shouted. “Kill him, Rhuk!”

Then, behind her, she heard Valera shout. “Kill him hard!”

Rhuk looked at the writhing bodies in front of him. He found a sword strapped to one of the bodies and drew it from its sheath.

“You die now,” Rhuk said.

The man smiled. “I don’t think so.”

He raised his sword and the twenty bodies of the not-dead mercenaries rose up with it. And they all swarmed the ork.

\* \* \*

Shy knelt down and touched the old man. “Can you walk?” he asked.

The old man held his throat. “I think so,” he said, his voice making the sound of dead leaves.

“Give me your hand,” Shy said. The old man took it and stood up.

Shy looked at the dead men. Only a few left. Those that were standing had arrows in their backs. Atellus was using his short, curved blade to cut their heads from their shoulders. That seemed to be working.

The villagers started to stand. The fear was fading. Shy looked at the old man. “What’s your name?” he asked.

“Willam.”

“My friends call me Shy,” he said. “You qualify.”

Willam nodded.

“Let’s get you out of here.”

Willam grabbed two hands and pulled. His neck stung him, but he ignored it. While Atellus kept the dead men at bay, Willam, Dannel and Shy pushed the villagers to the tree line.

\*\*\*

Aelron Vass stepped over the not-dead bodies of the mercenaries holding down and beating the ork. He heard a woman’s voice shout something that sounded like “rock.” He felt the power of the sword in his hand, pulsing in time with his own heartbeat. He looked at the tree line and saw four figures standing in the darkness: two women, a man and an uvandir.

He felt his smile curl on his face. He lifted the sword and more not-dead men rose up, joining his march. Vass walked toward the tree line just as the uvandir lifted something to his shoulder.

\*\*\*

Geir squeezed the trigger and the shot struck the man with the sword directly in the chest, just below the throat. He lowered the musket and started re-loading.

“Rhuk!” Valera shouted. “Rhuk!”

She looked at Tamyn. “We have to help him!” But Tamyn was looking over Valera’s shoulders, her eyes wide. Valera turned and saw the man with the sword pick himself

off the ground and continue walking toward them, his dead allies marching ahead of him.

“What magic is that?” Valera whispered.

Geir said nothing, but kept reloading. Tamyn pulled Valera back.

“You bastard!” she shouted. She waved her arms and a bolt of darkness flew. The man raised his sword, and the bolt sank into it. She fired another with the same effect.

Tamyn drew her sword and pushed Valera behind her. “You want the blood of a hero?” she shouted at the dark swordsman. “You want it? You come here and try to take it!”

The man’s smile was as still as a grave. He raised his sword and the dead men stopped marching. He stepped forward, leaving them behind. His dark sword moved fast—too fast for its size. Tamyn barely blocked his cut. Another thrust and she felt the ice cold steel slice at her belly. Only a fingertip away.

“Foolish girl,” the man with the sword said. The dead men behind him started marching again.

“Back up!” she heard a voice shout at her. It was Salvenj. Tamyn didn’t think. She turned and ran, pushing Valera hard. Both of them fell to the forest floor.

There was an explosion of heat that rushed across their bodies, setting the whole world on fire. Tamyn felt her clothes smoldering and the sword was too hot to hold. She threw it down.

“I’m on fire!” Valera shouted.

Tamyn threw herself on the sorceress and rolled in the wet grass and leaves. They rolled together for a moment, then settled with Valera on top of Tamyn. Both of them were out of breath.

“Well,” Valera said, smiling. “Isn’t this...”

Without thinking, Tamyn kissed her. And for that moment, Valera did not resist.

After that moment, Tamyn rolled from under her. Valera said, “Well. Isn’t this...”

They both then saw the mass of flames that engulfed the man with the sword and his dead allies. And they could see bodies moving inside it. Some of the twisting bodies fell in the flames, but the man with the sword stepped out, his clothes burning and his sword aflame.

He was still smiling.

\* \* \*

Vess saw the two women standing before him. He did not know which to drink first.

The sword had protected him so far. From the petty magic of the wizard and from the uvandir’s crude weapon. Nothing could stop him.

“You,” he said to the half-elf.  
“You are tempting, but...”

He turned to the sorceress. “Your blood sings to me like no other. I will take you first.”

The human backed up a step. She raised her arms and made a sound, deep in her throat.

“More petty magic,” he said. “Can you not feel *real power* before you?”

He called upon the sword. It drained the magic as she summoned it. The sorceress looked confused. She turned to the other woman. “Tam?” she said. Her voice sounded lost.

The half-elf jumped at him. He did not want to drink her first, but so be it. He swung high but she anticipated that attack and ducked low. She hit his knees and knocked him off balance. He fell to the ground, hitting his shoulders and the back of his head.

The half-elf was too close for the large blade. A clever tactic. He summoned the sword’s energy and threw her from him. She flew through the air, slammed into a tree and fell to the ground, motionless.

Then, he got to his feet and looked at the sorceress.

She took a step back. “I have power you don’t know,” she told him.

“And soon,” he told her, “it will be mine.”

She shook her head. “I don’t think so,” she said.

He paused, just for a moment. “And what power is this?” he asked, amused by her threat.

She smiled. “Really big friends.”

A shadow fell over his shoulders. Vass turned and saw the ork. It was bloody from head to toe. It had no weapons.

From behind him, Vass heard sorceress say, “Kill him, Rhuk.” He could feel her smile. “Kill him hard.”

Vass thrust the sword at the ork’s chest. The ork caught the blade with both

hands and held it, fresh blood oozing between his massive fingers. Then, he twisted. The sword broke from Vass's grip and the ork threw it to the ground.

Then, the ork smiled.

\*\*\*

Salvenj threw the fire at the man with the sword, but he was too close. He knew he was too close. He remembered his Master telling him, "Do not summon fire unless you are safely away." He remembered the old man's smile and his touch on his shoulder. "Fire will not obey you," he said. "It has a will of its own."

The blast knocked him back, blinding him with heat. He could feel his clothes burning, his belt burning, his hair burning. He tried to scream, but his voice failed him.

He hit the ground hard and felt something break in his shoulder. He rolled through the wet grass, finally stopping when he hit a fallen log.

That was when the pain started.

He opened his mouth to scream. Only a whimper escaped.

*help*

Parts of his body were burning. Others, there was no pain at all. In his mind, he knew what that meant.

Salvenj tried summoning water, but his fingers would not move. He tried to sit up, but his body would not obey him. The pain kept him down.

*help*

Even blinking was agony. He heard the sound of burned flesh when he tried to move.

Salvenj lay perfectly still, trying not to antagonize the pain.

*they will find me*, he heard his mind whisper.

*they will...*

\*\*\*

On the other side of the clearing, Shy and Dannel finished picking the locks. The villagers were free. Atellus dispatched the last dead man. There was a field of decapitated corpses behind him.

"Done and done," he said.

Willam asked, "How did you kill them all?"

Atellus smiled. "It helps when they can't run and you can."

Shy asked, "What about the others? Tamyn and Valera?"

Atellus said, "I don't know. We should probably find out."

Shy saw Geir walking up from the tree line. The uvandir's hair and skin were singed and smoking.

"Geir!" Shy shouted. "Where are the others?"

The uvandir pointed behind him, then raised a thumb.

Shy felt his shoulders loosen.

“Your friends are all right?” Willam asked, touching Shy’s shoulder.

Shy nodded. “It appears so, yes.”

“Good,” Willam said. “Let us go home, then.”

Atellus said, “Let us make certain first.”

They all walked to the tree line. There, they saw Tamyn, Valera and Rhuk walking toward them. Valera was carrying something wrapped in a blanket, Valera looked bruised from head to toe and Rhuk looked like he walked through a sea of wounds.

“Rhuk!” Atellus shouted. “Do you need...?”

Rhuk smiled, his teeth full of blood, meat and veins. Atellus felt his stomach lurch.

Valera said, “There’s a line here that everyone says.” She held Rhuk’s hand with a trembling grip. “You should see the other guy.”

Shy asked Tamyn. “Are you hurt?”

Tamyn shook her head. “Not bad,” she said. “But I’ll be sore tomorrow.”

There was blood in her hair. Shy looked at it. “You’ve got something here,” he said. “You need medicine. And should rest.”

“We can rest in the village,” she told him. “I don’t want to rest here.” She pointed at the bodies. “Not with those.”

Atellus asked, “Is that the weapon?” He pointed at the blanket that Valera carried.

She nodded. “Yes,” she said. “But I don’t think anyone should touch it. Or even look at it.”

Atellus nodded. “I will trust your counsel.”

Tamyn asked, “How far are we from the village?”

“On foot?” Willam said. “Three hours.”

Valera shook her head, “I don’t think I can walk that far.”

Willam said, “There is a place not far from here. A spring with water and fruit. We can rest there.”

“Look at us,” Valera said. She looked at Tamyn. “I told you we should have brought a philosopher.”

Willam laughed. They all looked at him.

“Always bring a philosopher,” he said, looking at his wife. Then, he turned to Tamyn. “This is my wife, Martha Harvester,” he said.

Tamyn raised an eyebrow. “You?” she asked.

The old woman smiled. “Me,” she said. “Although it has been a long time since I practiced.”

Valera said, “Why didn’t you do anything? We could have used your help!”

Martha said, “As I said, it has been a long time. Thirty years. I barely remember the meditations anymore.”

Valera shrugged. “Well... I guess we’re a little worse for wear, but...” she paused. Looked around. Then, her eyes filled with panic.

“Where’s Salvenj?”

Tamyn stood straight. "Oh no," she said. "No! No!"

She waved her arms. "Everyone, spread out! He must have been caught in that fire blast!"

Everyone moved. Tamyn shouted. "Hurry! Hurry!"

Tamyn went back to the blackened tree where the blast hit. She looked behind the tree. She lifted her head. Maybe he got blown into the limbs.

She was panicked. She remembered what the old wizard told her. He trusted her with his apprentice. Salvenj was barely a man.

Tamyn heard Rhuk's roar, felt it rumble her stomach.

She spun about and saw the ork carrying Salvenj's body. It was blackened and limp, smoke still pouring up from his skin.

"Put him down!" Tamyn shouted. "Put him down!"

Rhuk did as he was told. Everyone rushed to the boy's side.

"He got red pain," Rhuk said. There was no emotion in his voice. No fear. Just as if he had been talking about the color of his hair.

Tamyn wanted to hold the boy's hand, but dared not. His mouth was wide open, as if locked in a scream. She looked at his eyes. There was still life in there. There was still hope.

"Martha!" she shouted. "Help him!"

Martha looked frightened. "It's been thirty years..."

Tamyn heard her voice tremble. "Martha! Please!"

Willem touched her shoulders. "Sweet one," he said.

Valera was whispering to Salvenj as Martha knelt down beside him. "Don't leave me, Savenj," Valera said. "Please don't leave me."

Martha looked at the sorceress. Her face was full of tears.

"Help him," Valera said.

Martha nodded. She took the boy's hand. He flinched and his throat tried to scream. She leaned over him, looking in his eyes.

"Salvenj," she said. "Salvenj..."

The boy's eyes turned.

"The will of men," Martha said, "is stronger than flesh."

The boy's lips moved, just a little. Trembling.

"The will of men is stronger than pain."

Tamyn saw tears form in Martha's eyes. Her gentle hands holding Salvenj's hand.

"The will of men," she said, "is stronger than death."

Tamyn felt something moving in her belly. She looked up and saw a light in Shy's eyes. She saw Atellus and saw his lips moving with the words. Sitting next to Martha, Valera was already speaking the words aloud, as if she had



known them from birth. And when Martha spoke again, all of them spoke with her.

“My will is your will,” she said.

“Your will is my will.” Tamyn, Shy, Valera and Atellus said the words.

*Our will is stronger than flesh.*

*Our will is stronger than pain.*

*Our will is stronger than death.*

Tamyn felt tears on her face. There was silence for a long time.

But then, Salvenj gasped, and she nearly fell. It was the uvandir who caught her.

## Afterward

Salvenj stood in a fire. His Master's tower. He heard his Master screaming above him. The fire whispered at him, mocking him. He tried spell after spell, but nothing worked. The flames licked his robes and he tried to pull them away, but they stuck to his skin. He burned. Above him, the Master screamed. The flame pulled back his skin, and he could see the bone. It burned like paper burns. He was made of paper. He was dying.

A voice said his name. A woman's voice. She said, "Open your eyes."

He did, but he could not see. He could not move.

"Salvenj," the woman said. "It's all right. You're safe."

He blinked and saw blurs of light. Then, he saw a face.

"Who?" he asked.

"It's me," she said. "Valera."

He blinked again. He saw her face. He saw tears on her face. She was still looking at him when she said, "He's awake."

Another face came into view. A man's face. Unwashed and unshaved. Salvenj recognized it, but could not pull the name from his memory.

"Yes, he is," the man said. "I'll tell Tamyn."

Salvenj looked back at Valera. She smiled, wiping tears away from her eyes. "You're

all right," he said. "The philosophers and oracles all said you will heal."

He looked at himself. He was in a bed, almost naked. Parts of his body were red and others were black. He saw those parts glistening, as if someone had covered his body in star dust.

And there was pain. He didn't feel it before, but he began to feel it now. He winced and Valera touched his forehead.

"Easy," she said. Her touch calmed him. Her smile and voice calmed him. Everywhere she touched, his body shivered. He took a deep breath and felt it tremble in his chest. She never stopped touching him. Her fingers made him forget the pain.

Memories washed into his mind. The walking dead. The villagers. The fire.

The fire. He started to gasp. Valera touched his face. "Shh," she told him. "It's all right."

"The fire!" he said. "My Master! He's dying!"

Valera shook her head. "No, no. That was just a dream. You were dreaming."

"No!" he shouted. "He's dying! I have to help him!"

"Are you talking about me?" a voice asked. It was old, like ancient paper.

Salvenj looked up and saw the face he saw in his dreams. He stood beside a woman. A half-elf. He knew her, too. But he did not care now.

"Master!" he shouted.

Ashavendall nodded and smiled. "I am well," he said. "The sickness fled me shortly after you left."

Salvenj breathed deep. He smiled. "I failed you," he said.

The old man shook his head. "No," he said. "You did well. Better than I did on my first outing." Ashavendall laughed. "I nearly killed the entire Courage. But with water. Not fire."

The half-elf smiled, too. "He's well, Salvenj," she told him. "And you will get better. Then, you can rejoin the Courage."

Salvenj shook his head. "No," he said. "I'm not ready."

Valera looked at the half-elf and the wizard, her frown speaking for her.

"You weren't ready," the half-elf told him. "You are now." She stepped forward and touched his hand. "But sleep for a while," she said. "No need to make that decision now."

Salvenj nodded, then looked at Valera. "I'll sleep," he said.

"Yes," she told him. Then, she put her hands over his eyes. "Let me help you."

Salvenj felt her gentle fingers on his skin, then he felt nothing.

\* \* \*

Tamyn closed the door behind her. Lord Catalan stood in the hallway.

"He will live," she said to Catalan.

He nodded. "Good," he said. Then, he walked. Tamyn walked with him.

"The sword?" he asked.

"Broken. Atellus and Geir took care of it," she said. "No vault is secure enough for that thing."

"Yes," he said. "Good."

Then, he took a pouch from his pocket. "This is for you and your Courage," he said. He gave it to Tamyn.

Tamyn felt the bag in her hand. "My lord, this is more than we agreed."

"I don't care," he said. He reached a door. "I want to make sure the boy does better than just 'live.'" He looked at her. "You understand?"

She nodded. "Yes, sir."

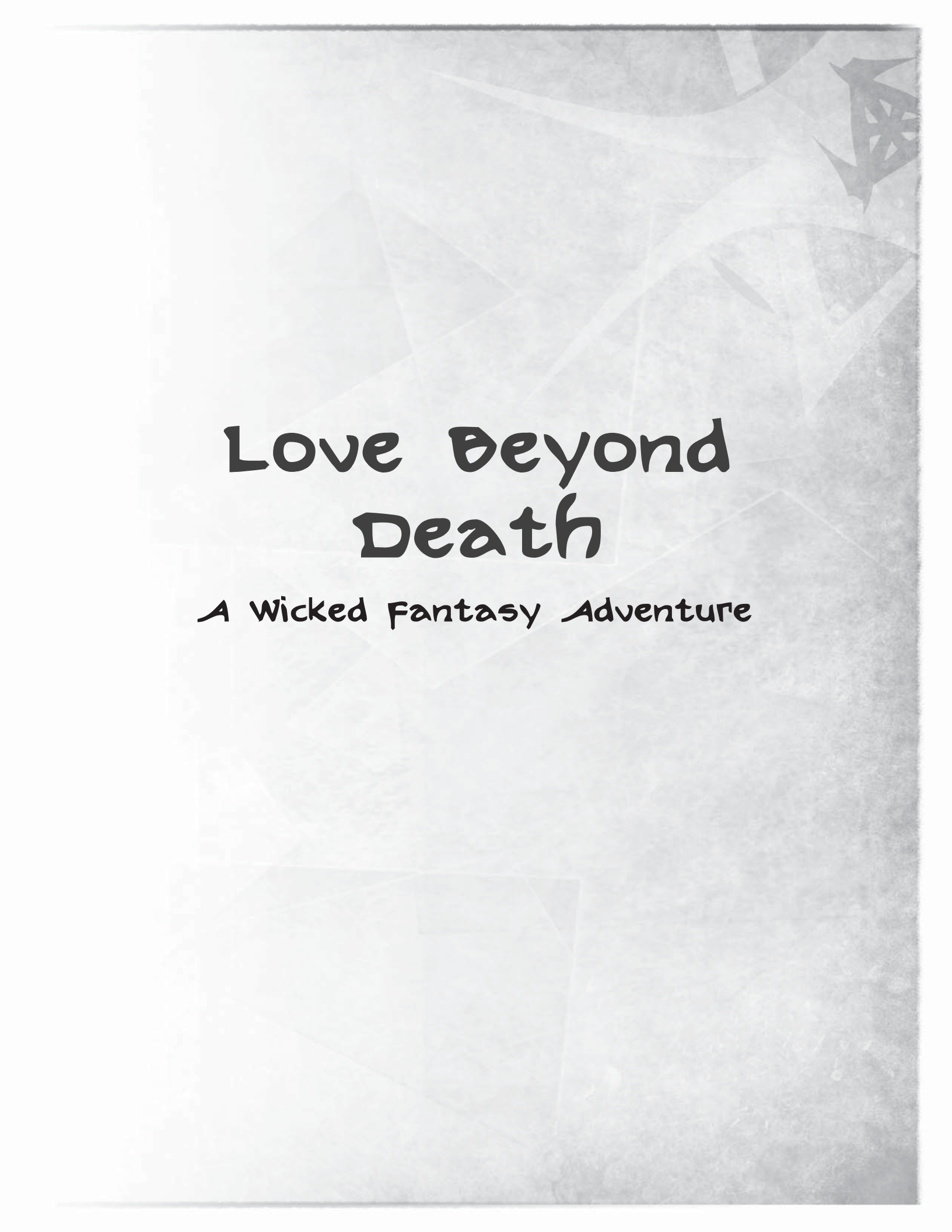
He opened the door. Guards on the other side saluted him.

"And get yourself a philosopher," he told her. "Ask Errol for help."

Tamyn smiled. "Right away, sir."

Catalan returned her smile and closed the door.





# Love Beyond Death

A Wicked Fantasy Adventure

*Love Beyond Death* is an adventure for players new to the world of *Wicked Fantasy*. We designed it for 4-to-5 characters of 5th-to-7th level. *LBD* works best if the characters are of good alignment and are members of a Courage.

This is not a standard, linear adventure. While we have a kickoff point, the choices the players make after the beginning dictate where the adventure goes. Don't worry, we made the non-linear structure easy to follow. We'll guide you through it.

However, you should read this adventure before you try running it for your players. We've got a bunch of ways to help you out, but familiarity with the structure makes running it a lot easier. And speaking of structure, let's take a look at how the adventure breaks down.

First off, *LBD* has three important features:

### **1) Easy-to-Use**

We made *LBD* as easy to use as possible. We divided the adventure into Scenes. Most Scenes take up only one to two pages of information. All the pertinent information you need for a Scene is right in front of you.

### **2) Non-Linear**

*LBD* is not a linear adventure. Instead, it's an "adventure environment." An adventure environment provides you with a setting, NPCs, and scheduled events. No matter where the players go, no matter what they choose to do, you remain in control. The danger of players straying off the pre-determined path is not an issue.

### **3) Modular**

Finally, *LBD* is modular. Everything in this adventure can be adjusted to fit your players' skills, abilities and tastes. You'll see how all that works in a moment.

# Overview

*A vampire and a lich seek an artifact that can give them true everlasting life. To find it, they are hunting down heroes who have found it before.*

Ashivaeyr Mezzet and Reginald Crane want to live forever. More importantly, these two are willing to do anything to achieve that goal. They've already spilled gallons of blood in their mad quest, and they are nearly at the point where they can see their final objective. There's only one problem: only one of them can have it.

What began as two lovers seeking immortality together has become a race against each other to achieve their goal.

Ashivaeyr Mezzet is a vampire. Reginald Crane is a lich. But these two want true immortality. The lich, slowly falling apart, little more than a living corpse. And the vampire, feeding off the blood of others to keep herself young. Both grew weary of their current states and sought something more. They searched for decades, following clues and cryptic signs. Finally, they thought they discovered a way to be immortal and together forever. But their discovery has driven them apart, for only one may have the prize.

The key is the Dragon's Tear: a gemstone that grants a man his greatest desire. As the vampire and the lich researched more about the Tear, they discovered others who touched the stone and gained their desires... and they found out what it meant to be granted your "greatest desire." Sometimes, it was a blessing. Other times, it was not.

The Dragon Tear's location is not static: the Tomb of the Dragon Tear moves whenever it is found. However, if you has enough clues, you can find it. Mezzet and Crane plan on "questioning"

every living soul who found the Tear before. And they plan on questioning them hard.

Our lovers have also learned that every time someone used the Tear, a sliver of it shattered, turning into a single drop of liquid. When the user touched the liquid to his tongue, the desire came true. The last person they interviewed told them the Dragon's Tear has been splintering over time and perhaps only one shard is left.

Only one shard left. Only one desire to fulfill. This news struck the lovers poorly, to say the least. Now, with only one of them able to gain their desire, they plot a way to use the other to gain what they want...

This is where your heroes come into play. The lovers want the Dragon's Tear for themselves, but they cannot accomplish the goal alone. They need assistance. They need a Courage. After all, it is said the Tomb of the Dragon's Tear holds many traps for the unwary. Mezzet and Crane need bodies to test the traps.

Or, perhaps they do not need the Courage. Perhaps, they only need a few more clues to discover the location of the Tomb. And that is how your Courage stumbles upon their plot. Leaving dead bodies of old heroes in your wake will attract attention.

Or, perhaps the vampire knows the Dragon Tear's secret: only a hero can benefit from its blessings. Those who hold evil close to their heart only gain a horrible curse; a twisted version of their desire. And thus, she will seduce a hero to touch the Tear and grant her desire.

All of these are options. We'll go over them in a moment. But first, let's talk a little bit about structure.

# Acts & Scenes

We've divided the adventure into *Acts* and *Scenes*.

An *Act* is a location such as Lady Courage's Castle, the Village of Skyvale or the Tomb of the Dragon's Tear. We broke each Act into a number of Scenes.

Each *Scene* represents an important step toward the climax and confrontation with our villains. We also divided each Scene into sections to help you navigate your way through it.

Acts and Scenes do not happen in a chronological order. Instead, when the players reach a location, run that Act and its subsequent Scenes.

We've also divided each Scene into four parts: The Run Down, the Set Up, the Action, and the Follow-Up.

## **Run Down**

The Run Down is a bullet list of all the important details in the Scene. It gives you a quick overview of what the Scene is about, what the NPCs' goals are, etc. That way, when

you run the adventure, you can look at the bullet list and remember the important parts.

## **Set Up**

The set up includes boxed text to read out loud to the players. It gives them clues to the scene and a description to get them on the same page. While you read the Set Up out loud, the text should also remind you of what's going on in the Scene. That way, you have a better chance to be prepared for your players' questions.

## **Action**

Action includes all the details and rules you'll need to run the Scene. It is a more detailed version of the Run Down, so if you need more information, you can find it in the Action section.

## **Follow-Up**

The Follow-Up lists any consequences that may impact other Scenes. It includes things that may happen later, depending on the players' actions in this Scene.



## **Lady Chance's Courage**

Lady Chance is a powerful landowner. She is wealthy and well-respected by her people. Technically, she is a Countess, but she prefers the title "Lady" (a sign of her humility).

We've set up the adventure so players begin as members of Lady Chance's Courage. This means they have all signed a contract with her. We've provided the contract at the end of the adventure so you can give it to players and even have them sign it, in character of course.

### **Preparation**

Before beginning the adventure, you have to answer a few questions. How you answer these questions changes how LBD plays out for you and your players. We've provided a checklist for you to go through and mark your choices, so you can refer back if you get lost.

#### **Question 1: What is Ashivaeyr Mezzet's Plan?**

Mezzet wants the Dragon's Tear. But how far is she willing to go to get it?

##### ***a) Mezzet is loyal to Crane***

While Mezzet wants the Dragon's Tear, she will not betray Crane to get it. She may scheme and plot, but her chief loyalty is to Crane. What's more, if there is only one drop of the Dragon's Tear left, she will allow Crane to have it, so he can be free of his cursed existence.

##### ***b) Mezzet is loyal to herself***

Mezzet will do anything to get the Dragon's Tear for herself, even if it means sacrificing her "true love," Reginald Crane. She will kill him if she has to. And she knows how to. In fact, she has the perfect weapon: an enchanted silver mask. More on that later.

#### **Question 2: What is Reginald Crane's Plan?**

Reginald Crane also wants the Dragon's Tear. And he's willing to go to equally depraved depths to get it.

##### ***a) Crane is loyal to Mezzet***

Crane loves Mezzet too much to betray her. In fact, if it costs him his unlife to see her cured of her vampirism, he will do it.

##### ***b) Crane is loyal to himself***

Crane's only concern is getting the Dragon's Tear for himself. Even if he has to sacrifice his "vampire queen" to do it, he will. In fact, he has a way to kill her: a wooden stake carved from one of the Great Trees.

#### **Question 3: Where is the Dragon's Tear?**

The Tomb could be anywhere. It could be in the middle of an elven forest, behind a discrete door in Vannick or just behind a Lord's throne in some rural castle. There is a pattern to its appearances, but more importantly, there is a tool the heroes can use to locate it. Unfortunately, that tool is in the hands of someone who isn't too eager to give it up.

#### **Question 4: How Do the Heroes Get Involved?**

For the purposes of this adventure, we assume our heroes are part of Lady Chance's Courage, but our heroes can get involved in a couple of ways. The scope of this adventure does not allow us to explore each of these options fully, but we thought we'd throw a few for your perusal.

##### ***a) Friendship***

Someone in the party is friends with the First Murder. Because of that friendship,

our intrepid heroes go out to find who caused it and bring them to justice.

***b) Bodyguards***

Our heroes meet the victim in a tavern, hit it off well, and he hires them to protect him. Unfortunately, the assassin's bolt hits before he can finish the job. He's dead, at the heroes' feet, and someone has to pay.

***c) Mezzet & Crane***

Mezzet could hire the heroes to assist her in finding the Dragon's Tear. She tells them she wants to use the Tear to cure her vampirism, so she can be human once again. Whether or not they believe her is up to them.

Crane could hire the heroes using the same logic: he wants to no longer be a lich. Of course, being hired by a lich or a vampire is dubious at best, but we offer this possibility because—well—some players just might fall for it.

# Introduction: The Courage

## Run Down

Our heroes are part of a Courage.

They get an assignment from Lady Chance to investigate the murder of an “old friend.”

## Set Up

Morning in Castle Chance and the heat is already streaming through the open windows. Summer has come early this year. You can hear the villagers down the hill—they have been hard at work in the fields before the sun gets too high in the sky.

A servant comes to wake you. He looks distressed, saying, “The Lady wishes to see you in her rooms. Immediately.” Then, he rushes off to tell the other members of your Courage.

You rush off to meet her. When the door opens, she sits at her dresser, still in her nightclothes. A long, blue robe hangs loose over her shoulders and she holds a letter in her trembling hands. There are tears in her eyes, but when you enter, she wipes them away.

“News,” she says. “An old friend of mine...” She hesitates, then, the tears flow again. Her maid takes the letter from her and hands it to you.

## Action

The letter:

My dear Cassandra,

An awful charge has fallen upon me. I can only imagine your reaction and I wish I might be there to tell you myself, but duties prevent me from doing so, as you will soon understand.

My husband, and your beloved friend, Oliver Task, has been murdered.

I know the two of you grew very close while serving in your father's Courage. He always spoke so highly of you. How the others saw you as little more than a nobleman's daughter—a product of noble privilege and nepotism. But he said he saw something different in you. You won his confidence and respect.

I understand you know all of this. But I also know you resented me taking him away from the Courage. It was something you never forgave me for. I loved him so, and I thought taking him away from a life of danger would mean we would have more time together. And now, he is gone. Taken away from me forever.

I should have allowed him to stay. I should not have taken him from you, Cassandra. He was safe with you and the Courage. Please forgive me. Please forgive me for taking him away.

I cannot ask you for anything. I do not deserve such a privilege. But I beg you, please help me now. Help me find those who murdered the man we loved and bring them to justice.

Your servant,

Abigail Task

Cassandra Chance cannot speak: she is overcome with grief. Her maid asks her Courage to investigate the crime. The Task family lived in a small town just outside of Ajun. She has selected the players—the most trusted members of her Courage—to investigate the crime.

Of course, the heroes are given horses and other supplies.

### **Available Resources**

Lady Cassandra tried to provide resources for her Courage. In her available resources, she has 250 gold worth of mundane items (the players can choose) and has 2 minor wondrous items or one medium wondrous item, a scroll no higher than 4th level and a weapon that equals a +2 bonus (the DM chooses). Try to choose items that are appropriate to your party and/or will help them on the adventure.

As a Courage, you are expected to be prepared for anything. Thus, the Lady provides you with items you may need while on the road.

If you should come across unique or useful resources during your mission, the Lady expects you to bring them back so they may be added to the resources available to the Courage at large. Of course, you are allowed to keep items you find unless the Lady expressly asks you add them to the Courage resource pool so others may make use of them as well.

# Act 1: The village of Skyvale

The Courage have been sent to Skyvale to investigate the murder of Oliver Task. It is a typical village: many homes, shops, crops, etc.

Our heroes will have a chance to talk to the Mayor and the Widow Task. They may also find a journal (with missing pages) and learn about another retired hero who has met with an unfortunate end.

## **Scene 1: The First Murder**

### **Run Down**

- The Scene occurs at Oliver Task's home in the village of Skyvale.
- Oliver Task was a powerful and influential magician, serving as a tutor for students at the nearby Wizard's Guild.
- His widow is very upset.
- The first person they meet is the Mayor of Skyvale: Reginus Pallas.
- Only his wife and the Mayor know there was foul play involved in his death.
- His adventure journal has pages torn out of it.
- The body of Oliver Task is a mess; someone obviously tortured him.
- Lady Task knows that Oliver was upset about another mysterious death: a haffun friend.

## Set Up

Oliver Task lived in a large village called Skyvale outside the City of Ajun. His home, although modest, is still the largest building in the village. It stands two stories tall and there is another, small building attached to it. A sign above the door of the smaller building reads "Task's Arcane Tutoring."

The doors of the main house are open and many people come and go. A black veil has been draped over the door. As you approach, some of the villagers look at you and point.

"A Courage," they whisper.

"Wasn't Oliver in a Courage?"

"Why are they here?"

"Perhaps to pay their respects?"

"Do you recognize the heraldry?"

As you come closer to the door, a man steps forward. He greets you with a salute and you notice the black band he wears on his arm. You notice he is missing his left hand.

"Good afternoon," he says. "I am Reginus Pallas. I am the Mayor of Skyvale. How can I help you?"

## Action

After they introduce themselves, Pallas takes them to meet the Widow.

She weeps as Lady Chance wept. She sits in the room with her husband's closed coffin. She can barely speak.

"Cassandra sent you?" she asks them. Then, she says, "Please. Please find who did this to Ol... to Ol..." and she falls apart. She cannot even say his name.

The Mayor takes you aside and asks if there is anything they need. He can answer any

questions: he knew Oliver as long as Cassandra did. Listed below are some common questions the Courage may ask as well as Pallas' answers.

### Did Oliver have any enemies?

He served in a Courage for decades. Of course he had enemies. But he thought he was safe here: far away from the world. He even had magical alarms set on the place. He thought he was safe.

### **Reginus Pallas**

Pallas is a good man. He's a retired adventurer himself, once serving in Lord Chance's Courage (that's Lady Chance's father). He is in his late-thirties. He retired after he lost his hand protecting the village from a troll. He recovered in the village and retired there, having fallen in love with the place. He's been elected five times. He shakes everyone's hand. He looks incredibly sad.

If the Courage is forthright about why they are here, he will offer them any assistance they need, but he is very protective of the Widow Task. The Task family and the Mayor have been friends for many years and he sees Abigail as an older sister. He saw Oliver as the brother he never had.

If the Courage is not forthright about their purpose he will treat them suspiciously, but with respect. "I will honor your authority," he tells them, "but you have to understand, I cannot simply accept mystery into my village. Especially after what happened to Oliver."

### **Who found the body?**

Cassandra did. He was in his workshop. The small building just to the side of the house. You probably saw it when you rode up.

### **Was there any sign of a struggle?**

The whole place was torn apart. Someone was looking for something. They tied Oliver to a chair and... they hurt him. They wanted something from him and he didn't want to give it to them. He probably knew they were going to kill him one way or another. Curse their eyes, he was a good man. (He hides his face from the Courage, wiping a tear from his eye.)

### **Does anyone know he was murdered?**

Only Cassandra and I know that. (He sighs.) We don't even have a sheriff. Haven't needed one for ten years.

### **Can we see where the body was found?**

Of course. Let me show you. One condition. I'll be there while you look. If you find anything, I want to tell Cassandra. It may help us find the bastards who did this to him.

During the questioning, Cassandra shouts her husband's name and jumps on the coffin. She rips it open and pulls the body halfway out. She holds him, shouting his name. The Courage can see that his face is heavily scarred and his ears and nose have been cut away.

After Pallas calms her down, a few ladies of the village take her to another room. "Come," he says to the Courage. "Let us go to the laboratory."

### **Follow Up**

The Courage goes to see the Laboratory.



## **Scene 2: The Laboratory**

### **Set Up**

The Lab is wrecked.

A bloody chair with manacles sits in the center of the room.

The Courage finds his Adventuring Journal with missing pages.

### **Run Down**

In the Lab, you see the wreckage mentioned earlier. Everything has been torn apart. Books lie on the floor, papers thrown everywhere. Bookshelves pulled down, furniture flipped and torn open.

In the center of the room is a chair, covered in blood and gore. Iron manacles sit beside the chair. The floor is stained red and you can see bits of flesh in the stain.

“When Cassandra told me Lady Chance was sending her Courage,” Pallas tells you, “I ordered the room shut. Nobody has been in or out and nothing’s been touched.”

### **Action**

The Courage can search the room, but most of what they find is wreckage.

An important item can be found by anyone making a Perception check (DC 10). The player who rolls highest finds it.

The item is Oliver Task’s adventure journal. It sits in the middle of the room, near the chair. It is a small book with hand-written notes. But the most interesting feature about this book is that pages are missing. Ten of them, covering approximately two weeks of time. Scanning through the journal reveals nothing of importance.

### **Follow Up**

If the Courage wants to ask questions of the widow, they have to convince Pallas. He isn’t keen on the idea. “She’s been through enough already,” he tells them. Convincing him requires a Diplomacy check (DC 15).

## **Scene 3: The Widow**

### **Set Up**

- The Widow Task sits in a dark room, alone. She weeps and catches her breath.
- She can tell the Courage about the missing pages: he belonged to an adventuring party before he joined a Courage.
- She remembers a letter from his haffun companion. He never got the chance to read it. It is still in the mail basket.
- The letter tells Task that he is in danger and to come to Ajun as soon as possible.

## The Run Down

In a small dark room, the Widow Task weeps. Her maid sits with her, silent, touching her arm.

"Cassandra," Pallas whispers. "The Courage. They need to speak to you."

Cassandra Task sniffs, stiffens her spine and looks at the Courage. "I am ready for you," she says. But even in these shadows, you can still see the grief in her eyes.

### The Action

Your players will have questions. Here's what she knows.

### These pages are missing. Do you know what happened here?

My husband was part of a freelance adventuring party when he was younger. Before we met. Full of dreams of "fortune and glory." Those pages are during those times. But I don't know much about what happened. I just know he was traveling a lot.

### Do you know who he was adventuring with?

Yes. Three others. An elf, a palatine and... oh, my. Yes. The haffun. What was his name? I should know this. A letter just arrived. He didn't have time to read it. It's still in the mail basket by the door!

### Why didn't he read it?

He saw the letter and said, "I will take care of that later." He—they—did not part on the best of terms. I don't know why. Oliver always said it was because of money. But I knew he wasn't telling me something. Oh, Oliver! Why did you keep your secrets from me?

The letter still sits in the mail basket, just as she said. When they are done reading it, the Courage will probably want to talk to the haffun, Gar Gallan. The letter mentions meeting in Ajun ("You know the place.") as well as contacting "Illandra" and "Alev." The Widow recognizes the names as members of the Courage, but does not know what he means by his cryptic reference.

Other than what she has told them, the Widow Task knows nothing else of value. She will break down and begin crying again and Pallas will ask the Courage to leave.

### Follow-Up

Further study of the journal (perhaps on the way to Ajun) reveals the cryptic

location: the Flame and Lion tavern. (Otherwise known as “the Flaming Lion.”) This is the place they all met and the place they all agreed to meet again one day.

Also, the Courage learn that Illandra is a wood-bound elf (scorned by her people for some reason) and that Alev is a palatine from Vinnick (much too idealistic for Oliver’s tastes). Where they are now, they have no clue. But they do know where to meet the haffun. Little do they know, they’re already too late.

## **Letter in the Basket**

My old friend,

I know it has been many years since we spoke, and I owe you an apology that is long overdue. Let me begin this letter with that apology.

For what happened in the Tomb, I am truly sorry. You were right, it was my fault, I and you were right to expect more from me.

I hope this apology will suffice and you will continue to read this message. It is crucial that you do. Our lives depend on it. Our lives and the lives of our families.

Please contact me in Ajun. You know the place. I have sent letters to Illandra and Alev. We must protect each other now. We are all that we have.

Your friend in hope,

Gar Gallan

## Act 2: The Butler's Name

The Courage arrives in Ajun, looking for the Flame and Lion tavern and a haffun named Gar Gallan. What they find is a body, more questions and a gathering of butlers looking to collect the name of a fallen friend.

Unfortunately, Gar Gallan is dead. One of Ajun's King Rats has the body, and he's waiting for someone to claim it. He does not know why, but he's sure that someone will.

### Scene 1: The Flame and Lion

#### Set Up

- “The Flaming Lion” is filled with patrons.
- Asking for “Gar Gallan” gets sour looks.
- Another haffun—a butler, Sam Yffur—tells the Courage that Gallan is missing and his friends are looking for him.

#### Run Down

Even a street block away, you can hear the sounds of singing and stomping. Come around the corner and there it is: the Flame and Lion. Lights in the windows, smoke from the chimney, you can smell meat and beer. The door is open. Step on inside...

## The Action

The man who owns the tavern stands behind the bar serving drinks. His name is Ugesh. Nothing else. Just Ugesh. A patch covers his right eye and has only three fingers on his left hand. He is fat and jolly, but also carries an aura of danger.

He welcomes the Courage, recognizes them as such, and says, "The first drink is on the house for those who protect the people of the Reign."

If asked about Gar Gallan, Ugesh's smile disappears. He shakes his head. "I don't talk about that," he says. "But if you're looking for him, there's someone who wants to talk to you."

He points the Courage to a room in the upper story of the tavern. Behind the door is a haffun, sitting at a table, eating food and drinking wine. This is Sam Yffur. He is one of the *tatura*: a butler.

Sam tells the Courage he is here to help. He also wants to find Gallan. When asked why, he will say, "Because he is a hero in our people's eyes. If he is in trouble, if he needs help, I will give it to him without question."

Sam will *not* reveal he is a butler. Nor will he acknowledge that butlers even exist. If a PC haffun has revealed that secret to his friends and they reveal it to Sam, he will give the PC haffun a stern look and say, in haffun, "You had no right to show them that."

Either way, Sam wants to help. He says the last time anyone saw Gallan was two days ago. He was in a poor neighborhood delivering baked goods to hungry children. "He has become a baker," Sam says. "And when he has bread at the end of the day, he gives it away."

Other than those facts, Sam knows nothing. He tells the Courage that he will join them, if they wish, or he will look on his own. But if they discover anything, tell Ugesh and Sam will get the message.

## Follow Up

The Courage has two choices: 1) Gallan's Bakery (Scene 2) and 2) Gallan's Home (Scene 3).

Of course, if they don't trust Sam, they could try following him. His stats are at the back of this adventure. I wish them luck.

If they make Sam an enemy, that's a problem. He won't trust them and will not share information with them until they prove they are actually trying to help.

## A Butler's Secret Greeting

If one of the Courage is a haffun, the PC knows who Sam Yffur is. More importantly, he knows *what* Sam is. Sam gives a fellow butler the "secret handshake."

If the haffun is not a butler, Sam will give him the "other secret handshake." The one that means, "I'm here, my friend. And I am here to help."

## Scene 2: Gallan's Bakery

### Set Up

- The men who killed Gallan are currently searching the bakery.
- Both the front and back doors are locked and trapped. The trap on the back door has been set off and there's a corpse hung on it.
- Three 3rd level rogues. One 3rd level rogue/3rd level fighter
- After their defeat, one of the corpses animates, possessed by the Lich.
- The Lich warns the Courage to "go home" and "pursue the matter no further."

### Run Down

The Bakery stands on Wallis Street just short of Robin Way.

The doors are locked, the windows barred. Getting in requires some subterfuge (Lock Pick DC 30—Gallan was a butler and he knew what he was doing). There's a back door and a front door as well as traps on both. The back door trap (or, the front, if that's convenient for you) has been sprung and a corpse hangs on it. The trap (on both doors) is a scythe above the door that swings down vertically and another that swings horizontally (for those who are smaller than humans). You need to unlock the door *twice* to avoid both traps. Once the doors open (properly), the traps disarm until the doors are locked again.

Inside the Bakery are three rooms. The front door opens to a small shop for selling goods. The back door opens to a large room with preparing tables and ovens. Finally, a small office sits on the west wall: just big enough for two or three people. The office has a desk and two chairs.

Our villains are ransacking the place. As mentioned above, they've already set off the back door trap and one of their buddies

hangs on the scythe (it went through his chin and up through his jaw).

There are four scoundrels in here. They are 3rd level rogues armed with swords, knives and leather armor. Their boss is Androit Benjong, a ruthless mercenary who cares only about money. He is a 3rd level fighter/3rd level rogue.

The villains fight until the fight goes against them. Depending on your players, that could be the first round. When that happens, they try throwing smoke bombs and rushing the door to escape.

If the Courage defeats the rogues, one of them—probably the one hanging on the door—opens his eyes and speaks.

Well, aren't you all a gaggle of nuisances.

But since you have begun to meddle in affairs you do not know nor could you understand, I shall give you a warning. Turn back now. Do not make yourself a nuisance or I shall have to swat you.

Whatever the Courage says to the corpse, it responds:

I have given you fair warning. If you ignore it, I will relish each of your deaths, one by one.

(Insane laughter)

The body catches on fire. Then, it explodes, causing 2d4 fire damage to anyone who fails a Reflex Save 18. Making the save means you take half damage.

The explosion does set fire to the Bakery, however. If the Courage has no way to put it out, the Bakery will burn to the ground before the fire brigade can reach it.

### Follow Up

The explosion sets the Bakery on fire and may even burn it down. If it does, the Courage may have to answer a few questions from the City Watch.

If the heroes want to figure out who that was speaking through the corpse, how much they discover is up to you.

The next stop is Gallan's Home (if they haven't been there already).

## Scene 3: Gallan's Home

### Set Up

- Gallan's house has a front door and back door, both locked (DC 30) and trapped (DC 30). Treat these just like the traps at the bakery, but the DC to find and disarm them is much higher. Gallan, being no fool, spent greater time installing them inside his house.
- Gallan's Home has been run through the same way Oliver Task's office was.
- While there aren't any brigands here, there are a few roddun, going through the mess.
- The roddun are 3rd level rogues.
- The roddun don't want a fight, and they'll run if spotted. They'll find friends and fight with a bigger advantage.
- If they see a haffun, they tell him, "Come to King Rat. He have your friend."
- Gallan's home also has a chamber hidden by a butler's mark. If the Courage has a butler, they can find it. If not, they can receive the goods inside from the haffuns in Scene 6.

### Run Down

Gallan's home is a small, two story brickstone in one of the better neighborhoods. You can see the windows are all dark and barred and the doors are locked.

### Action

Getting into the house requires a couple of steps. First, getting by the locks is tricky (DC 30) and there are traps on both the front and back doors just like the traps at his Bakery (swinging scythes). Finding and disarming the traps is DC 30: Gallan was no fool.

There's another way to get into the house: a sky window on the top floor is open; the lock is picked and the window sits ajar. Getting up there requires a Climb check (DC 15). If someone climbs up to the roof, he'll see three roddun scouring through a house that looks like a storm blew through it.

The roddun know they can't win a stand up fight against a full Courage, so they will fight to escape. If a hero gets knocked unconscious, they'll leave him. They want to make it to the street so they can call on friends.

Once they make it to the street, they only need 1d4 rounds before more roddun show up. And by "more," we mean, "like twenty." The roddun will show their teeth at the Courage and threaten them.

"(skkt!) Go away," they'll say. "This not your place. (skkt!)"

If the Courage has a haffun, they will immediately say, "King Rat want haffun! Bring haffun, he say!" They will refuse to fight unless attacked, in which case, they fight to escape, just as before.

If the Courage doesn't have a haffun, they have to convince

the roddun to bring them to King Rat. This isn't very hard: they're invaders in his territory. If they ask to speak to him, the roddun say, "Good. He want talk too."

There is also a hidden chamber in Gallan's bedroom. It is hidden by a butler's mark. A butler can see it, but otherwise, it requires a perception check (DC 30) to find.

Inside the chamber are letters to and from other members of the adventuring party as well as a circle of iron. The letters are personal correspondence between Gallan and the other members of the adventuring party. They contain addresses.

### **Follow Up**

You may have stubborn players who want to meet King Rat on their own terms. That's fine. If they want to arrange a meeting with him, they can. He'll communicate through both roddun and humans, making sure both his people and the Courage feel safe.

But if they give him too much attitude, he will remember it. He owed Gallan a favor, and he's willing to bend over for the haffun, but not so much for the Courage. More on that in the next Scene.

## **Scene 4: King Rat**

### **Set Up**

- The roddun have Gallan's body.
- King Rat is willing to give it to the haffuns.
- King Rat is also willing to make a deal for information on the ones who killed him.
- "Tisstik" is the roddun King Rat speaks through. King Rat only speaks if he feels threatened or feels the need to threaten the Courage.
- King Rat makes a deal with the Courage using a "promise knife."



**The Symbol  
King Rat draws**



## Run Down

Two candles sit on either edge of a table. On the other side of the table sits a shadowed figure. You can see fur and ears and red eyes in the middle of the dark silhouette.

Another roddun speaks. "You come here for haffun. King Rat has haffun."

A group of roddun carry a small bundle—about the size of a child—into the room. They lay the bundle at your feet. You can smell salt.

"This haffun," says the roddun standing by the desk. "Gallan. King Rat owe him favor. Gallan say, 'Give me to haffun if I die.' King Rat return favor. Now, hands clean."

The dark figure sitting behind the desk rubs its hands together, then puts its palms forward.

"Favor for favor. All done."

The roddun standing next to the table says, "But you want something from King Rat. You want to know who did this. King Rat knows. And he will tell."

The roddun smiles. "For favor."

## Action

The roddun speaking for King Rat is Tisstik, the King's right hand. Yes, that means he's the King's skootzik (ninja).

King Rat knows who killed Gallan and where they are. He can give the Courage that information, but he wants something in return.

It's up to you what King Rat is willing to take in exchange for the information. If the players make a good offer, King Rat will take it. If they can't think of anything, skootzik whispers something to King Rat and the King nods.

"You owe favor," Tisstik says. "King Rat know. You know. And you return favor when asked."

If the Courage agrees, Tisstik asks for the leader of the Courage to step forward.

King Rat steps from behind his desk. He is an intimidating sight. He withdraws a dagger, glowing red in the dim light. He cuts his hand and takes the leader's hand, making the same cut. Then, he clasps both hands together. He says words in roddun, and the leader can feel magic pouring through him.

When they unclasp hands, the leader of the Courage sees a red scar on his palm.

"This is the promise," King Rat says. "When I need it, the scar glows and hurts. It will hurt until you come back and fulfill your promise."

Then, Tisstik says, “Killers at Plate and Key. Up in private rooms. They have marks like this.” He dips his finger in ink and draws a pattern “They all have this mark. You know them when you find them.”

Then, the other roddun surround King Rat. “Go now,” Tisstik says. “And remember your favor.”

## **Follow Up**

The Courage has the body, but they probably don’t know what to do with it. They know Sam is looking for it, so they can call on him.

Of course, the leader of the Courage owes King Rat a favor. That’s an “in” for another adventure. Use it wisely.

Lastly, they have the location of the men who killed Gallan. They can peruse that themselves or they can give the information to Sam.

If they peruse it themselves, go to Scene 5.

If they go to Sam with the body, go to Scene 6.

## **Scene 5: The Plate and Key**

### **Set Up**

- Gallan’s assassins are staying the night in the Plate and Key: a high end inn located in the rich part of the City.
- To get in, they’ll have to pay.
- To get out, they’ll have to be clever. The place is heavily guarded by the City Watch.
- The Inn is really a cover for a bordello above and below the main floors.

### **Run Down**

You stand in front of the Plate and Key. Lanterns light the well-paved streets, leaving few shadows. You see another heavily armed patrol walk by, giving you uneasy looks. The last one that passed by was only minutes ago.

The Inn itself looks like a small fortress. Three stories tall. Stone walls, thick glass. You look it up and down and see no entryways other than the front door.

This is not going to be easy.

## Action

Hopefully, the boxed text discourages your players from breaking in to the Inn. They can try, but it will be difficult. This is the *rich* part of town and the owner of the Plate and Key is no slouch. He's a retired adventurer himself and his business partners are old friends.

If your players come up with a half-baked scheme to get in, they're going to be spending the night in jail. They have to be careful here. Make sure they know that before they go rushing in, throwing spells and swinging swords.

Routine City Watch guards walk by every few minutes, and if they spot any trouble, they'll come rushing in. And in this part of the City, the Watch are not a force to take lightly. Each man is a 5th level warrior, fully armed and armored, and they travel in packs of five. As soon as they get in a fight, they all blow whistles, calling more guards. In 1d4 rounds, another group of five shows up. And another. And another.

Fighting the City Watch is a crime against the City. Not a pleasant thing to have around your neck, especially if you are a member of Lady Chance's Courage.

If they try to use their Courage status to blatantly arrest the villains, they're in for trouble as well. The City Watch will not recognize their authority ("You have no jurisdiction here") and will arrest them if the Courage gets out of line.

No, the best way to get the villains hiding in the Plate and Key is luring them out. Clever players will find ways to do this. Perhaps they want to *hire* the villains for a job. They heard about that job they pulled on the haffun and they want someone who can do another.

The bastards in the Plate and Key are no lightweights, either. They're all fighter/rogues with serious skills. The leader is a fighter/sorcerer.

Of course, starting a fight in the street *also* calls the City Watch. And a whistle. And more guards and more guards and more guards. Again, your Courage has to be subtle and clever.

Even getting in to the Inn will cost them. There's a "door charge" of one gold per person. That's if you know the password. If you don't know the password, the charge is ten gold. The password changes every night. Tonight, it is "Where is the spoon?"

On the main floor is a large dining room, a dance hall, a smoking lounge and private rooms (available for one gold per hour).

Getting a room costs 10 gold per night. The rooms are on the second floor.

The third floor is where the real action takes place. The third floor of the Plate and Key is a high class bordello with some of the most expensive men and women in the City. Spending a night with one of these lovelies costs 100 gold, but also gives a hero a +1 *inspiration* bonus to all rolls for the next 48 hours.

Of course, there are private guards everywhere, all hired by the management of the Plate and Key. And let's not forget that some of the richest members of the City are walking around. You don't think they come to a place like this unarmed and without magic, do you?

## Follow Up

This one is tricky because of the many ways it could end up. Your

Courage may be spending the night in jail, waiting for a letter from Lady Chance to get them out. Or, they could be bringing the villains back to Lady Chance for justice.

If your Courage dispatches the villains, one of them “animates” (as before) and a strange voice speaks through his lips.

Again? Again?

You are quickly moving from pest to problem. And if you continue, you may even become a predicament. But you are accomplishing nothing with all your running about. Continue to squander your resources, fumbling in the dark.

The corpse falls still again. And then, it explodes as before, causing 4d4 damage to anyone who misses a Reflex Save (DC 18). Those who make the save only take half damage.

After capturing the villains, the next step is probably handing over Gallan’s body to Sam. He’ll be meeting them at the Flame and Lion (Scene 1).

## **Scene 6: Reclaiming the Name**

The Courage returns the butler’s body to his fellow haffuns. They repay the heroes with gratitude and a secret.

### **Set Up**

- This is a quick and quiet scene.
- The Courage sets up a meeting with Sam Yffur at the Flame and Lion.
- The haffuns thank the Courage for their help and offer them the first piece of a strange artifact.

## Run Down

After contacting Sam Yffur at the Flame and Lion, the haffun shows up with three other haffuns. They introduce themselves using butler names.

They take the body, handling it reverently, and offer thanks. Then, Sam says, "Gar Gallan was killed on orders. We know this. But we must return his body to his family and make other... preparations."

He continues, "In thanks for your assistance, please accept this gift. And, if you wish to pursue the ones who are responsible, perhaps these will help."

Sam holds in his hands two letters and a circle made of what appears to be iron. He offers these to you. (If you have not found them in earlier scenes)

## Action

There isn't much to do here except receive the gift of gratitude from Sam.

## Follow Up

If your Courage has a butler, Sam invites him to the "Reclaiming the Name" ritual.

If your Courage has a haffun who is not a butler, Sam may suggest to him that he inherit Gallan's name. That's up to you. He gets one level of butler. Of course, he has to either spend the xp for it or go into "xp debt."

Both envelopes are empty, but they have addresses for the other members of the adventuring party. They now have leads on the two other members of the adventuring party. Where they choose to go next is up to them. If they choose to follow the courtesan, go to Act 3. If they choose to follow the palatine, go to Act 4.

## Act 3: The Iron-Bound Courtesan

The Courage meets an iron-bound elf courtesan who is really a Blackthorn-bound spy. She has received her haffun friend's warnings, but is embedded in a bit of trouble at the moment and can't break away.

While they investigate, the Courage meets the vampire for the first time. They also receive the second part of a peculiar artifact that may lead them to their ultimate destination.

### Scene 1: The Red Rope

#### Set Up

Following up on Gallan's letters, the Courage embarks to the City of Nevarnare.

They find the brothel where Illandra Vaeleron works.

They have to get in the door: 20 gp.

#### Run Down

Nevarnare pulses, like an enormous beating heart. Its streets are its arteries and veins, it's gates guard the center from danger. Moving down the street, you can feel the life of the City moving along with you. It's life, moving down the avenues and boulevards, all headed for destinations unseen.

You have arrived in one of the wealthier barrios. You have seen brothels before, but nothing like this. Tall and proud like a noblewoman, the building stands, dressed in fineries, smelling like a rose garden. Members of the City Watch eye you with suspicion. You see them whispering to each other. Perhaps you should get your business done quickly...

## Action

This is the address they are looking for: a high end brothel. Of course, getting in should be easy, right?

Well, only if they are willing to pay. The cost of entry is 20 gold. Dropping the name “Gil Gallan” won’t help. Also, saying “We’re friends with Illandra Vaeleron,” won’t help, either. The man at the door wants 20 gold per person.

Fighting their way in is no solution. City Watch in this part of Nevarare are no slouches: they’re all 9th level fighters. They’re also well armed and armored.

Once they are inside, they can request for a meeting with Illandra. *This* is where name dropping helps. She usually meets clients first, then determines whether or not she will take them on, but if they mention the haffun, the Courage gets an immediate audience.

## Follow Up

Either the Courage gets in the door or they don’t. If they’re not willing to shell out the 20 gold to talk to Illandra, they are left out in the cold.

If they try to start a fight, the City Watch gets them, throws them in jail and they get fined *200 gold* for disturbing the peace. If they actually fight the City Watch, there’s a 2,000 gold fine for assaulting an Officer of the City.

If they get a meeting with Illandra, go to the next Scene.

## Scene 2: The Spy Set Up

Illandra Vaeleron is troubled by the news of her friends’ deaths, but tries not to show it.

She also tries to hide the fact that she is not, in fact, iron-bound. She is a Blackthorn-bound spy, getting information on the Senate’s negotiations for lumber rights.

Senators Villhem Vikkers and Ubek Tin are arguing whether or not to send in mercenaries and just take the wood.

She also knows what the Courage is looking for: a part of the compass. She has a piece of it and knows where it is hidden, but the Courage must convince her to tell them where it is.

Discovering Illandra is not iron-bound requires a perception check (TN 30). Another elf (iron-bound or not) will automatically notice.

## Run Down

The room is lit in scarlet. The smell of incense fills your nostrils. A womanly figure steps toward you, wearing a thick robe. On her naked ankle, just under the hem of the robe, you see what appears to be an iron band.

She smiles and says, “I am Illandra. I hear you have news for me?”

## Action

Illandra knows something is wrong. She’s sensed danger and needs the Courage to help her. However, she is also spying on a Senator—Villhelm Vikkers—who is in charge of negotiations for lumber rights with the elves of Gildenhome, a forest outside of Tomkin.

Vickers has been conspiring with another Senator—Ubek Tin—to march soldiers into Gildenhorne and take the lumber, killing any elves who get in their way, blaming the whole thing on orks. She needs those letters. If she can get them, she can show them to other Senators and kill his reputation.

Whether or not she feels comfortable telling any of this to the Courage depends on your players. If they seem trustworthy and honorable, she may inform them. She will talk about the Senate in general, fishing for opinions of the Senate's corruption or attitude toward elves. Illandra is clever—she is Blackthorn-bound—and will not spill her secrets to just anyone.

If the Courage asks about the death of her former comrades, she seems distant and aloof. "I only joined for the coin," she will say. "That they are dead now matters not to me." A successful sense motive (DC 29) reveals this to be a lie; that she is deeply troubled by this and you can sense deep sadness in her eyes.

If the Courage asks about the compass, she looks at it and says, "Oh, that thing. Useless. We chased treasure with it for months and found nothing." Another lie and another Sense Motive check. If successful, the Courage discerns that she's lying to protect the Courage from an important secret.

Her relationship with Vickers, so far, has been cold. She can't get the Senator to warm up to her. She suspects it is because she is elven and his deep hatred for her race breeds a deeper suspicion.

### **Follow Up**

If the Courage decides to meet with Senator Vickers (to warn him or get the letters), go to Scene 3.

If the Courage decides to follow Illandra discretely, go to Scene 5.

## **Scene 3: The Senator**

### **Set Up**

The Courage visits the office of Senator Vickers looking to either expose Illandra or get the letters she's looking for.

The Senator is not in a good mood: he lost a vote.

### **Run Down**

You arrive at the Senator's office, but like everywhere else in Nevamare, you have to wait. His secretary—a pretty, young woman— informs you that the Senator is currently on the floor for a vote, but should return at any time.

After ten minutes of waiting, a tall man with thin, grey hair wearing a Senator's toga enters the office.

"Senator," the secretary says, "this is Lady Chance's Courage. They wanted to speak to you."

The Senator nods a greeting at you, walks by you, and enters his office. He leaves the door open behind him.



### **Action (Getting the Letters)**

Vikkers is obviously angry. He lost an important vote (re-allocating taxes from the merchant class to the nobility) and he has little time or patience for anyone advocating an elf's position.

Vikkers is a stuck up, human-centric snob. This much is true. But he's also a good man. He was born to a merchant family, earned his way through apprenticeship, became a Master Architect and won his seat in the Senate with fair debate and reasonable discourse. He believes in the Reign, believes in the betterment of humanity, believes in goodness, charity, solidarity and all the rest. He also hates elves. He really, really hates elves. He hates that they live forever, that they won't work with humanity, that they are frighteningly powerful, condescending to men and disrespect the accomplishments of the Reign. He tries to negotiate with them, but they talk to him like he's a child. No elf has ever respected him and so, he will undo them at every turn. His pride has gotten the better of him when it comes to elves. And he will spend eternity in a cursed grave before he lets them get away with disrespecting the Reign.

If the Courage is here to get the letters, they have a few options.

They can try bribing the Senator. This won't work. Exposing himself as duplicitous will not endear him to his fellows.

They can try blackmail. This is a tricky one. The Courage knows little or nothing about the Senator. Using Lore (Law) or Lore (Nevarnare) tells the Courage that the Senator has no scandals in his past.

In fact, other than his hatred and distrust for elves, he's a rather honest fellow. He

just hates elves and wants to see all of them either enslaved or in graves. Otherwise, he is an honest man. But these letters show his prejudice and compromise his position in the negotiations. He cannot allow that.

They can try stealing them. The letters are in his office. Breaking and entering is a possibility using spells like *locate object* reveal the letters' location: a secret drawer in his desk. Or, the Courage can use a perception check (DC 26). The drawer is trapped with a poison needle: if anything but the actual key is used, the needle shoots out at the thief.

### **Action (Informing on Illandra)**

If the Courage wants to inform on Illandra (she is spying on a Senator and trying to undermine the Reign, after all), it's a simple matter of telling the Senator what they know.

### **Follow Up**

If the Courage cannot acquire the letters, that's too bad. They may want to report back to Illandra with the news. Go to Scene 4.

If the Courage does acquire the letters, that's good. They'll want to deliver them to Illandra. Also go to Scene 4.

## **Scene 4: The Vampire Set Up**

Returning to Illandra, the Courage encounters the vampire, Ashivaeyr Mezzet. She has already captured Illandra and is looking for the second piece of the compass.

## Run Down

As you return to Illandra's, you notice the door is slightly open. Just inside, you see the doorman, the one who threatened you before, lays on the floor, his throat torn out. You see blood on the floor, sprayed on the wall, the carpets and the ceiling.

Stepping further inside, you see bodies everywhere. And blood, blood, blood.

### Action

Everywhere the Courage looks, that's what they find. It's when they go upstairs to Illandra's that they find the source of this carnage.

Ashivaeyr Mezzet is there, the elf held by the throat with one hand as the vampire prepares to strike with another: her fingers curled into claws. As the Courage enters, she laughs.

"So, these are the fools my beloved told me about," she says, her voice like a poison whisper. "Put down your weapons or I drink the elf's soul."

At this point, you may want to tell the players that the vampire hasn't a single scratch on her and the entire brothel is dead. It's an important detail. Why?

### Because the Courage is outmatched.

This is so important to communicate to your players. This is a vampire: one of the deadliest

foes in the Known World. And they have little or no chance of beating it with traditional weapons. And here is where your Courage will show it's true mettle. They can try saving Illandra or let her die. What they do next determines Illandra's fate.

If they try messing with Mezzet, she will kill Illandra. All she has to do is squeeze (*a coup de grace*) and the elf dies.

If they give Mezzet what they think she wants, she throws the elf down and vanishes. Of course, what Mezzet wants is Illandra's part of the compass. Illandra pleads with the Courage not to give the vampire the compass, that her life is worth sacrificing to keep the compass from the vampire's hands. And she's honest. She's willing to die rather than let Mezzet get anywhere close to the Dragon's Tear.

There's another complication: the Courage has one part of the compass as well. Mezzet does not know this but careless players may inform her of that fact. In which case, she will go through the Courage to get the compass as well.

If the vampire kills Illandra, she laughs at the Courage. "You can do nothing," she warns them. "Leave now or I'll kill you just as I killed her." She looks at the Courage. "Although, by the looks of you, it will be easier."

If the Courage decides to face Mezzet, they have a serious fight on their hands. An Estvere vampire, such as Mezzet, cannot be harmed by mundane or magical weapons. She can shrug off anything the Courage throws at her. The only thing they can do is stun her for a round: if the Courage delivers a single blow that does more damage than her Constitution, she is *stunned* for one round. That's it. Spells, magic items, weapons... all of these things just cannot harm her.

Mezzet may be affected by strongly presented symbols of the Reign of Men. Symbols such as coins, a Senator's sash, the emblem of the roadmen, a prestigious coat of arms... a symbol that anyone in the Reign could recognize. These symbols remind Mezzet of everything she betrayed to become a vampire. A recoiling vampire must stay at least 5 feet away from the symbol and cannot touch, use powers, cast spells or make melee attacks against that creature. Holding a vampire at bay takes a standard action. After 1 round, a vampire may make a Will Save against the holder of the symbol (DC= 10+half the wielder's level+Wisdom bonus) to overcome its power. If the vampire is successful, it is no longer affected by that symbol and may act normally.

A philosopher may be able to turn the vampire, but their chances are slim. Even so, it will give the Courage an important advantage. If they turn Mezzet, she drops Illandra and the vampire snarls at them. Illandra is at zero hit points and is dying. She needs medical attention immediately.

If the Courage successfully turns Mezzet, or if they stun her enough, she grows frustrated and curses at the Courage, warning them that she's watching. She then uses *shadowstep* to flee the scene.

## Follow Up

If the Courage saves Illandra, she tells them the location of her piece of the compass. "It is no longer safe with me," she tells them. She will also tell them the story of what happened when they found the Dragon's Tear. You can find that in a nearby sidebar.

If the Courage does not save Illandra, they can still find her piece of the compass: hidden under a secret panel in the floor.

The Courage has one lead left: the fallen palatine. Go to Act 4.

# Act 4: The Fallen Palatine

Our heroes go looking for Alev Pinn, a palatine who served with his fellow adventurers years ago. When they knew him, Alev was a palatine, dedicated to upholding the law. Since they parted ways, he's turned into an anonymous vigilante the streets have called "Hush." Still serving the law (in a lawless City), he has taken to the streets waging a personal war against its gangs. The Courage finds him just as the lich and witch do.

## Scene 1: The Office of the Palatines

### The Set Up

- The Courage arrives in Jinix looking for a palatine by the name of Alev Pinn.
- They also arrive to find Jinix in the middle of a riot. The whole City is in the middle of a street gang war.
- Approaching the Office of the Palatines is a tense situation with the only palatine inside—Silveste Agon—not trusting the Courage.
- Agon isn't alone: he's with Senate bureaucrats who are using the situation to their advantage. The main one is Sansa Fell—an attractive older woman who controls some of the street gangs. Her target is a street gang leader known as "Hush."
- He's not here. He resigned. We don't know where he is.
- A successful *diplomacy* or *intimidate* check (DC 18) gets the officer to request a secret meeting later.

## The Run Down

Walking down the streets of Jinix, you wonder if you will ever find the Office of the Palatines. The streets seem to twist and turn on themselves like a massive labyrinth. Eventually, after asking many suspicious-looking locals, you arrive at the building.

You see a giant burn mark on the side of the building. Windows are boarded up. Carved into the stone above the door are the words, "All Are Welcome!" On the doors themselves, written in paint, are the words, "Approach with hands raised."

### The Action

As the Courage approaches the building, they hear a voice calling from inside.

"Stay where you are! Identify yourselves!"

If they identify themselves as Lady Chance's Courage, the voice says, "Let me see your papers!"

This is a tense situation. The man inside is Silveste Agon and he doesn't trust anyone. He's the only palatine in the Office. The others either departed, are on missions and haven't returned, or betrayed the Order and were hung. Jinix is not friendly to palatines.

After they identify themselves, Silveste opens the doors and hurries them in, looking out at the street. Once inside, they see the place is a mess. Papers everywhere, desks overturned. He tells them they had a riot a few days ago and the mob wrecked the place. He doesn't know where the other palatines are: he was the lowest ranked and was left with the duty of guarding the place.

When asked about Alev Pinn, he says, "Alev? I haven't heard that name in a while. He resigned years ago. Ten years ago. Disappeared. We just assumed he was dead."

Around this time, Sansa Fell shows up. She's a beautiful older woman and one of the ten

Senators of Jinix. She demands to know who the Courage is and why they are here. Her treatment of the Courage greatly depends on their reply. She is a cruel, ruthless woman who is using the current situation in Jinix to her advantage. She is taking control of the street gangs through bribes and promises of power. She wants to depose the current leader of the street gangs (a man calling himself "Hush") and is willing to do anything to get him. She'll even bribe a Courage.

She doesn't know where Alev Pinn is, but she's willing to help find him if they will deal with Hush. She knows where he's located: locked up in "The Holly Juff," a tavern in the worst part of town. "Bring me Hush, dead or alive, and I'll give you what you want. I'll have everyone on the street looking out for Alev Pinn."

### Follow Up

If the Courage appears on the up and up, Silveste approaches them quietly. "Meet me at The Nowhere Inn after dark," he whispers. Go to Scene 2.

If the Courage asks suspiciously or treats him poorly, he says nothing.

If the Courage takes up Sansa Fell's offer and head to The Holly Juff, go to Scene 4.

## Scene 2: The Nowhere Inn

### Set Up

- The Courage meets with Silveste Agon again, but this time, without the Senator watching.
- He tells them they can find Pinn through Hush.
- An ambush of street thugs attacks Agon and the Courage.

### Run Down

You find the Nowhere Inn off the main street in a back alley. There is no sign over the door. You hear no sounds coming from inside. One knock and a peephole opens.

“Password?” a voice asks from the other side...

### Action

The password is “I am nowhere.” Not knowing the password means they don’t get in. It’s a small problem. (Silveste forgot to tell them this part.)

Bribes are acceptable—this is Jinix, after all—and 10 gold pieces gets them in the door. (A Knowledge (Local) check, DC 15, reminds the Courage that bribery is common here.) They could also try intimidation, but that won’t work. Or, they could try to get the password from someone entering or exiting the place. That will also cost them.

Once inside, they move through a dim room that seems to have bookshelves for walls. A woman seated at a desk smiles at them

and pushes a button. One of the walls slides away and they enter the Nowhere Inn.

Upon entering, the Courage notices the walls are soundproofed. There is music and dancing and all kinds of decadence going on. The Nowhere Inn has two floors, private rooms, two bars (one upstairs, one downstairs) and a dance room. There are also three secret exits just in case the palatines or City Watch decide to break up the place.

The Courage will find Silveste on the second floor, sitting by himself in a dark corner. He doesn’t want to be noticed, so he’s wearing a disguise. It’s a bad disguise. A cheap wig and a cheap fake beard.

He tells the Courage that he knows how to find Pinn. “And Sansa Fell gave you the answer. It’s Hush. You find him, you’ll find Pinn.”

If the Courage asks questions, he holds up his hand. “I can’t say anything else. I *swore* not to say anything else. You try to make me break my oath, we will have problems. You understand?”

If they ask him how to find Hush, he says, “Exactly how Fell told you. But it’s more complicated than that.” He says, “You aren’t the only crew she’s sending after him. You’re just one. I saw her throw gold at three other gangs before and after you arrived. They’re out for his blood. You have to get to him first.”

Silveste asks that they leave separately. “I’ll go first. You give me a few ticks and follow.”

He makes his way down to the first floor. Unfortunately, by the front door, a gang of five thugs stop him and put a knife in him. Then, they rush him out the front.

## Follow Up

If the Courage goes after Silveste, go to Scene 3.

If they leave Silveste to the gang (shame on them; it'll come back to bite them), go to Scene 4.

## Scene 3: Saving Silveste

### Set Up

- It's pretty simple here. Fighting a gang of street thugs.
- The thugs run as soon as it starts looking bad.
- Silveste is injured, but not dead. He needs treatment.

### Run Down

Outside the Inn, you see the five hoodlums running with Silveste's body. One of them spots you and shouts. "Hey! It's some big, bleedin' heroes!" The gang laughs, turns and continues running.

### Action

Use the chase rules.

If they catch up with the street thugs, a fight occurs. The thugs will try to run the moment two of them go down. If need be, one of them will stand over Silveste with a knife to the palatine's throat. "You come any closer and he dies." The thug stands with a *coup de grace* ready. If the Courage allows him to run, he spares Silveste's life. Of course, we expect your Courage to come up with all kinds of ways to save Silveste, but if they just try to rush him or shoot an arrow at him or try any tactic that's less than subtle, Silveste dies.

### Follow Up

If they save Silveste, he will suggest taking him to the local university for healing. Then, he tells them, "Go to Hush. He'll help you."

Of course, that means heading off to Scene 4.

## Scene 4: The Holly Juff

### Set Up

The Holly Juff is a tavern in the seediest part of Jinix and it is surrounded by gangs.

The Courage has to find a way in without getting themselves killed.

Sansa Fell has put a ransom on Hush's head and everyone wants it, so there's no way any gang lets in the Courage.

Hush and his men are inside the tavern and they aren't coming out. They've managed to snipe off anyone trying to burn the place down or otherwise enter.

## Run Down

You come across the Holly Juff—the tallest building on the block. There's a sign out front: a man in a colorful costume wearing a wreath of holly. You can see the windows are bordered up and there are many men and women on rooftops facing the building. They are all wearing different gang marks (tattoos).

As you come closer, one of the gangs spots you. "If yer comin' fer the ransom, yer too late!" he shouts. "We got here first, we're takin' him in!"

Another gang on another rooftop shouts, "Nah, ya ain't! We were here first! We're takin' him in!"

Suddenly, all the gangs on the rooftops start shouting at each other. Seems you've come across a bit of a problem.

## Action

The big question is how to get in to the Holly Juff. Of course, your players will come up with plans. We just have to provide details; we don't need to give them plans.

The building is three stories tall. It's the tallest building in the barrio. The other buildings are only one and two stories tall. Hush has archers on the rooftop of the Holly Juff, so trying to across that way will get you shot.

The doors and windows are barred and Hush has guards on every floor. If the Courage tries to break through a window, they'll be surrounded in moments.

The gangs tried burning the place down, but whenever anyone with a fire gets close, they get shot down with arrows. Then, a wash of water rushes down the side of the Inn. Bandits will say, "Either Hush has a lot of water buckets, an interior well or a wizard casting water spells." (All three are true.)

The ruffians have even tried the sewers. There's an iron gate that's been welded shut by magic fire (Hush's wizard again). The ruffians don't have the magic to get it open.



This is a stand-off. Nobody can get in and nobody can get out. And that's where the problem lies. The Courage has to get in and they have to get Hush out.

Of course, there's always the option of just walking up to the building in Lady Chance's colors and announcing who they are and why they are there. That just might work, depending on how they do it.

## Follow Up

If the Courage gets access to the Inn, go to Scene 5.

If they do not gain access to the Inn, go to Scene 6.

## Scene 5: Showdown in the Holly Juff

The Courage gets into the Inn and the lich arrives.

### Set Up

- The Courage discovers that Hush is actually the man they are looking for: Alev Pinn.
- He reveals he's been running a gang of his own to take down the other gangs.
- The lich's minions arrive, looking to capture Pinn.
- As fighting begins, the gangs outside take advantage of the distraction and force their way into the Inn.

### Run Down

Inside the Holly Juff, you see the inhabitants have transformed the place into a stronghold. There are weapons everywhere. Spare arrows and crossbow bolts in bunches by windows and doors. Rations lined up and water buckets ready for any attempt to light the place. The men inside have no air of desperation or futility. They are ready to fight and have the confidence of an army on the edge of victory.

Some men greet you and offer their hands. They tell you they have heard of Lady Chance's Courage and are proud to meet you. A few even go so far as to offer a shallow bow.

Then, a tall man walks down the stairs. "Are these the men and women of Lady Chance's Courage?" he asks one of the men. He has the bearing of a noble. His eyes are sharp and seem full of wit and candor. He gives you a sideways smile while he extends his hand.

"I am the man the streets call 'Hush,'" he says. "But please. Call me Alev."

## Action

What the Courage does with the knowledge that Alev Pinn is Hush is up in the air. How they respond really doesn't matter, because sooner than they think, the whole scene is going to flip on its head. A nearby sidebar has answers to the most obvious questions the Courage may want to ask Pinn.

Pinn carries his piece of the Compass around his neck, but he won't give it up (see his answers in the nearby sidebar). He won't surrender it while he still holds breath. Fortunately for the Courage, someone is about to put the kibosh on that.

Give them a few minutes to talk to him and ask questions. Then, when the scene begins to slow down, that's when the lich and the vampire show up.

Ashivaeyr Mezzet and Reginald Crane arrive via the roof. They fly in to the barrio, rip the roof off with a combination of spells and begin descending down the building, killing anything in their way.

This, of course, creates a bit of a problem. The gangs outside want to kill them, the lich and the vampire want Pinn's part of the Compass, and the Courage is stuck in the middle.

Pinn has his part of the Compass on him, but if the Courage asks about it, he will deflect their questions. He will not lie. If forced, he will say, "I choose not to answer that question yet." The Courage has to win his trust to win his part of the Compass.

And, as we already know, Mezzet and Crane don't want the Compass, but they want the Courage to assemble it so they can follow them into the Tomb. They don't care who they kill as long as the Courage gets Pinn's piece of the Compass.

Unfortunately for the Courage, there is little they can do to stop the lich and vampire. These two are beyond the Courage's power. At best, they can turn them away. But Mezzet and Crane don't want the Courage dead, so that's off the table. Hurting the Courage, however, is always an option. After all, pain is such a powerful motivator.

## Follow Up

Whatever happens here—and it will be a mess—the Courage gets hold of the Compass. It is likely that Pinn dies, but he won't be the only one. He'll take as many gang members as he can with him.

At the end of this Act, the Courage has all three pieces of the Compass. They can put them together and locate the Tomb. And that, dear friends, is the last Act of this adventure.

## Questions for Pinn

### Why did you leave the palatine order?

I didn't leave. I'm still a palatine. I never surrendered my obedience to the law. But in this City, there is no law. The only way to maintain my Oath was to become a vigilante.

### Aren't you breaking the law?

What law? Do you see *anyone* following any kind of law here? I'm upholding the law the best way I can. The only way to do that is to be anonymous... but not anonymous. Everyone knows "Hush." Nobody knows me. That way, I can continue doing what I do.

### Do you know about the Compass? Do you know where it is?

Yes. (He shows it to them, hanging around his neck.) I also know *what* it is. An artifact from an ancient culture. It leads to a tomb where wishes are granted. Do not ask me for it, for I will not give it to you. The dangers in that place are too great. Not for those who seek the power that lies within... but for the world itself. I will not give it to you.

# Act 5: The Tomb

The final Act of the adventure. Here, the Courage has all three pieces of the Compass and is ready to use it. If they follow its directions, it leads them to the Tomb of the Dragon's Tear. Of course, this is exactly what our villains want.

Mezzet and Crane cannot enter the Tomb. They know they cannot best the challenges within. Yet, a small group of heroes can. And when they do, they will get to the Tomb and use the wishes inside to grant them true immortality... or someone suffers.

## Scene 1: Arrival

The Courage arrives at the Tomb only to discover the lich and vampire have men waiting for them. And a message.

### Set Up

- Following the Compass, the Courage discovers the location of the Tomb: through a doorway in a back alley somewhere in Vinnick.
- When they arrive, a representative of the lich and vampire is there with a crystal ball. Through that, the Courage discovers Mezzet and Crane have Lady Chance (and other NPCs) and will kill her (them) unless the Courage does as they are told.
- The Courage is to take the crystal ball with them. Mezzet and Crane will watch as they proceed. If anything goes against plan, the captives die. Horribly.

## Run Down

The Compass has lead you through forests and over rivers. Over mountains and plains. Finally, you have arrived here in the City of Vinnick. The City of Swords. Everywhere you look, not a single citizen is unarmed. And all of them look at you—strangers—with deep suspicion.

*(Special text for non-human characters: **You** get particularly dark looks. You hear muttered curses and dirty epithets. Men put their hands on the pommels of their weapons when they pass you by. A few even spit on the ground, looking directly into your eyes as they do.)*

You follow the Compass along, coming to a side street behind a market. The place smells like an outhouse and the street's grime sticks to the bottom of your boots. When you reach the end of the alleyway you see two things. The first is a stone door that has no business being in this place. The second is a black-robed figure holding a crystal ball.

"Hold your wrath," he says, raising a hand. "I have a message."

### Action

Even if the Courage kills the messenger—something that might happen, although murdering a man who asks for peace is decidedly *not-good*—Mezzet and Crane can still speak to them through the crystal ball.

If the Courage doesn't kill him, he offers them the crystal ball and then bows and steps aside.

Mezzet and Crane speak to the Courage from the other side of the crystal ball. "We congratulate you on getting this far," Mezzet says with a snide tone. "Now, you have only to perform one more act to complete our goal. Complete the Tomb's tests and when you reach the tear, you will wish that Ashivaeyr Mezzet and Reginald Crane may be released from their cursed states and granted true immortality."

If the Courage bickers or argues, Mezzet and Crane show the Courage the captives they have: Lady Chance and any NPCs the Courage may be emotionally attached to.

"This is very simple," Crane tells them with his dribbling, decaying voice. "Do as we say, or these people die."

Ashivaeyr Mezzet and Reginald Crane also order them to carry the crystal ball with them so the two of them can watch the Courage's progress through the Tomb. This is non-negotiable. If they Courage tries to weasel their way out of this, Mezzet either kills or severely wounds one of the NPCs. She cuts off a finger or an ear or possibly a nose. Or, she plucks out an eye.

"Do it," she says. "Or I will spend the rest of my eternal life slowly killing them all."

## Follow Up

The Courage has little choice here. Unless you have a party of psychopaths (“Screw the NPCs! Nobody tells us what to do!”), the Courage has to go through the Tomb with the crystal ball.

Of course, the Courage could decide not to negotiate, in which case, all the victims on the other side of the crystal ball die.

Once they agree to the villains’ terms, it’s time to enter the Tomb. The Compass glows and the door glows. Then, the door vanishes. A shining, swimming darkness calls to them from the other side.

## Scene 2: A Room of Ghosts

The first test in the Tomb is a room full of ghosts: those who tried to pass the tests and failed.

### Set Up

- The “room” is an endless mist containing thousands of ghostly figures. Each begs the Courage to help them leave this place.
- If they do not choose to help someone (a test of compassion), they remain in the mists forever.

### Run Down

You step into a swirling mist that blinds your sight. It feels chilly and crisp against your skin, like morning dew drawing goosebumps. You cannot see well, although you do notice shadowy figures moving through the mist. One steps forward, but his eyes are blank. He wears the colors of a Courage, but you do not recognize them. His armor looks one hundred years old. He mutters to himself, “the hammer... the hammer...”

As you wander, you see even more figures, all in the same state. One whispers, “Leave no-one behind...” Another: “It should have been me...”

There seems no end to this “chamber” and endless figures shamble by you, all whispering or muttering, fading in and out of the mist.

### Action

The figures continue to wander in and out of the mist until one of the Courage touches one. As soon as that happens, the figure snaps out of the trance, looks at the Courage and says, “Trapped. Trapped here, too?”

All the figures in the mist are adventurers who tried the Tomb and failed. They are trapped here for all eternity. Most of them are evil. A few are good. We encourage you to have the Courage

bring a few figures out of the mist to hear their stories. As soon as they wake one adventurer, another goes back to sleep and wanders into the mist. Only one at a time. And if they lose one, they lose him forever.

Each made it a certain distance, but none of them made it all the way. And the Tomb changes its tests each time, so the Courage cannot simply ask questions to figure out their way through the Tomb.

Eventually (at your discretion), the Courage comes across a young soul with a good heart. He (or she) tried to make it through the Tomb but failed. Now, they are trapped in the Tomb forever. But not forever...

“Take me with you,” he says. “If you take me with you, I can help you. I saw many of the traps. Please. I don’t want to be here forever.”

PS: Alignment-testing spells don’t work here. That might be important.

### **Follow Up**

If the Courage decides to take any of the ghosts with them, they have passed the first test. The test of compassion. The Courage can wander forever in the mist, eventually becoming mindless zombies like the others, if they never offer to bring someone with them.

This is an opportunity to create all kinds of mistrust. The person they bring with them insists they have redeemed their ways. Having spent one hundred years trapped in mists—fully conscious and walking—it’s time to make a change. But can the Courage trust him? Can they?

Once they accept someone to bring out of the mist, a glowing doorway appears. Move onward to Scene 3.

## **Scene 3: The Trap**

### **Set Up**

- The Courage enters a seemingly endless hallway, walking for ten minutes or more.
- When they see a door in the distance, black iron chains appear, trapping a member of the party. And the ceiling begins to sink.
- If the Courage leaves the trapped member of the Courage behind, they reach the door... and it’s false. They pass into the Room of Mists.
- If the Courage stays behind, trying to save their friend, the ceiling stops sinking and the “true door” opens, leading to the next room.

### **Run Down**

You find yourself in a long corridor. It stands ten feet wide and ten feet high. Along the way, your feet kick up dust. You see crushed bones and skulls in your way.

Finally, after what seems an eternity of walking, you see a doorway in the distance. But just as you do, black iron chains snap from panels in the walls!

### **Action**

Everyone makes a Reflex Save against TN 30. The player who failed and rolled lowest gets caught by the chains. (By default, the NPC from Scene 2: Room of Mists gets caught.)

As soon as the chains catch, the door at the end of the corridor opens. Also, the ceiling begins to sink toward them.

Running to the door takes three rounds (about thirty seconds). The ceiling crushes anyone trapped in the chains in five rounds. That gives your Courage two rounds (about twenty seconds) to get everyone out of the chains.

That's not enough time.

Breaking the chains with mundane tools or just pure strength is pointless. Also, magic seems to sink into the chains, causing no damage whatsoever.

## Follow Up

This is a test of fellowship. There are two ways to pass.

First, if someone trapped in the chains insists the others leave him, they have passed the test.

Second, if the Courage spends all its available time breaking the chains (all five rounds), the Courage passes the test.

If anyone runs for the door, leaving behind someone begging for help, they fail the test and end up in the Room of Mists. Use your own judgment here. For example, a player attempting to block open a door hasn't failed the test.

Anyone who passes the test moves on to Scene 4.

## Scene 4: The Truth

The third room is the Room of Truth. No lies allowed.

### Set Up

- A fountain and a statue in the center of a circular room. A golden goblet rests on the lip of the statue.

- Someone must drink from the fountain. Then, the statue says they must tell the truth to pass.

### Run Down

The mists between doorways clears and you see a stone, circular room. In the center is a stone fountain and a statue. On the lip of the fountain is a golden cup. As you look closer, you see the word, "Truth" carved into the stone of the statue.

### Action

So, this is pretty simple. Someone must drink from the cup and tell the truth. But how you do this will make it work.

By this time, your players have probably pulled shenanigans against each other. Their characters have lied, cheated or done some devious thing without the other characters knowing. Or, they just have secrets. Players love giving their characters secrets.

In order to pass this test, someone has to tell the truth. *You* can pick who that someone is, based on your knowledge of your players and their characters. It isn't up to the Courage to pick; the statue picks.

If someone, let's say a palatine, says, "I'll do this!" the statue says, "NO!" Then, the statue's head turns (stone against stone) and looks at the one you want. "This one," the statue says. "This one must drink or none of you pass."

Like we said, it doesn't need to be something pernicious. Players write elaborate back stories for



their characters all the time. This is an opportunity to get that invisible back story out in the open (where the other players can enjoy it). “I’m really the daughter of Lady Chance,” for example. Or, “I killed my father for his title.” Or even just, “I picked your pocket back in Jinix.”

## Follow Up

This is a place for pure roleplaying. No dice needed. Your players need to tell the truth or they all go out to the mists.

It’s also up to you how many should tell the truth. The statue won’t be satisfied until one, two or three... it’s up to you. You know your players; tailor the room to suit them.

If they succeed, move on to Scene 5.

## Scene 5: Covetous

A chamber full of gold and magic. Wonder what could happen here?

### Set Up

- The Courage enters a vast room full of treasures.
- All their food and water is gone.
- A door sits on the other side barred with black chains (like ones they’ve encountered before).
- To break the black chains, the Courage must use the weapons and treasures in the room.
- Above the door reads an inscription: Need/Greed.
- If they put the treasures back, they move on. If they keep the treasures, they go to the Room of Mists.

### Face the Truth

Here’s an option if the Room of Truth doesn’t work for you. Instead of a cup on the lip of the fountain, members of the Courage must look into the fountain and “face the truth.”

This is an opportunity to introduce some back story into your game.

Again, players love having deep backgrounds. Bring them to light here.

When each hero looks into the pool, the rest of the Courage sees what she sees. A moment of weakness, perhaps. Or, a moment of fear. A moment of blood and pain. Bring up ugly truths and show them to everyone. Then, let the Courage sort them out. If you feel they “pass the test,” they can move on to Scene 5.

## Run Down

The mists part and you find yourself standing in a treasure room.

Yes, a treasure room.

Boxes of gold coins line the walls and more coins cover the floors. You cannot step anywhere without hearing the slush of metal coins under your feet.

Lined along the walls are weapons of ancient beauty. And even from here, you can feel their power.

There is enough wealth in here to make each of you rich beyond your wildest dreams. But on the other side of the chamber there sits a door. A door bound by the same black iron chains you've seen before.

Above the door reads an inscription: Need/Greed.

## Action

Here, the Courage is trapped in a room with everything they want and nothing they need. There is no food in here. No water. There's also no way out. They are surrounded by gold, silver, platinum and magic, but none of it will keep them alive.

To double the problem, all their food and water is gone.

The only way to get out of this room is using the magic weapons on the walls. Using the weapons breaks the chains, opening the door, and putting powerful artifacts in their hands.

## Follow Up

If they keep the weapons, the Courage goes to the Room of Mists.

If they put the weapons back, the Courage moves on to Scene 6.

## Scene 6: The Sacrifice

The last room is the Chamber of Sacrifice...someone has to give up their life so the door will open.

## Set Up

- A small, stone room with a sword pointing upward.
- Someone must fall on the sword to move forward.
- The one who falls moves on to the room with the Dragon's Tear.

## Run Down

The mists part and you enter a small, stone room. There is no other door. As you step through, the one behind you vanishes.

In the center of the room is a sword. Its razor blade gleams in the dim light. You see words carved on the blade.

“One must fall to continue.”

There is nothing else.

## Action

Someone must fall on the blade. When they do, they will be transported to the final chamber. Until then, the Courage remains in the room.

It's as simple as that.

His body vanishes and the others remain behind while he enters the Chamber of the Dragon's Tear.

Follow Up

The hero who chooses to fall moves to Scene 8.

## Scene 8: The Dragon's Tear

### Set Up

The hero who chose to fall on the sword in Scene 7 finds himself in the Chamber of the Dragon's Tear.

### Run Down

There is devastating pain as you feel your blood pumping out the open wound in your chest. You close your eyes.

When you open them again, your pain and your wound are gone. You look up and see above you a small, glowing gemstone floating in the air.

#### The Dragon's Tear.

“Welcome,” a voice says. “You have earned the right. But before you progress, you must know, there is always a price for what you ask. Some have heeded this warning. Others have not.”

A vision appears before you: a man in ancient armor standing before a larger crystal. He bows his head and speaks, "I wish all slaves were free."

A flash of light. The gemstone responds. "Your wish is granted."

Then, another flash of light. You see a beaten and bloodied ork holding a broken sword. He lifts it above his head and thrusts it into a beast of pure darkness. The darkness shatters like glass and you see a thing that looks part serpent and part man dying on the edge of the broken sword.

"Free!" the ork screams. "My life for my people's freedom!"

Another flash of light. You see an uvandir digging in near pitch darkness. You see haffuns looking behind them, their eyes filled with fear. A gnome runs around the corner. "They are nearly here!" he whispers. The uvandir hits the wall again with his pick. Again and again. Their torch goes out. The uvandir screams, "Light! More light!" and with one more blow with his tool, the wall cracks and sunlight breaks through.

You stand back in the chamber. The gemstone speaks.

"All actions have consequences," it says. "Now, speak. And let the world feel your words."

## Action

Only one shard of the Dragon's Tear remains. A single wish.

What happens from now is something nobody can anticipate. Your player is about to irrevocably change the world. He can use this last wish as selflessly or selfishly as he wants. The example he has just seen—a single wish causing both the liberation of the orks and the underfolk's successful flight from the Enemy—should give him enough understanding of how profound his wish can be.

Obviously, he could do something like wish the lich and vampire were dead. He could also wish that they were mortal again. They can't see him, they can't hear him and they can't stop him. It's up to him.

## Follow Up

How do you follow up a wish? Well, you can't. Whatever your player decides, that's what happens. Hopefully, the player is just as worthy as the character.

We've got our fingers crossed for you.

# NPC List

## Scoundrels (3)

XP 600 each

Human rogue 3

CN Medium humanoid (human)

**Init** +3; **Senses** Perception +6

### DEFENSE

**AC** 15, touch 13, flat-footed 12 (+2 armor, +3 Dex)

**hp** 15 (3d8+3)

**Fort** +2, **Ref** +6, **Will** +2

**Defensive Abilities** evasion, trap sense +1

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** shortsword +6 (1d6+1/19-20)

**Ranged** dagger +5 (1d4+1/19-20)

**Special Attacks** sneak attack +2d6

**Before Combat** Having worked the back alleys together for some time the gang attempt to set up an ambush from hiding, preferring to attack from multiple directions at once. If discovered, they attack immediately.

**Morale** The villains fight until the battle goes against them. Depending on your players, that could be the first round. When

that happens, they try throwing smoke bombs and rushing the door to escape.

### STATISTICS

Str 12, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 9

**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 16

**Feats** Stealthy, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (Shortsword)

**Skills** Acrobatics +9, Appraise +8, Bluff +5, Climb +9, Disable Device +11, Disguise +5, Escape Artist +11, Knowledge (local) +8, Perception +6 (+7 to find traps), Sleight of Hand +9, Stealth +11, Swim +7

**Languages** Common, Elven, Halfling

**SQ** rogue talent (Finesse Rogue), trapfinding +1, rally, hometown advantage (Ajun)

**Gear** leather armor, shortsword, 2 daggers, smoke bomb

## Androit Benjong

XP 1,600

Human fighter 3/rogue 3

LE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +7; Senses Perception +8

### DEFENSE

AC 21, touch 14, flat-footed 17 (+7 armor, +3 Dex, +1 dodge)

hp 34 (3d10 + 3d8 + 6)

Fort +5, Ref +7, Will +2

**Defensive Abilities** evasion, trap sense +1, bravery +1

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 20 ft.

**Melee** +1 shortsword +9 (1d6+2/19-20)

**Ranged** dagger +8 (1d4+2/19-20)

**Special Attacks** sneak attack +2d6

**Before Combat** Androit spends one round coating his blade with scorpion venom poison, risking the 5% chance of poisoning himself. He then positions himself to engage the most physically intimidating PC and attempts to backstab the PCs from the shadows.

**Morale** Androit fights until reduced to 12 hit point or fewer. Similar to his men, he will attempt to escape under cover of smoke once the battle is no longer in his favor. He is more than willing to sacrifice the lives of his men to make good his escape.

### STATISTICS

Str 14, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 13

**Base Atk** +5; CMB +7; CMD 20

**Feats** Combat Expertise, Dodge, Improved Feint, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (shortsword)

**Skills** Acrobatics +7, Bluff +10, Climb +7, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (local) +6, Perception +8 (+9 to find traps), Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +8

**Languages** Common, Elven, Halfling

**SQ** rogue talent (Finesse Rogue), trapfinding +1, armor training 1, rally, hometown advantage (Ajun)

**Gear** +1 chainmail, +1 shortsword, 2 daggers, vial of large scorpion venom, smoke bomb

## Bakery Door Scythe Trap

CR 4

**Type** mechanical; **Perception** DC 20; **Disable Device** 20

Effects

**Trigger** location; **Reset** manual

**Effect** Atk +20 melee (2d4+6/x4)

## City Watchman

XP 1,200

Human warrior 5

LG Medium humanoid (human)

**Init** +2; **Senses** Perception +5

### DEFENSE

**AC** 18, touch 12, flat-footed 16 (+6 armor, +2 Dex)

**hp** 35 (5d10+10)

**Fort** +6, **Ref** +3, **Will** +2

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 20 ft.

**Melee** halberd +9 (1d10+3/x3) or  
sap +7(1d6+2 nonlethal)

**Ranged** heavy crossbow +7 (1d10/19-20)

**Special Attacks** tanglefoot bag +7 (DC 15 Reflex save)

**Before Combat** The city guard attempt to diffuse a tense situation (be it through calm words or a show of force) before violence can erupt. When combat begins they blow whistles to summon additional members of the watch.

**Morale** Watchmen reduced to 15 hp or lower retreat to the nearest guard post to summon additional reinforcements. In defense of the citizenry or a clear threat to the entire city, they fight to the bitter end.

### STATISTICS

Str 15, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 8

**Base Atk** +5; CMB +7; CMD 19

**Feats** Cleave, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (halberd)

**Skills** Intimidate +5, Perception +5, Profession (soldier) +6, Sense Motive +7

**Languages** Common

**SQ** rally, hometown advantage (Ajun)

**Combat Gear** potion of cure light wounds, tanglefoot bag **Other Gear** breastplate, masterwork halberd, heavy crossbow with 10 bolts, sap, manacles

## King Rat's thugs

XP 400

Roddun rogue 2

N Medium humanoid (roddun)

**Init** +1; **Senses** Blindsight 60 ft., Perception +5

### DEFENSE

**AC** 12, touch 11, flat-footed

11 (+1 armor, +1 Dex)

**hp** 11 (2d8+2)

**Fort** +1, **Ref** +4, **Will** +1

**Defensive Abilities** Fast healing 1; **Immune** nonmagical disease

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

**Melee** bite +x(2d4+3) and 2 claws +v (1d6+3)

**Ranged** dart +2 (1d4, +1 to hit and damage within 30 ft.)

**Special** Attacks sneak attack +1d6

**Before Combat** These roddun focused on one task: Finding what King Rat wants. They take no special actions before combat.

**Morale** From the start, the roddun's goal is to fight their way past the PCs and flee the scene. Any damage taken only spurs on their departure even moreso.

### STATISTICS

Str 16, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 10

**Base Atk** +1; CMB +3; CMD 14

**Feats** Tooth & Nail Gemstone, Point Blank shot

**Skills** Acrobatics +6, Climb +7, Intimidate +4, Perception +5, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +6

**Languages** Common, Roddun

**SQ** Mischief (8 points), Plagueborn, trap sense +1, rogue talent (combat trick)

**Gear** cloth armor, burglar's tools, 5 darts

## Concealed Drawer Needle Trap

CR 6

**Type** mechanical; **Perception** DC 20; **Disable Device** 20

Effects

**Trigger** location; **Reset** manual

**Effect** Atk +15 melee (1d6 plus wyvern poison/x3)



## **Bastards [4]**

XP 1,200

Human fighter 2/rogue 3

NE Medium humanoid

**Init** +3; **Senses** Perception +6

### **DEFENSE**

**AC** 21, touch 14, flat-footed 17 (+4 armor, +3 Dex, +1 dodge, +3 shield)

**hp** 40 (2d10+3d8+12)

**Fort** +5, **Ref** +6, **Will** +2 (+3 vs. fear)

**Defensive Abilities** bravery +1, evasion, trap sense +1

### **OFFENSE**

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** mwk rapier +7 (1d6+3/18–20), light shield +5 (1d4+1)

**Ranged** mwk light crossbow +8 (1d8/19–20)

**Special Attacks** sneak attack +2d6

### **TACTICS**

**Before Combat** If alerted to the PC's presence they take a moment to down their potions of invisibility.

### **STATISTICS**

Str 16, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 10

Base Atk +4; CMB +7; CMD 21

**Feats** Dodge, Improved Shield Bash, Mobility, Shield Focus, Two-Weapon Fighting, Toughness, Weapon Focus (rapier)

**Skills** Acrobatics +11, Bluff +6, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (local) +5, Perception +8, Sleight of Hand +11, Stealth +11

**Languages** Common

**SQ** rogue talent (weapon Training), trapfinding +1, rally, hometown advantage (Jinix)

**Combat Gear** potion of cure moderate wounds, potion of invisibility; **Other Gear** +1 studded leather, +1 light steel shield, masterwork light crossbow with 20 bolts, masterwork rapier, sunrods (2), thieves' tools

## **Senator Vikkers**

Male old human aristocrat 8

LG Medium humanoid (human)

**hp** 44 (8d8 +8)

**Fort** +3, **Ref** +1, **Will** +10

**Skills** Bluff +11, Diplomacy +13, Knowledge (Local) +13, Knowledge (Nobility) +13, Perception +10, Sense Motive +14

## Alessio, Bastard leader

XP 1,600

Human fighter (Free Hand Fighter) 3/sor 3

NE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +1; Senses Perception +

### DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 13, flat-footed 15 (+5 armor, +1 Dex, +2 dodge)

hp 37 (3d10+3d6+12)

Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +5

**Defensive Abilities** deceptive strike +1

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** +9 bastard sword (1d10+4/19-20)

**Special Attacks** touch of destiny 5/day

**Sorcerer Spells Known** (CL 3rd, concentration +5, spell failure chance 10%)

**1st (6)** – charm person (DC 13), magic missile, enlarge person

**Bloodline** destined

**Before Combat** Alessio casts enlarge person and bull's strength on himself, then moves to enlarging as many of his underlings as time allows before combat begins, though he keeps at least 2 spells in reserve for use during combat.

**Morale** Viewing this as a make-or-break test of his capabilities Alessio fights until the bitter end.

### STATISTICS

Str 17, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 14

**Base Atk** +4; CMB +7; CMD 18

**Feats** Arcane Armor Training, Blind Fight, Dodge, Eschew Materials, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bastard sword), Mobility, Weapon Focus (bastard sword)

**Skills** Bluff +8, Intimidate +8, Profession (Smuggler) +7, Sleight of Hand +7, Spellcraft +7, Survival +7

**Languages** Common

**SQ** rally, hometown advantage (Jinix)

**Combat Gear** potion of cure moderate wounds, scroll of bull's strength; **Gear** +1 chain shirt, +1 bastard sword

## Elite City Watch

XP 4,800

Human fighter 9

LG Medium humanoid (human)

**Init** +5; **Senses** Perception +6

### DEFENSE

**AC** 25, touch 12, flat-footed 23  
(+13 armor, +1 Dex, +1 dodge)

**hp** 66 (9d10+18)

**Fort** +8, **Ref** +4, **Will** +5

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 20 ft.

**Melee** longsword +15 (1d8+6/17-20)

**Ranged** heavy crossbow +11 (1d8)

**Before Combat** The elite of the city watch know that they are not called upon for minor infractions against the laws of Ajun. A single order to surrender is issued by the patrol head, with immediate and forceful reprisal following a refusal to stand down. The guardsmen are not above striking first, if the situation appears to be out of hand.

**Morale** Disciplined and practiced, the elite of the city watch calmly assess any combat situation. They retreat when appropriate but do not hesitate to sacrifice their lives for the greater good.

### STATISTICS

Str 16, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 10

**Base Atk** +9; **CMB** +12; **CMD** 23

**Feats** Coordinated Defense, Disruptive, Dodge, Greater Weapon Focus (longsword), Improved Critical (longsword), Improved

Initiative, Outflank, Shield Focus, Skill Focus (Sense Motive), Step Up, Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (longsword)

**Skills** Intimidate +8, Perception +6, Profession (soldier) +9, Ride +7, Sense Motive +7

**Languages** Common

**SQ** rally, hometown advantage (Ajun)

**Gear** masterwork full plate, +1 heavy steel shield, +1 longsword, masterwork heavy crossbow with 10 bolts

## Ashivaeyr Mezzet

+4 CR increase

XP 38,400

Estvere vampire barbarian 11

CE Medium undead (augmented humanoid)

**Init** +3; **Senses** Darkvision

60 ft., Perception +17

### DEFENSE

**AC** 24, touch 13, flat-footed 21 (+5 armor, +3 Dex, +6 natural)

**hp** 90 (11d12+22)

**Fort** +9, **Ref** +6, **Will** +4

**Defensive Abilities** Trap sense +3, Damage Immunity (special), Uncanny Dodge, Improved Uncanny Dodge

**Weaknesses** Estvere weaknesses

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 40 ft.; climb 40 ft.

**Melee** greatsword +21/+16/+11 (2d6+1d6 cold+12)

**Special Attacks** Ability Drain, Dominate, Greater Rage (main attack becomes greatsword +24/+19/+14 (2d6+1d6 cold+17 and Ashivaeyr gains 33 additional hit points) 26 rounds/day

**Rage Powers** No Escape, Rolling Dodge, Strength Surge, Surprise Accuracy, Unexpected Strike

**Before Combat** Ashivaeyr relishes the possibility of fighting a foe strong enough to end her undead existence. She

does not hesitate to enter a rage and attack the strongest looking foe nearby.

**Morale** Ashivaeyr fights to her last breathe, refusing to retreat. If however, the GM feels that the love motivating her actions is true, she may retreat as necessary to heal herself, that she be able to assist Reginald in his quest.

### STATISTICS

Str 26, Dex 16, Con -, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 14

**Base Atk** +11; CMB +19; CMD 32

**Feats** Power Attack, Cleave, Dodge, Mobility, Step Up, Weapon Focus (greatsword)

**Skills** Acrobatics +19, Intimidate +18, Knowledge (nature) +17, Perception +17, Survival +17

**SQ** Fast movement

**Languages** Common, Elvish, Orc

**Gear** belt of giant strength +4, +1 frost greatsword, +1 hide armor

Note: Adventure did NOT specify how much to increase natural armor by. I'm suggesting +6. Should 'ability drain' be more of a standardized ability?

## Reginald Crane

CR 14

XP 38,400

Human necromancer 13

LE Medium undead (augmented humanoid)

**Init** +2; **Senses** Darkvision 60 ft., life sight, Perception +16

Aura feat (60-ft. radius, DC 19)

### DEFENSE

**AC** 24, touch 15, flat-footed 22 (+4 armor, +2 Dex, +3 deflection, +5 natural armor)

**hp** 103 (13d6+39 +15 false life)

**Fort** +4, **Ref** +6, **Will** +10

**Defensive Abilities** channel resistance +4; **DR** 15/bludgeoning and magic;

**Immune** cold, electricity, undead traits

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** touch +6 (1d8+6 plus paralyzing touch)

**Special Attacks** Grave touch 8/day, paralyzing touch (DC 19), power over undead (10/day, DC 19)

**Spells Prepared** (CL 13th, concentration +20)

**7th** – finger of death (DC 24) (2)

**6th** – circle of death (DC 23), create undead, summon monster VI

**5th**– cloudkill (DC 22), summon monster V, waves of fatigue, wall of force

**4th**– bestow curse (DC 21), dimension door, enervation, summon monster IV

**3rd**– dispel magic (2), fireball (DC 20), summon monster III (3)

**2nd**– darkness, false life (already cast), scorching ray (2), see invisibility, summon monster II

**1st**– cause fear (2), mage armor (already cast), magic missile (4), summon monster I

**0**– bleed (DC 17), detect magic, ray of frost, read magic

Prohibited Schools illusion, transmutation

**Before Combat** Reginald continually keeps 2d6 worth of minor undead with him when out and about. Should he have time to prepare before combat he will turn himself invisible, become airborne, and begin casting as many summon monster spells as possible after making sure that mage armor is active. Alternatively, he may simply decide to begin making his skeletal minions invisible prior to the start of battle.

**Morale** Already seeking his own end, the ancient lich fights with reckless abandon and little heed for his own existence. He may, at the GM's discretion, retreat from a fight only to ensure that his lover succeeds in her quest for peace.

### STATISTICS

Str 10, Dex 14, Con -, Int 24, Wis 14, Cha 16

**Base Atk** +6; CMB +6; CMD 18

**Feats** Command Undead, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (Conjuration), Augment Summoning, Spell Focus (Necromancy), Skeleton Summoner, Superior Summoning, Greater Spell Focus (conjuration), Greater Spell Focus (Necromancy), Undead Master

**Skills** Fly +16, craft (alchemy) +16, Knowledge (Religion)+16 , Knowledge (arcana)+16 , Knowledge (The Planes) +16, Knowledge ( Dungeoneering) +16, Linguistics +10, Perception +16, Spellcraft +16

**Languages** Common, Elven, Draconic, Uvandar, Aklo

**Combat gear** scroll of summon monster VII, staff of necromancy (24 charges) **Gear** headband of vast intelligence +4, ring of protection +3, cloak of resistance +4, winged boots, Wand of Greater Invisibility

## Sam Yffur

XP 9,600

Haffun butler 11

NG Small humanoid (haffun)

**Init** +8; **Senses** Perception +

### DEFENSE

**AC** 19, touch 16, flat-footed 14 (+3 armor, +4 Dex, +1 dodge, +1 size)

**hp** 55 (11d8+11)

**Fort** +8, **Ref** +11, **Will** +4

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 20 ft.

**Melee** walking stick +14/+9 (1d4+2)

**Special Attacks** Sneak attack +6d6, Mark

**Marks Known** Aid, Blast, Grin, Known, Seal

**Before Combat** If combat is looking likely, Sam will do his best to drop out of site using stealth, while positioning himself for a sneak attack from hiding.

**Morale** Sam is no fool and if reduced to 25% of his total hit points or fewer, he will retreat by the quickest means available.

### STATISTICS

Str 12, Dex 18, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 14

**Base Atk** +8; CMB +8; CMD 22

**Feats** Combat Expertise, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse

**Skills** Acrobatics +15, Appraise +12, Diplomacy +13, Disable Device +15, Knowledge (local) +12, Knowledge (nobility) +12, Perception +17, Sleight of Hand +18, Stealth +27, Spellcraft +7

**Languages** Common

**SQ** The Silent Servant, The Whisper Way, Soundless

**Gear** +1 club (walking stick), +2 cloth armor

# Lady Cassandra's Courage Contract

Be it known that all signed parties below have agreed with full will and faculty and without undo or unjust provocation.

Let it be known that this document outlines the duties and responsibilities of Lady Cassandra Chance's courage. Those who have taken on such duties and responsibilities shall, at all times, remain aware that they represent the Lady, and thus, are extensions of her reputation. She has given you these powers so you may mete justice, protect the innocent and keep her people safe from unjust harm.

## Powers

Those who ride under the banner of Lady Chance shall have the following rights:

### The Right to Bear Arms

Those who ride under the banner of Lady Chance have the Right to carry weapons and wear armor they see fit to protect and aid the people under Lady Chance's charge.

### The Right of Inquisition

Those who ride under the banner of Lady Chance have the Right to detain and question those under Lady Chance's charge who may have information regarding past, present or future criminal matters. Those who do not fall under Lady Chance's charge are not covered by this Right.

### The Right to Espionage

Those who ride under the banner of Lady Chance have the Right to carry out acts of Espionage if such actions will reveal dangers to the Lady or those under her charge.

### The Right to Commandeer

Those who ride under the banner of Lady Chance have the Right to Commandeer any item owned by a citizen under the Lady's charge if it shall assist them in preventing a crime or capturing one who has broken the law.

### The Writ of Investigation

While the courage may only operate under the jurisdiction of the Lady's lands, she may offer a Writ of Investigation if need be. A Writ of Investigation is a signed document extending the Lady's powers to her courage while they travel in foreign territories. The courage is advised that not all nobles may recognize or honor her Writ,

## Restrictions

### Sentencing

The courage does not have the Right to sentence those under the Lady's charge. Only the Lady herself holds that Right.

Signed:



## The Estvere Vampire

Vampires are undead creatures of terrible power. Fortunately, they are also very rare. The creation of a vampire is a ritual unknown to most humans and only those of the upmost willpower can even survive it. But if they do, they become a nearly unstoppable force of evil.

### Lore Check

Human scholars are still trying to uncover the origins of the vampire, but a few facts are known. If a scholar makes a Knowledge (undead) check, read the following results based on the roll.

#### DC 15

Vampires are created by an ancient ritual.

Vampires do not make other vampires.

Vampires “drink” the life essence of living creatures. They do this by drinking blood.

Vampires do not walk during the daylight hours.

#### DC 20

The ritual for creating a vampire requires a man or woman to be buried alive. After a number of days, the vampire must dig itself free from the grave. If they succeed, they become a vampire.

Vampires drink the lives of others. A vampire can walk down a busy City street, gently touching all who pass her by, draining small portions of life. Those who come into contact with her often become dizzy, tired or even ill.

The act of spilling blood is the most effective way to drain another’s life essence.

A vampire’s powers are greatly reduced during the day, but she may move about as she pleases. She just prefers darkness.

You must destroy a vampire’s grave with divine magic to destroy the vampire.

#### DC 25

(All the information from DC 20)

The ritual for creating vampires comes from the same source as dark elves. Humans make a bargain with a “dark power,” learning the ritual.

Vampires are immortal. They do not age as long as they feed. If they do not feed, they begin to take on physical traits of their actual age.

#### DC 30

(All the information from DC 20 and 25)

The only true way to destroy a vampire is to use consecrate (2nd level cleric spell) on a vampire’s grave. Once the spell has been cast, the vampire is no longer protected by the dark magic and may be killed as if she were a normal human.

### Creating a Vampire

Only a human may become a vampire.

“Vampire” is a template.

The human makes a “deal” with the same dark powers that create dark elves, promising eternal life. The human must dig her own grave, then lay down in the grave inside a specially prepared coffin made from the wood of a Great Tree. The Darkness then buries the human in the grave.

If the human survives for three days and nights inside the coffin, she has only one task remaining: digging herself out. If she is successful, she becomes a vampire. She will forever appear as she did before becoming a vampire, but she now carries an aura of evil beauty. Also, her fingers carry the scars of digging herself out. These injuries can never be healed. Often, in pennybooks, adventurers identify a vampire by her twisted, scarred fingers.

**AL:** Chaotic evil

**Type:** The creature's type changes to undead (augmented). Do not recalculate class Hit Dice, BAB, or saves.

**Senses:** A vampire gains darkvision 60 ft.

**Armor Class:** Natural armor improves by

**Hit Dice:** Change all racial Hit Dice to d8s. Class Hit Dice are unaffected. As undead, vampires use their Charisma modifier to determine bonus hit points (instead of Constitution).

### **Defensive Abilities**

Vampires are immune to any magical and mundane damage. They simply cannot be harmed until the dark magic cast upon their grave has been unmade. Vampires register no wounds or injuries. A vampire can ignore any successful attack against it. If the attack does equal to or more damage than the vampire's Constitution, the vampire is *stunned* for one round.

### **Weaknesses**

#### **Grave**

A vampire's grave is its primary weakness. If a philosopher (cleric) or oracle casts the consecrate spell on a vampire's grave, it loses all protection listed under defensive abilities, above. She may be killed as a normal human.

#### **Symbols**

A vampire may be affected by strongly presented symbols of the Reign of Men. Symbols such as coins, a Senator's sash, the emblem of the roadmen, a prestigious coat of arms... a symbol that anyone in the Reign could recognize. A recoiling vampire must stay at least 5 feet away from the symbol and cannot touch, use powers, cast spells or make melee attacks

against that creature. Holding a vampire at bay takes a standard action. After 1 round, a vampire may make a Will Save against the holder of the symbol (DC= 10+half the wielder's level+Wisdom bonus) to overcome its power. If the vampire is successful, it is no longer affected by that symbol and may act normally.

#### **Life**

A vampire needs to drain life to survive. Vampires drain ability scores. A vampire can drain one point of ability per round as a standard action. This is a touch attack. A vampire may choose which ability to drain. A vampire can drain a number of points equal to her current level. Each day, she loses one point. If she ever reaches zero points, she takes on the condition fatigued. After two days, she gains exhausted. After three days, she becomes petrified. She remains petrified until another character puts a single drop of blood on the petrified vampire.

The easiest way for a vampire to drain life is by spilling blood. If a vampire causes a coup de grace on a target, she may drain 1d6+2 ability points per round.

If a vampire walks in daylight (not during daylight hours, but in direct daylight), it gains a -4 penalty to all rolls.

#### **Shadow**

A vampire's shadow is like a living thing unto itself. It does not move as its owner moves, but reveals the vampire's true intentions. If the vampire intends to kill you, you can see its shadow moving to strangle you. A vampire's shadow only appears when it is outside complete darkness. Observing a vampire's shadow requires a Perception check (DC 15). If successful, the vampire can make no bluff rolls against you.

### ***Special Abilities***

In addition to draining life (see Life, above), vampires have the following special abilities.

#### ***Dominate (Su)***

A vampire can crush a humanoid opponent's will as a standard action. Anyone the vampire targets must succeed on a Will save or fall instantly under the vampire's influence, as though by a dominate person spell (caster level 12th). The ability has a range of 30 feet. At the GM's discretion, some vampires might be able to affect different creature types with this power.

#### ***Shadow Step (Su)***

A vampire can use the shadow step spell as a standard action.

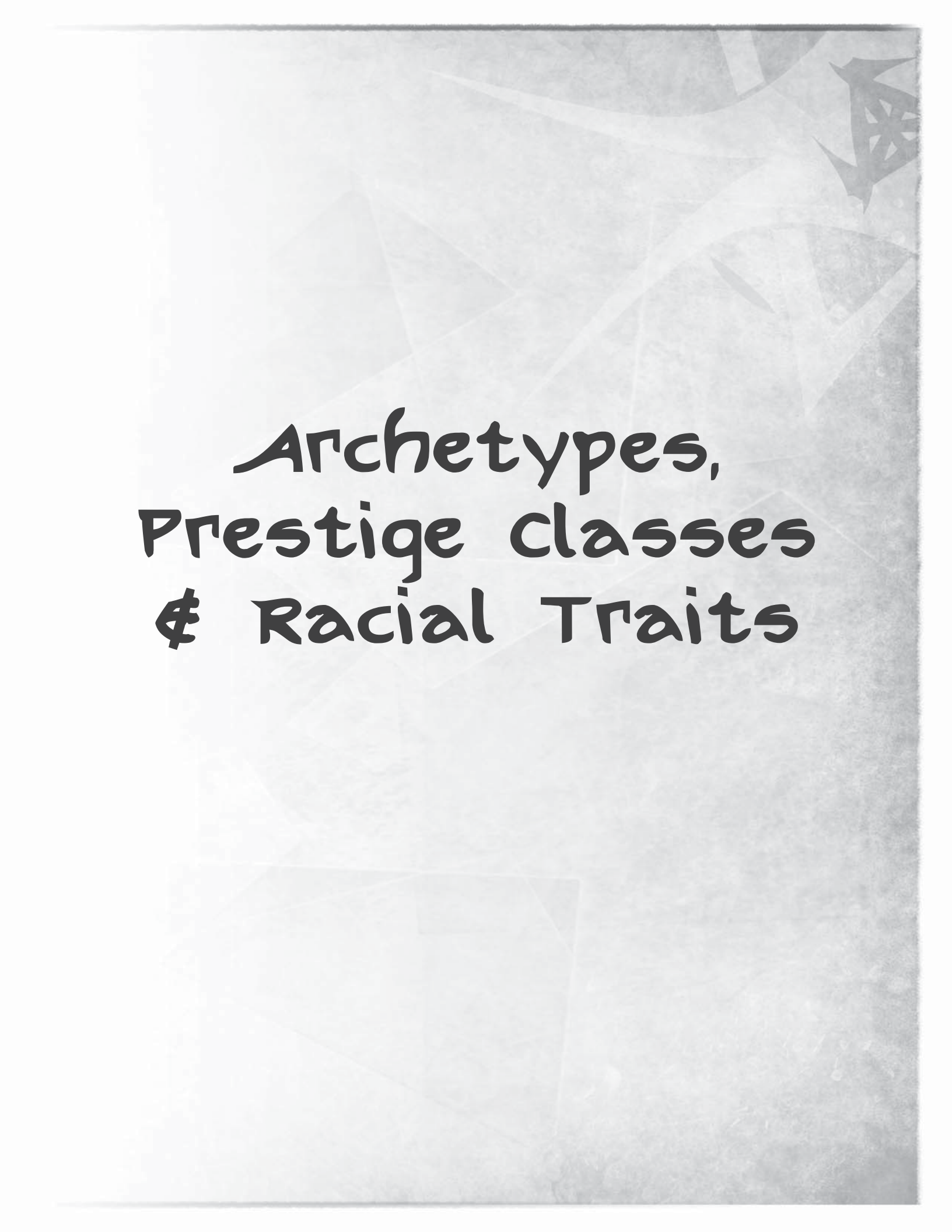
#### ***Shadow Form (Su)***

The vampire gains the ability shadow form as per the fetchling ability. The vampire's body becomes shadowy and more indistinct. This shadow form grants the vampire constant concealment (20% miss chance), and its melee attacks affect incorporeal creatures as if it had the ghost touch weapon property. The vampire's melee attacks deal only half damage to corporeal creatures.

#### ***Spider Climb (Ex)***

A vampire can climb sheer surfaces as though under the effects of a spider climb spell.





**Archetypes,  
Prestige Classes  
& Racial Traits**

# Humans



## **Bard Archetype: Senator**

**Requirements:** Human

### **Class Features**

The following are class features of the senator.

**Jurisdiction:** A senator chooses one of the ten cities to represent. Whenever he meets a human who lives in that city for the first time, their starting attitude is one level better than usual. This does not change the starting attitude of non-human races or animals.

This ability replaces the *well-versed* class feature.

**Rally Feat:** At 5th level, a senator gains a bonus rally feat even if he does not qualify for it. He gains one additional rally feat for every six levels he possesses beyond 5th, to a maximum of three at 17th level.

This ability replaces the *lore master* class feature.

**Contacts:** At 10th level, the senator can declare he knows someone within 10 miles. Such as

knowing a blacksmith, captain of the city watch or local urchin. The contact automatically has a friendly attitude toward the senator and his allies. He can do this once per day.

This ability replaces the *jack of all trades* class feature.

## **Ranger Archetype: Roadman**

For the common people, the greatest hero of the Reign is the roadman. He carries personal letters, parcels and official documents across the wilderness, riding through wind and rain, trudging through the snow and sleet, braving dangers known and unknown. So many pennybooks have been written about roadmen, often romanticised and seldom accurate. For if the people knew the truth, they probably would not believe it.

Roadmen not only carry parcels and packages, but also escort caravans moving between one City and another. Journey in

the Known World is dangerous, but with a roadman, at least you have a chance.

**Requirements:** Human

## Class Features

The following are class features of the roadman.

**Uffred (Ex):** The roadman forms a close bond with an uffred who serves as him mount. This uffred is a loyal companion that accompanies the roadman on his adventures as appropriate for its kind. A roadman's uffred shares his favored enemy and favored terrain bonuses.

This ability functions like the druid animal companion ability (which is part of the Nature Bond class feature). Uffred use the heavy horse stats but have an Intelligence of 8; they understand human speech but cannot speak in return.

This ability replaces the *hunter's bond* class feature.

**Roadman's Creed (Ex):** At 4th level, a roadman picks a creed to uphold. As a swift action, he may activate his creed and gain the associated bonus for 2 rounds. When the roadman gains a new level, he can choose to change his creed. He can do this a number of times equal to 3 + his Wisdom modifier.

*Creed of Stability:* The roadman adds his level to all acrobatics, fly and ride checks.

*Creed of Protection:* The roadman adds his Wisdom modifier to his AC. All allies within 30 ft also gain this benefit.

*Creed of Sincerity:* The roadman adds his level to diplomacy and intimidation check.

*Creed of Freedom:* The roadman can move normally, even under the influence of

magic that usually impedes movement, such as paralysis, *solid fog*, *slow*, and *web*

*Creed of True Direction:* The roadman adds his level to perception and survival checks.

*Charlotte's Creed:* The roadman adds his level to his Will Saves against enchantment spells and effects.

This ability replaces the *wild empathy* class feature.

**Neither Snow Nor Rain:** At 12th level, The roadman suffers no harm from being in a hot or cold environment. He can exist comfortably in conditions between -50 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit (-45 and 60 degrees Celsius) without having to make Fortitude saves. The roadman's equipment is likewise protected.

This ability replaces the *camouflage* class feature.

**Ride Until Dawn:** At 17th level, a roadman and his steed can ride full speed and non-stop for a number of days equal to his Wisdom modifier without need for rest or sleep, food or water. The roadman may carry one more rider, but he can only ride for half of his usual days (rounded down, minimum 1).

This ability replaces the *hide in plain sight* class feature.

## Sorcerer Archetype: The Arcane Order of the Shepherd

In the shadows of Ashcolmb, there are those who hold many secrets. One of those secrets is an order of sorcerers who have made a solemn oath to use their powers to protect the people of the City rather than exploit them. Of course, in Ashcolmb, this is a dangerous choice. Like lone knights in a dangerous land, these sorcerers use their abilities to undermine the sorcerous regime of Ashcolmb, protecting its citizenry

from exploitation. The Arcane Order of the Shepherd is a small but growing secret society that hopes its actions will bring a bit of light to the darkness spilling across Ashcolmb.

Operating under masks and pseudonyms, speaking in code and secret gestures, the Order tries to maintain the anonymity of its members... but does not always succeed. Learning from the failures of the past, when a member's identity is exposed, they flee the City, but do not forget their oath. They still use their powers to protect the people of the Reign, hoping one day to return to their home to fight for the people they left behind.

**Requirements:** Human

### Class Features

The following are class features of the arcane order of the shepherd.

**Improved Counterspell:** At 1st level, the arcane order of the shepherd gains improved counterspell as a bonus feat.

This ability replaces the arcane order of the shepherd's eschew materials bonus feat.

**Block Magic:** At 7th level, the arcane order of the shepherd adds *dispel magic* to his list of spells known as a 3rd-level spell. At 13th level, he adds *antimagic field* to his list of spells known as a 6th-level spell.

This ability replaces the arcane order of the shepherd's bloodline spells gained at 7th level and 13th level respectively.

**Righteous Reflect:** At 15th level, the arcane order of the shepherd can reflect spells that target himself or his allies back at the caster. When himself or an ally within 30ft is targeted by a spell, he can make a *counterspell* check following all of the normal rules of counterspell. If the arcane order of the shepherd is successful, the original caster of the spell is affected by the spell instead. The sorcerer cannot use this on area spells; it must be a single target spell. He can use this ability once per day.

This ability replaces the arcane order of the shepherd's 15th level bloodline power.





# Haffuns



## Barbarian Archetype: Wilpa

When human mountain men first heard that haffuns were making their way into the wilderness, they scoffed at the idea. Equipped with domestic skills they quickly adapted to survival, the *wilpa* (wild ones) seemed eager to prove they deserved a place in the wilderness. Not only did they adapt, they thrived. They traded knowledge for knowledge with the humans and gnolls, and became the centers of community in the wild. Those who wished nothing more to be alone soon found themselves adopted by haffuns with the same desire, combining a respect for privacy with a need for family.

But more importantly, they become fierce protectors of their adopted families. They transformed that devotion into a rage that could be summoned in a blink of an eye. The *wilpa* can also focus that rage into a single, powerful strike. They call this, *alsha*. “For my family.” It has become a feat of such renown that even City dwellers tell tales of the haffun who struck down an ogre with a single blow.

**Requirements:** Haffun

## Class Features

The following are class features of the *wilpa*.

**Mountain Grip:** The *wilpa* may choose one weapon he has proficiency in and he

may use the medium sized version of that weapon at no penalty. He must use both hands to hold and swing the medium sized version of that weapon. Once he chooses a weapon, his choice cannot be changed.

This ability replace the *trap sense* class feature.

**Alsha:** At 6th level, the *wilpa* gains the *vital strike* feat as a bonus feat. In addition he gains the *improved vital strike* feat at 11th level and the *greater vital strike* feat at 16th level.

This ability replaces the *damage reduction* and *indomitable will* class feature.

## Wizard Archetype: House Mage

Haffun wizards are a rare sight in the Reign. Most haffuns turn to professions such as cook, gardener or butler. But a few have attended a Wizard’s Academy and turned the skills they learned to a more “domestic” approach.

In recent days, Alfa Tin, a graduate and instructor at the Vinnick Academy, has begun teaching a new school of magic specifically for haffun students. Those who graduate advertise themselves as “house mages,” seeking employment in households wealthy enough to afford their unique skills. House mages have also joined human courages, seeking adventure on the road.

**Requirements:** Haffun

## Class Features

The following are class features of the house mage.

**Household Pet:** A house mage gains a *household pet* as a familiar. A household pet must be a cat, small dog (uses fox stats), mouse (uses rat stats), parrot or rabbit (uses weasle stats). It also has the *curse of ghava* and *omnilingualism* like its master.

This ability modifies the *arcane bond* class feature.

**Domestic Spells:** The house mage gains a list of domestic spells that he has learned from his family. He can trade any spell he has already prepared that day for a casting of one of his domestic spells of an equivalent or lower level. The house mage also gains *mending* a bonus cantrip.

*unseen servant* (1st), *arcane lock* (2nd), *arcane sight* (3rd), *detect scrying* (4th), *fabricate* (5th), *animate objects* (6th), *cure moderate wounds*, *mass* (7th), *maze* (8th) and *refuge* (9th)

This ability replaces the *arcane school* class feature.

## Butler Alternate Class: Feltura (The Fallen Butler)

All haffuns know the secret of the *tatura*: the haffun butler. He is dedicated to protecting his family, no matter the cost to himself. All haffuns also know there are only twenty butlers. Once one retires (or is killed), another takes his place.

What many haffuns do not know is this: there were once twenty-seven butlers. But seven of those names have been erased and forgotten. The *feltura*. "The fallen butlers." Their names removed from the list, never to be spoken again.

This secret has remained with only a privileged few: the butlers themselves. Only they know the names of the *feltura*. And they never speak of them. Those who were tainted by a dark, whispering voice....

Feltura are butlers who have fallen to the corruption of the Darkness. They serve only the Darkness now, luring more haffuns to the whispers that guide them.

**Requirements:** Haffun

**Alignment:** Any Evil

**Hit Die:** d8

**Starting Wealth:** 4d6 x 10 gp (average 140 gp). In addition, each character begins play with one outfit worth 10 gp or less.

## Class Skills

The feltura class skills are Acrobatics (Dex), Appraise (Cha), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Dex), Escape Artist (Dex), Knowledge (arcane) (Int), Knowledge (engineering) (Int), Knowledge (history) (Int), Knowledge (local) (Int), Knowledge (nobility) (Int), Linguistics (Int), Perception (Int), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Stealth (Dex) and Spellcraft (Int).

**Skill Ranks per Level:** 6 + Int modifier

## Class Features

The following are class features of the feltura.

### Weapons and Armor Proficiency:

Feltura are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, plus the bola, repeating crossbow and net. He is proficient with light and medium armor but not with shields.

**Feltura's Name:** Feltura gain a name passed down from one of the 7 original feltura. It gives power to his marks and can inspire fear in his enemies. If he for any reason loses his name then he can no longer use any marks he knows or invoke the name.

**Table: Feltura Names**

Name	Special Ability
Assa Ving	+2 Attack Bonus with Dagger
Bin Talon	+2 Attack Bonus with Repeating Crossbow
Mara Enabe	+2 Attack Bonus with Short Sword
Tey Mordan	+2 Attack Bonus with Shortbow
Un Cabor	+4 Bluff vs. Good
Uva Fedor	+4 Craft (alchemy) to make poisons
Wil Shav	+4 to confirm criticals vs. Good

**Sneak Attack:** If a feltura can catch an opponent when he is unable to defend himself effectively from his attack, he can strike a vital spot for extra damage.

The feltura's attack deals extra damage (called "*precision damage*") anytime his target would be denied a Dexterity bonus to AC (whether the target actually has a Dexterity bonus or not), or when the rogue flanks his target. This extra damage is 1d6 at 1st level, and increases by 1d6 every two feltura levels thereafter. Should the feltura score a critical hit with a sneak attack, this extra damage is not multiplied. Ranged attacks can count as sneak attacks only if the target is within 30 feet.

With a weapon that deals nonlethal damage (like a sap, whip, or an unarmed strike), a feltura can make a sneak attack that deals nonlethal damage instead of lethal damage. He cannot use a weapon that deals lethal damage to deal nonlethal damage in a sneak attack, not even with the usual -4 penalty.

The feltura must be able to see the target well enough to pick out a vital spot and must be able to reach such a spot. A feltura cannot sneak attack while striking a creature with concealment.

**Deadly Ground (Ex):** A feltura selects a specific area, no bigger than 50 ft by 50 ft, and prepares it for an ambush. Any creatures who are surprised and then attacked by him in the surprise round take extra damage equal to his feltura level. Within this area, the feltura gains a +2 bonus on initiative checks and Acrobatics, Perception and Stealth skill checks. At 5th level and every five levels thereafter, the skill bonus and initiative bonus increases by +2.

These bonuses do not stack with the ranger's favored terrain bonus; use the higher bonus only.

**Marks:** At 2nd level, a feltura learns a one mark of his choice. He gains an additional mark at 4th level and for every 2 levels attained after 4th level, as noted on Table: feltura. A feltura cannot select an individual mark more than once.

Unless otherwise noted, using a mark is a standard action that does not provoke an attack. The save to resist a mark is equal to 10 + 1/2 the feltura level + the feltura's Wisdom modifier.

*Alarm (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a passage way, if anyone crosses the passage the feltura knows. If they have a home ground of a traveling campsite they can inscribe the mark around the camp in a circular manner. The circle counts as a passage way.

*Danger (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a person. The feltura always knows where that person is and if that person is in danger.

*Fool (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a person. The creature's alignment appears to be evil to any detect spells or effects.

*Grin (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on himself. When he uses Bluff or Diplomacy on a creature that is (or could be) sexually attracted to him, gain a +1 racial bonus.

*Harm (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a creature. If the creature makes a

successful attack roll then it takes the feltura's Wisdom modifier in damage.

*Hear (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a flat surface, he can hear through the mark as if it were his own ear

*Known (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a mundane item. If a creature is holding the item he can make Wisdom check DC 15 to learn simple fact about the creature such as a name. The creature can make a Will save to resist.

*Locate (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a mundane item. He always knows where the item is in relation to himself.

*Loud (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on small mundane item. If that item is thrown it makes a huge sound with a 30 foot radius from where it lands.

*Open (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a key. He can use it to open any mundane lock that the key would fit into. If the key would normally open the lock, it opens.

*Poison (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a plate or cup. If anyone eats or drinks from the item they gain the sickened condition.

*Quiet (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on an item or creature. That item or creature is makes no sound; armor and weapons do not count as part of a creature but their clothing and shoes do.

*See (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a flat surface, he can see through the mark as if it were his own eye.

*Smell (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a flat surface, he can smell through the mark as if he had the scent ability

**Silent Servant:** At 2nd level, as long as feltura does not move from his starting space on his

turn, his racial stealth bonus increases by +2. Additionally, a feltura may make a stealth check without need for cover or concealment as long as he do not move from his starting space, and he is adjacent to a wall, tree, or other solid background.

**Whisper Way:** At 6th level, a feltura may make small movements, one five-foot step per turn, while maintaining whisper way technique. He must continue to remain adjacent to at least one solid background, such as a wall or tree. He may pick up objects, pocket them, or even toss an object that he can hold in his hand, although he may not throw a weapon. A feltura has to make a sleight of hand check opposed by perception checks from any creature that can see the object and he can add his racial stealth bonus to the check. A successful check means that the action does not draw the attention of the observer and he remains hidden.

**Lesser Invoke Feltura Name:** At 8th level, as a standard action a feltura invokes his name and one enemy within 30 feet takes -4 penalty attack rolls, saves, ability checks, and skill checks for a number of rounds equal to his Wisdom modifier. The Will save to resist is equal to 10 + 1/2 the feltura level + the feltura's Wisdom modifier.

**Major Mark:** Starting at 10th level, and every two levels thereafter, a feltura can choose one of the following major marks whenever he could select a new mark. If he wants he may choose a mark instead of major mark.

*Blast (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a flat surface. The mark explodes in 1d6 rounds or if a living creature makes contact with it. The radius is 10 feet in every direction and it deals 1d6 damage per every 3 feltura levels. Any creature in the radius makes a Reflex save for half damage.

*Coin (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a coin. If the coin leaves his possession

it will find its way back to him the next day. Only haffuns can see this mark.

*Effective (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a tool. The tool can be used to complete any type of craft, profession or skill check without penalty for the wrong tools. On a successful check, the tool breaks.

*Hidden (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a light simple weapon. When the item is hidden on a creature it cannot be found.

*Love (Su):* Needs to have Grin before a feltura can take this. The feltura inscribes a mark on a creature. The creature is in love with the feltura; they have to make a will save to do anything harmful to the feltura.

*Precision (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on the palm of a creature. The next time that creature makes a successful attack using a weapon in the inscribed hand; it automatically threatens a critical hit.

*Protect (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on armor. The next time a critical hit is threaten on the creature wearing the armor, the attack completely misses instead.

*Soft (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a pair of boots. The next time the creature wearing the boots takes fall damage, the damage is 0.

*Swift (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a weapon. Any creature holding that weapon can make a coup de grace as a swift action.

*Unseen (Su):* The feltura inscribes four marks on the floor in a square shape. Every living creature within the marks is treated as invisible to every creature outside of the marks. This mark lasts a number of rounds equal to the half the feltura's level (minimum 1, round down).

**Soundless:** At 10th level, while using whisper way a feltura may also make disable device checks without revealing his location, and if he is already hidden, enemies may not make hearing based perception checks to hear him while using those skills.

**Invoke Feltura Name:** At 12th level, when the feltura invokes his name the target takes a -8 penalty instead of a -4 penalty..

**Invisible Passage:** At 14th level, as a full-round action a feltura may move up to 10 feet while retaining the benefits of the silent servant and the whisper way. He must remain within at least 10 feet of a solid background, such as a wall or tree, but he no longer need to be adjacent to such a surface to use silent servant, whisper way or soundless.

**Greater Invoke Feltura Name:** At 16th level, when the feltura invokes his name the target takes a -12 penalty instead of a -8 penalty.

**Unseen Attack:** At 17th level, a feltura can make an attack action with sneak attack without breaking whisper way. He can do this a number of times per day equal to his Dexterity modifier. He still has to make a sleight of hand check to make the attack without being noticed.

**Grand Mark:** Starting at 18th level, and every two levels thereafter, a feltura can choose one of the following grand marks whenever he could select a new mark. If he wants he may choose a mark or major mark instead of grand mark.

*Cloak (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a cloak. When he is wearing the cloak it acts as a perfect disguise. He looks, sounds, smells and feels like the person he is impersonating.

*Hole (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on the ground. A large hole appears from the mark and only the feltura can enter it. The

passage transports him to a place of his choosing within 5 miles of the mark.

*Pocket (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a pocket. The pocket acts as a handy haversack but only the feltura can remove items from it.

*Speak (Su):* The feltura inscribes a mark on a corpse. As long as the corpse still has a functional mouth it will answer three questions truthfully. The corpse cannot have been dead for more than 1 hour.

*Terror (Su):* The feltura inscribes a permanent mark on a creature. Every time that creature sees or hears the feltura, it becomes panicked. The mark can only be removed with a wish or similar magic, although slaying the feltura ends the effect.

**Grand Invoke Feltura Name:** At 20th level, as a swift action a feltura can invoke his name before delivering a killing blow. If the attack is successful then the creature cannot be resurrected, reincarnated or brought back to life by any means.

**Table: Feltura**

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+2	+0	feltura's name, sneak attack 1d6, deadly ground +2
2nd	+1	+3	+3	+0	Mark, the silent servant
3rd	+2	+3	+3	+1	Sneak attack 2d6
4th	+3	+4	+4	+1	Mark
5th	+4	+4	+4	+1	Sneak attack 3d6, deadly ground +4
6th	+4	+5	+5	+2	Mark, the whisper way
7th	+5	+5	+5	+2	Sneak attack 4d6
8th	+6/+1	+6	+6	+2	Mark, lesser feltura invoke name
9th	+7/+2	+6	+6	+3	Sneak attack 5d6
10th	+7/+2	+7	+7	+3	Deadly ground +6, mark, major mark, soundless
11th	+8/+3	+7	+7	+3	Sneak attack 6d6
12th	+9/+4	+8	+8	+4	Mark, invoke feltura name
13th	+10/+5	+8	+8	+4	Sneak attack 7d6
14th	+10/+5	+9	+9	+4	Mark, invisible passage
15th	+11/+6/+1	+9	+9	+5	Sneak attack 8d6, deadly ground +8
16th	+12/+7/+2	+10	+10	+5	Mark, greater invoke feltura name
17th	+13/+8/+3	+10	+10	+5	Sneak attack 9d6, unseen attack
18th	+13//+8/+3	+11	+11	+6	Mark, grand mark
19th	+14/+9/+4	+11	+11	+6	Sneak attack 10d6
20th	+15/+10/+5	+12	+12	+6	Deadly ground +10, mark, grand invoke name



## ORKS

### **Antipaladin Archetype: Thravdu**

**Requirements:** Ork, Worships Ilck Nil Mourn

#### **Class Features**

The following are class features of the thravdu.

**The White Pain (Su):** At 2nd level, the thravdu's hand inflicts the white pain upon his enemies. Each day he can use this ability a number of times equal to 1/2 his thravdu level + his Charisma modifier. As a touch attack, a thravdu can cause 1d4 cold damage for every two thravdu levels he possesses and renders the target's arm unusable, with an icy cold pain, for a number of rounds equal to his Charisma modifier (minimum 1). Using this ability is a standard action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity.

This ability replaces the touch of corruption class feature.

**Mark of Ilck Nil Mourn (Ex):** At 3rd level, if the thravdu successfully attack a target he can leave the mark of Ilck Nil Mourn upon them. Any creature with the mark of Ilck Nil Mourn takes a -1 penalty to attack, saving throws and skill check for a round. At 6th level and 3 levels thereafter the penalties increase by 1.

This ability replaces the plague bringer class feature.

**Cruelties (Su):** The cruelties class feature functions like normal except a thravdu can use it whenever he uses the white pain class feature.

This ability modifies the cruelties class feature.

**Channel Negative Energy (Su):** The channel negative energy class feature functions like normal except a thravdu trades his uses of the white pain class feature.

This ability modifies the channel negative energy class feature.

**The Red Pain (Su):** At 14th level, the thravdu can force the red haze back into an ork's mind. As a touch attack, a thravdu can cause 1d10 fire damage for every two thravdu levels he possesses. If the target is an ork, they must also my a Will save DC equal to the thravdu's level + his Charisma modifier. On a failure they will obey the thravdu's orders except for any order that would result in their immediate death such as slitting their own throat. At the end of the target's every turn they get a saving throw to attempt to break the red pain. He can use this ability a number of times a day equal to 3 + his Charisma modifier.

This ability replaces the aura of sin class feature.

**Unholy Champion (Su):** The unholy champion class feature functions like normal except a thravdu's the white pain deals maximum possible damage as well.

This ability modifies the unholy champion class feature.

### **Paladin Archetype: Herald of the End**

Given visions of a bloody, terrible end, the heralds seek to destroy those who serve evil... unknowing their actions bring an everlasting darkness closer to the world.

**Requirements:** Ork, Worships Uggek

#### **Class Features**

The following are class features of the herald of the end.

**Expose the Enemy (Sp):** At will, the herald of the end can detect if any of the agents of the enemy are present. He selects one target within 60 ft and as a swift actions knows if they work for the enemy or not.

This ability replaces the detect evil class feature.

**The Enemy's Foe (Ex):** Once per day, if the herald of the end successfully attacks someone he has knows to be an agent of the Enemy he can unite his allies against them. As a free action, he may grant all allies that can see and hear him a +1 bonus to attack and damage against any enemies that are known agents of the Enemy for a number of rounds equal to his Charisma modifier. At 4th level, and at every 3 levels thereafter, the herald of the end may use the enemy's foe one additional time a day.

This ability replaces the smith evil class feature.

**Aura of True Perception (Su):** At 3rd level, the herald of the end can roll twice for sense motive checks and use the higher result. All allies within 10 feet gain a +4 to sense motive checks. This ability functions only while the herald of the end is conscious, not if he is unconscious or dead.

This ability replaces the aura of courage class feature.

**Encite the Mob (Su):** At 8th level, the herald of the end can incite people into actions against agents of the Enemy. He may give a minute long speech which acts as the confusion spell using his paladin level as his wizard level. This ability works like confusion except the targets of the spell will attack the nearest creature that the herald of the end designates as an agent of the Enemy. The herald of the end can only designate targets he knows are agents of the Enemy, if he attempts to designate a target that is not an agent of the Enemy his speech will have no effect. He may do this a number of times a day equal to 3 + his Charisma modifier.

This ability replaces the aura of resolve class feature.

**Aura of Bloodlust (Su):** At 11th level, the herald of end doubles his pain bonuses. All ork allies within 20ft also double their pain bonuses. This ability functions only while the herald of the end is conscious, not if he is unconscious or dead.

The ability replaces the aura of justice class feature.

#### **Redemption**

If the herald of the end learns the truth about the darkness and the enemy, he can choose to voluntarily give up his powers and enter penance. While in penance he cannot willingly committee any evils acts, must respect legitimate authority,



act with honor (not lying, not cheating, not using poison, and so forth), help those in need (provided they do not use the help for evil or chaotic ends), and punish those who harm or threaten innocents. His penance lasts until he gains another level at which point he may choose to trade all of his heard of the end levels for fighter levels.

## Ranger Archetype: Feth'Ork Master

**Requirements:** Ork

### Class Features

The following are class features of the feth'ork master.

**Feth'Ork Pack (Ex):** At 4th level, the feth'ork master gains loyal animal companions to accompany him on his adventure. The feth'ork master may have more than one animal companion, but he must divide up his effective druid level between his companions to determine the abilities of each companion. For example, a 4th-level feth'ork master can have one 4th-level companion, two 2nd-level companions, or one 1st-level and one 3rd-level companion. All of his companions must have undergone the feth'ork bleeding ritual and share his favored enemy and favored terrain bonuses.

Each time a feth'ork master's ranger level increases, he must decide how to allocate the increase among his animal companions (including the option of adding a new 1st-level companion). Once a ranger level is allocated to a particular companion, it cannot be redistributed while that companion is in the feth'ork master's service (he must release the companion or wait until the companion dies to allocate its levels to another companion, which he can do the next time he prepares spells). The share spells animal companion ability only applies to one animal

companion at a time—the feth'ork master cannot use it to cast a one-target spell and have it affect all of his animal companions.

This ability functions like the druid animal companion ability (which is part of the Nature Bond class feature), except that the ranger's effective druid level is equal to his ranger level –3..

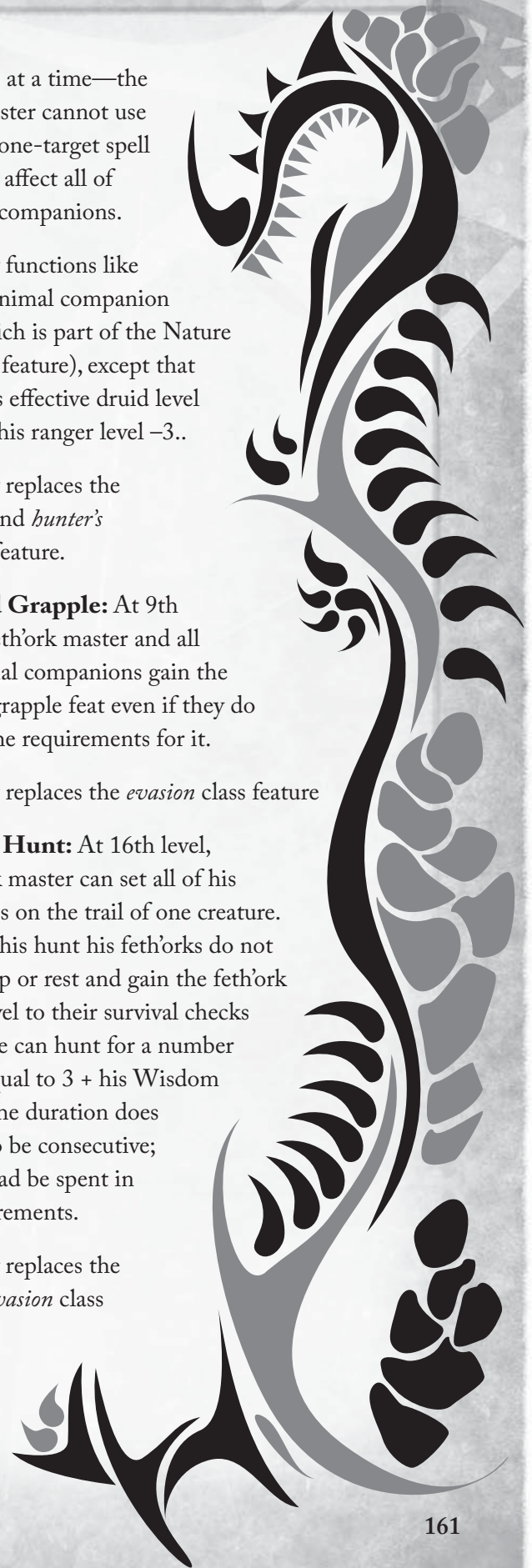
This ability replaces the *endurance* and *hunter's bond* class feature.

**Improved Grapple:** At 9th level, the feth'ork master and all of his animal companions gain the improved grapple feat even if they do not meet the requirements for it.

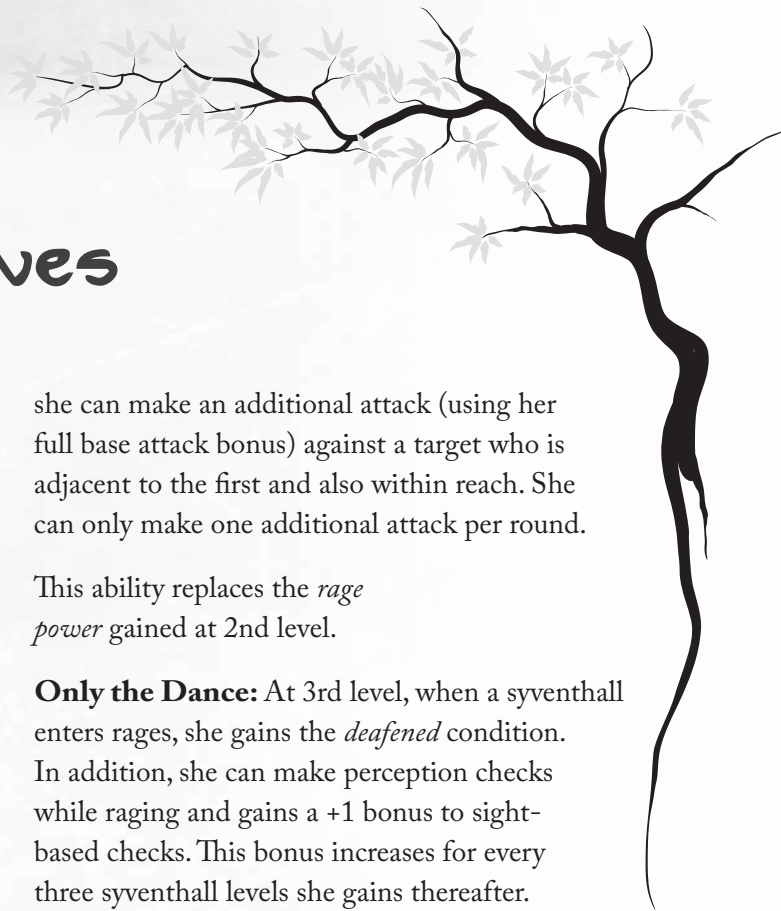
This ability replaces the *evasion* class feature

**The Wild Hunt:** At 16th level, the feth'ork master can set all of his companions on the trail of one creature. While on this hunt his feth'orks do not need to stop or rest and gain the feth'ork master's level to their survival checks to track. He can hunt for a number of hours equal to 3 + his Wisdom modifier. The duration does not need to be consecutive; it can instead be spent in 1-hour increments.

This ability replaces the *improved evasion* class feature.



# Elves



## Barbarian Archetype: Syventhall

Since men discovered they could bind elves to iron, the ritual has transformed elven culture. Some elves fall into dark despair, surrendering their will and hope. Others turn into mindless slaves. But some—a very few—have become transformed in ways that deny reason.

The syventhall are a small group of iron-bound elves who have turned their condition into something... wild. The word means, “the rose has thorns,” an old phrase meant to warn young elves against the treachery of older, wiser enemies. Specifically, enemies who seek to seduce the young and naive, then turn against them for the sheer joy of watching the death of that naivete. But the word took on new meaning with the birth of these “blood dancers” (as men have come to call them).

When a syventhall enters into violence, she falls into a strange trance. Her eyes go white, her lips part, just slightly, and she moves like flowing water. She cannot hear allies or enemies. And her movements are like a dance; a ballet of flashing blades and blood. And when she is finished, she is unaware of the carnage she has caused.

**Requirements:** Elf, Iron Bound

### Class Features

The following are class features of the syventhall.

**Cleave (Ex):** As a standard action, a syventhall can make a single attack at her full Base Attack Bonus against a target within reach. If she hits,

she can make an additional attack (using her full base attack bonus) against a target who is adjacent to the first and also within reach. She can only make one additional attack per round.

This ability replaces the *rage power* gained at 2nd level.

**Only the Dance:** At 3rd level, when a syventhall enters rages, she gains the *deafened* condition. In addition, she can make perception checks while raging and gains a +1 bonus to sight-based checks. This bonus increases for every three syventhall levels she gains thereafter.

This ability replaces the *trap sense* class feature.

**Greater Cleave (Ex):** At 6th level, when a syvethall uses cleave she can continue to make attacks against targets adjacent to the previous target, so long as they are within her reach. She cannot attack an individual target more than once during this attack action.

This ability replaces the *rage power* gained at 6th level.

**The Dance is All:** At 12th level, when a syvethall uses cleave or great cleave, if her initial attack hits, she may take a single 5-foot step as a free action before making her additional attacks. If doing so places a creature within her threatened area, that creature becomes a legal target for her additional cleave attacks as long as it meets all the other prerequisites.

This ability replaces the *rage power* gained at 12th level.

## **Bard Archetype: Llurwen**

Loggers tell stories of beautiful elven women who appear just on the edge of the forest. These elves lure men to the wood with sweet songs and hypnotising eyes, and the men are never seen again.

This is the llurwen: the song of the doomed kiss. The llurwen are unique to the birch bound, and almost all are women. The llurwen are also usually driven by revenge, using their powers to hurt men for some sin from the past.

**Requirements:** Elf, Birch Bound

### **Class Features**

The following are class features of llurwen.

**Siren's Call (Su):** At 1st level, the llurwen can use her bardic performance to lure a group of creatures to her. She can lure a number of creatures equal to 3 + her Charisma modifier. Each creature targeted must be within 90 feet, able to see and hear the llurwen. The bard must also be able to see the creatures affected. For every three levels a bard has attained beyond 1st, she can target one additional creature with this ability.

Each creature within range receives a Will save (DC 10 + 1/2 the llurwen's level + the llurwen's Cha modifier) to negate the effect. If a creature's saving throw succeeds, the bard cannot attempt to call that creature again for 24 hours. If its saving throw fails, the creature spends its turn trying to move as close as possible to the llurwen for as long as she continues to maintain her call. Any potential threat to the target allows the target to make a new saving throw against the effect. Any obvious threat, such as someone drawing a weapon, casting a spell, or aiming a weapon at the target, automatically breaks the effect.

Siren's Call is an enchantment (compulsion), mind-affecting ability and relies on audible

and visual components in order to function but is not language-dependent.

This ability replaces the *fascinate* bardic performance.

**Choir of Howls (Su):** A llurwen of 8th level or higher can use her performance to foster a sense of fear in her enemies, causing them to take become shaken and take a -4 penalty when attempt to save against any of the llurwen's abilities. To be affected, an enemy must be within 30 feet and able to see and hear the llurwen's performance. The effect persists for as long as the enemy is within 30 feet and she continues the performance. The performance cannot cause a creature to become frightened or panicked, even if the targets are already shaken from another effect. Choir of howls is a mind-affecting *fear* effect, and it relies on audible and visual components.

This ability replaces the *dirge of doom* bardic performance.

**Summon (Su):** At 2nd level, the llurwen can summon a 10ft radius of birds, vines, cicades, flowers or a whirlwind. Each type of summon has a different effect. As a standard action, she can summon this radius anywhere within 50 ft of herself. She can move the radius up to her base speed as a move action. The radius last for 1 minute. The llurwen can do this once a day at 2nd level and gains an additional use of this ability at every even level.

*Summon Birds* - Any creature within the 10ft radius gains the flat-footed condition. At 10th level, they also gain the blinded condition while inside the radius.

*Summon Vines* - The area instead of this radius is considered difficult terrain of a supernatural nature. At 10th level, any creature that starts their turn in the radius or enters it makes a Reflex save (DC 10 + 1/2 the llurwen's level

+ the llurwen's Cha modifier) or take bleed damage equal to her Charisma modifier.

*Summon Cicadas* - Any creature within the 10 ft radius that attempts to cast a spell is casting defensively. At 10th level, any creature that starts their turn in the radius or enters it gains the shaken condition for 3 rounds.

*Summon Flowers* - Any creature within the 10ft radius makes a Fortitude save (DC 10 + 1/2 the llurwen's level + the llurwen's Cha modifier) or they become fatigued. At 10th level, any creature that fails their Fortitude save also becomes nauseated.

*Summon Whirlwind* - Any creature within the 10ft radius gains concealment. At 10th level, any creature within the 10ft radius is also immune to projectile weapons.

This ability replace the *lore master* and *jack of all trades* class features.

### **Fighter Archetype: Gorddluydeae**

An elf earns the title of gorddluydeae through years of rigorous training. The word means "beloved/trusted friend/protector." In the elven culture a gorddluydeae serves as a kind of bodyguard (or what humans would call "shield guardian") for the elven priest class (the cyllawellan). But the human word falls short of the powerful (and sometimes intimate) relationship the priest and protector share.

The gorddluydeae take a sacred oath on her Tree to protect her charge against all harm and danger. This is not a meaningless or trivial ritual. The gorddluydeae's oath is what gives her her power. If she violates her oath, she can lose her power until she redeems herself and her Tree forgives her sin.

**Requirements:** Elf, Cyffathellean Racial Trait

### **Class Features**

The following are class features of the gorddluydeae.

**Equipment Trick (Shield):** The gorddluydeae gains the *Equipment Trick (Shield)* feat even if she does not meet the prerequisites She also gains proficiency with the tarryon.

This ability replaces her proficiency with heavy shields.

**Cyllawellan:** At 4th level, a gorddluydeae gains a companion to protect called a cyllawellan. She has two options when selecting a cyllawellan. The first choice is to gain an npc cohort as if she had the *leadership* feat; her leadership score is equal to her gorddluydeae level + her Charisma modifier. The cohort's class levels must be druid level and the cohort must be an elf with the cyffathellean racial trait and cyllawellan archetype.

The second choice is to have a pc as her cyllawellan. The pc must be an elf with the cyffathellean racial trait, more levels in druid than any other class and the cyllawellan archetype.

If at any time the cyllawellan does not meet these requirements—such as becoming cwthellean or gaining more level in a class other than druid—he is no longer fit to be a cyllawellan and losses all the associated benefits. The gorddluydeae is free to pick a new cyllawellan if this happens.

*No Blood, No Tears (Su):* A gorddluydeae can transfer hit points equal to her level to her cyllawellan as a standard action. She must be in direct contact with her cyllawellan to do this. At 12th level, for every point of health transferred the cyllawellan two points of damage are healed.

*Like the Wind (Su):* At the gorddluydeae's 6th level, she grants her cyllawellan her Dexterity modifier to their AC as a *dodge*

bonus. The gorddluydeae must be adjacent and conscious to use this power.

*I Steal Your Pain (Su):* At the gorddluydeae 10th level, she can intercept all damage from attacks of opportunity against her cyllawellan. She takes all the damage normally instead of her cyllawellan. The gorddluydeae must be adjacent and conscious to use this power. All damage taken is reduced by an amount equal to the armor bonus provided by the gorddluydeae's shield (including any magical enhancement).

*The Last Measure of Devotion (Su):* At 14th level, when a gorddluydeae's companion would normally drop to 0 hit points or lower the damage is negated. Instead, the gorddluydeae drops to -1 hit points regardless of her current health and begins dying. This ability activates regardless of the distance between the two, but will not activate if they are both not on the same plane.

This ability replaces the *fighter's 4th level, 10th level and 16th level and* bonus feats.

## The Tarryon: The Elven Razor Shield

Men speak of studying the way of the blade: an almost sacred practice among those who devote entire lifetimes to swordplay. The gorddluydeae have a similar practice, but with a different kind of weapon. The gorddluydeae study the tarryon: the razor shield.

The tarryon is a standard sized shield, but its edges are razor sharp: capable of cutting through flesh and bone. It is a dangerous weapon for both the one who wields it and the one who faces it. Those who do not know its ways are just as likely to injure themselves as they are to injure others. The tarryon requires years of practice to use, and even then, the wielder is far from a master.

The shield is not made from iron, but from the wood of the gorddluydeae's Tree. This creates a sacred bond with the shield, meaning it can never be far from the elf who wields it. When the gorddluydeae throws the shield at a target, the shield returns to its user's hand... a skill that requires years of practice.

### Shield, Light: Tarryon (Wooden)

Cost: 2500 gp

Shield Bonus: +1

Dmg (M): 1d6

Armor Check Penalty: -1

Arcane Spell Failure Chance: 5%

Weight: 15 lbs.

Extras: Shield Spikes, Throwing

### Benefits:

*Shield Bash Attacks:* You can bash an opponent with a tarryon. The tarryon deals 1d6 damage. Used this way, a tarryon is a martial piercing weapon. For the purpose of penalties on attack rolls, treat a tarryon as a light weapon. If you use your shield as a weapon, you lose its Armor Class bonus until your next turn. An enhancement bonus on a shield does not improve the effectiveness of a shield bash made with it, but the shield can be made into a magic weapon in its own right.

*Shield Throwing Attacks:* You can throw the shield as a free action. Neither a shield's enhancement bonus to AC nor its shield spikes apply to your attack or damage rolls. The tarryon deals 1d6 damage.

*Returning:* A tarryon flies through the air back to you. It returns just before your next turn (and is therefore ready to use again in that turn). Catching a *returning* weapon when it comes back is a free action. If you can't catch it, or if you have moved since throwing it, the tarryon drops to the ground in the square from which it was thrown.



# gnolls

## Ranger Archetype: Tachba

The greatest crime a dach'youn can commit is betraying his pack. Not failure; any dach'youn can fail. Not theft; that crime can be forgiven and repaid. No, when a dach'youn betrays his pack for his own personal gain, the pack punishes him with the greatest punishment they have: exile.

A tachba is a dach'youn who has betrayed his pack. He wears the scars of his betrayal on his face. His fellows beat him within an inch of his life, then scar him with hot coals. The scars form a pattern all dach'youn recognize: "Packless." The word means, "Do not trust this one," or "Do not let this one into your pack." Those who wear the scar—on their face so it cannot be hidden—are forced to run to the Cities of men to make a new life and, possibly, redeem their great crime.

**Requirements:** Dach'youn

## Racial Traits

The following are racial traits of the tachba.

**All Alone:** Tachba gain a bonus feat at 1st, 7th, 14th and 20th level.

This replaces the *pack* racial trait.

**Scarred:** When the tachba critically hits a target, that opponent becomes shaken.

This replaces the *pack tactics* racial trait.

## Class Features

The following are classes features of the tachba.

### I Command My Own

**Heart:** At 3rd level, the tachba gain a +3 bonus to initiative and chooses a command from the kech's command list. As a swift action he may use the command on himself. He may only choose commands that do not require him to work with others and must meet any prerequisites to select the command. The

tachba has a number of uses of his commands a day equal to 3 + his Wisdom modifier. At 8th level and every five level thereafter he may choose an additional command.

This ability replaces *avored terrain* class feature.

**Hunter's Bond (Ex):** This ability works like the ranger's normal hunter's bond except the tachba must select an animal companion and his effective druid level is equal to his ranger level - 2. His animal companion does not gain any favor terrain bonuses.

This ability modifies *hunter's bond* class feature.

**The Street is My Cloak (Ex):** At 12th level or higher, the tachba can use the Stealth skill to hide in any city even if his current location does not grant cover or concealment.

This ability replaces *camouflage* class feature.

**Hidden in the City's Heart (Ex):** At 17th level or higher, the tachba can use his Stealth skill to hide in any city even if he is being observed.

This ability replaces *hide in plain sight* class feature.

## Joining A Pack

The tachba may take the pack membership feat to join a pack, with GM approval, but he does not gain any pack feats retroactively. In addition, if he joins a pack he may not take any more levels of tachba.

## Wizard Archetype: Or'gakash

All dach'youn have a relationship with their birth moon, but some have a more profound relationship than others. The *or'gakash* (students of Or'gha) see their Sister as a teacher, sending them wisdom through dreams, omens

and miracles. That wisdom is transferred to power. Magical power. Arcane power.

**Requirements:** Gnoll, Moonsign Or'gha

## Class Features

The following are class features of the or'gakash.

**Or'gha's Arcane School:** An or'gakash must specialize in the Illusion arcane school. In addition, she also gains proficiency with light armor but not with shields.

This ability modifies the *arcane school* class feature.

**Hidden Spell:** An or'gakash masks their usage of magic by making a bluff check as a swift action before she cast. In addition, she gains bluff as a class skill and +2 bonus to bluff checks. When she is using this ability any creature who can see her may make a sense motive check vs her bluff to know she is casting.

This ability replaces the *scribe scroll* class feature.

**Contingent Illusion:** At 5th level, an or'gakash may specify an action or occurrence that will trigger an illusory effect as per the spell *minor image*. Such as if a pack member draws a weapon then an image of them without their weapon appears instead, at the GM's discretion they may have situational bonuses. She has a number of these illusions equal to half of her class level (round down, minimum 1) that can only be bestowed on member of her pack and lasts for 24 hours.

This ability replaces the wizard's 5th level bonus feat.

## New Gnoll Pack Feats

### The Moon's Shadow I

*The Moon's Shadow hides the truth and disguises lies.*

**Prerequisite:** Gnoll, PT 6+

**Benefit:** When you have the or'gakash adjacent to you, gain a +3 morale bonus to any bluff checks.

### **The Moon's Shadow II**

*The Moon's Shadow darkens steel and danger, making them difficult to see.*

**Prerequisite:** Gnoll, The Moon's Shadow I, PT 9+

**Benefit:** When you have the or'gakash adjacent to you, you may *feint* as a swift action.

**Normal:** Without this feat, feinting in combat requires a standard action.

### **The Moon's Shadow III**

*The Moon's Shadow gives many gifts, including the power to blind enemies to the truth.*

**Prerequisite:** Gnoll, The Moon's Shadow II, Bluff 10 Ranks

**Benefit:** You gain 1 *Contingent Illusion* which function like the or'gakash power of the same name. This illusion may be bestowed on yourself or another pack member.

### **Prestige Class: Bach**

Every pack has a bach: a hero who is the face of the pack. A hero to inspire others. Not any dach'youn can become a bach...

**Alignment:** Any

**Hit Die:** d10

### **Requirements:**

To qualify to become a Bach, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Race: Gnoll

Base attack bonus: +5

Skills: Diplomacy 3 ranks, Sense Motive 3 ranks, Survival 3 ranks

Special: The character must belong to and be acknowledged as the leader by every member of their pack.

### **Class Skills**

The Bach's class skills are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (dungeoneering) (Int), Knowledge (engineering) (Int), Knowledge (local) (Int), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Survival (Wis), and Swim (Str)

**Skill Ranks per Level:** 3 + Int modifier

### **Class Features**

The following are class features of the bach.

**Weapons and Armor Proficiency:** Bachs gain no proficiency with any weapon or armor.

**Leader of the Trodden:** As a swift action, for each allied member of his pack within 30 feet (regardless of that pack members current condition), the bach gains a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls for one round. He may use this ability once per day at 1st level, twice per day at 3rd level, and 3 times per day at 5th level. These bonuses stack with any bonuses provided for adjacent NPC pack members.



**Extra Large Pack:** At 2nd level, the bach gains the Extra Large Pack feat even if he does not meet the prerequisites.

**Stand Together (Su):** At 3rd level, the bach gains 3 temporary hit points for every pack member within 30 feet. This is a free action that happens at the start of combat, as initiative is rolled.

**Bonus Feat:** At 4th level, the bach gains a bonus feat in addition to those gained from normal advancement. This bonus feat must be selected from those listed as Combat Feats.

**Savior of the Fallen:** At 5th level, while fighting in defense of downed packmates, the bach's strength grows greatest. Multiply all bonuses provided by the *leader of the trodden* ability for each member of the bach's pack within 30 feet that is currently suffering the *helpless*, *unconscious*, or *dying* condition + 1; to a maximum of x5. For example if two packmates are currently dying then multiple the bonuses by x3.

### Bach Table

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+1	+0	+1	Leader of the trodden (1/day)
2nd	+2	+1	+1	+1	Extra large pack
3rd	+3	+2	+1	+2	Leader of the trodden (2/day), stand together
4th	+4	+2	+1	+2	Bonus feat
5th	+5	+3	+2	+3	Leader of the trodden (3/day), savior of the fallen



### **New Gnome Occupation: Cannibal**

**Requirements:** Occupation  
Racial Trait, Chaotic Evil

**Smell Underfolk (Ex):** Cannibal gnomes gain the scent special ability, they also gain a bonus equal to their level when tracking haffuns, gnomes or uvandir.

**Paralyzing Bite:** Cannibal gnomes gain a bite attack. The target must make a Fortitude save against DC 10 + 1/2 character level (round down, minimum 1) + Dexterity modifier or be nauseated for a number of rounds equal to 1 + their Constitution modifier (minimum 1 round).

### **New Gnome Region: Parks and Gardens**

**Requirements:** Region Racial Trait

**Parks and Garden:** Parks and Garden gnomes gain a +2 racial bonus to Will and +2 racial bonus to Knowledge (local).

### **Oracle Curse: Sympathetic Healer**

**Requirements:** Gnome, Gain Cure Spells

#### **Effect**

Whenever you cast a cure spell you take 1d4 damage but each target regains extra hit points equal to the damage you took from the cure spell.

At 5th level, you are immune to the sickened condition.

At 10th level, you take 1d8 damage but each each target regains extra hit points equal to the damage you took + 3 from the cure spell.

At 15th level, you are immune to the nauseated condition.

## Rogue Archetype: Arbeith

*Arbeith* is a gnome word that best translates as “hobo” or “bum.” It means “looking for the street.” In other words, a gnome who would rather sleep on the street than under a roof. Arbeith carry a particular stigma in gnome society, but have found a place among the Thieves Guilds of the Reign. Like their counterparts, they have made themselves useful, and thus, made themselves a “home.” Most arbeith sleep in the parks and gardens of the Cities, making homes there in the trees and shrubbery.

**Requirements:** Gnome, Parks and Gardens Racial Trait

### Class Features

The following are class features of the arbeith.

**Summon Rat Swarm (Sp):** The arbeith may summon a swarm of rats as per the *summon swarm* spell. She can do this once per day for every 3 arbeith levels she possesses.

This ability replaces the trapfinding class feature.

**Eyes in the Back (Ex):** At 3rd level, the arbeith gains an intuitive sense that alerts her to danger from sudden attacks, giving her a +1 bonus on Reflex saves made to avoid surprise attacks and a +1 dodge bonus to AC against attacks made by surprise. These bonuses rise to +2 when the arbeith reaches 6th level, to +3 when she reaches 9th level, to +4 when she reaches 12th level, to +5 at 15th, and to +6 at 18th level.

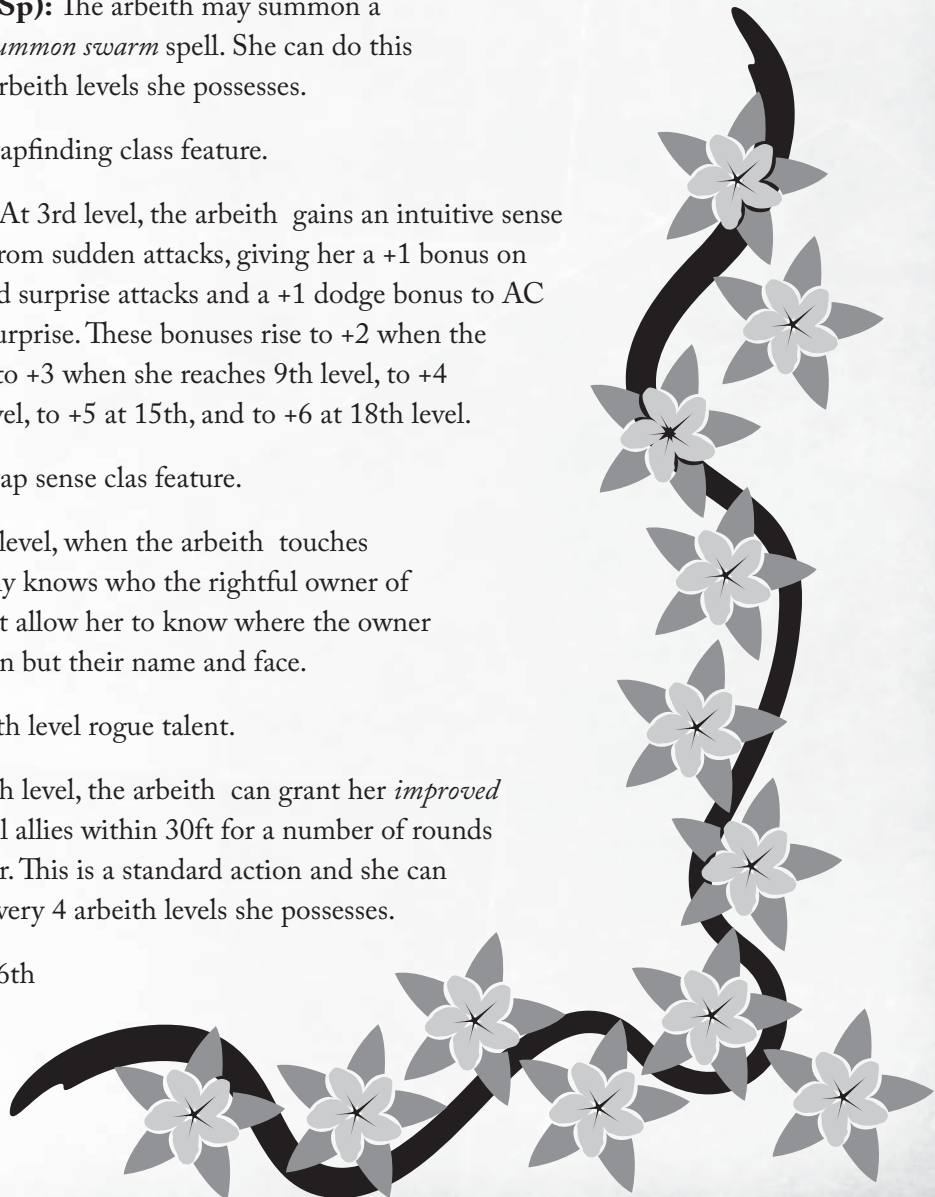
This ability replaces the trap sense class feature.

**Not Yours (Su):** At 6th level, when the arbeith touches an object she automatically knows who the rightful owner of the object is. This does not allow her to know where the owner is or any other information but their name and face.

This ability replaces the 6th level rogue talent.

**Look Out! (Su):** At 16th level, the arbeith can grant her *improved uncanny dodge* ability to all allies within 30ft for a number of rounds equal to Wisdom modifier. This is a standard action and she can do this once per day for every 4 arbeith levels she possesses.

This ability replaces the 16th level rogue talent.





## Gobowins

### **Bard Archetype: Nanna**

Some human scholars have made an argument that “goblin” society is “matriarchal,” gobowins would likely not agree. (In fact, most would look at the scholar with big eyes and a frown, wondering what this word meant, then make the joke, “human think too much.”)

Although gobowins would not describe their own culture as “matriarchal,” there is no doubt the role of the mother—or “nanna”—is one of high authority. Gobowins do not see the task of childrearing as secondary or less important than that of a merchant. It is a different role, but just as important, and in some ways, even more important.

What’s more, nannas are spoken in high reverence by gobowins. The worst insult you can throw at a gobowin would be one that involves his mother (or *any* gobowin mother, for that matter). You just don’t talk about a gobowin’s mom. However, instead of avenging her slight, a gobowin will simply call for the nanna herself.

Nobody wants a face-to-face confrontation with mom.

**Requirements:** Gobowin

### **Class Features**

The following are class features of nanna.

**Nanna’s Cantrips:** This ability works the same as the bard’s cantrip class feature except a nanna gains *lullaby* and *mending* in addition to her normal cantrips gained at 1st level.

This ability modifies the *cantrips* class feature.

**Nanna’s Kiss:** At 2nd level a nanna adds all of the *cure* spells to her list of spells known (cure spells include all spells with “cure” in the name). These spells are added as soon as the nanna is capable of casting them.

This ability replaces the *well-versed* class feature.

**Nanna’s Anger:** At 5th level, as a swift action the nanna can activate this ability creating an aura that works like the *fear* spell except it radiates out from her in a 30ft aura. She can do this 3 + her Charisma modifier times a day.

This ability replaces the *lore master* class feature.

**Nanna’s Wrath:** At 10th level, once per day, a nanna can turn one target to stone with a command. This works as the *flesh to stone* spell but only lasts for 24 hours. If her target is within her nanna’s anger aura they take a -4 penalty to their Fortitude save. She can activate this ability as a standard action.

This ability replaces the *jack of all trades* class feature.

## **Fighter Archetype: Bannaw**

Gobowins are known for the misfortune that follows their caravans (and those who aggravate them). Even with such a reputation, most caravans must rely on other races for protection. But there are a few who are lucky enough to have a bannaw.

A caravan knows when it has a bannaw the moment he is born: for a gobowin, they are huge. A bannaw is also born with a distinguishing mark on his face or hands.

Like his parents, a bannaw has the same “bad luck,” but it affects him differently. For some reason, his buwuk keeps him alive. It is almost as if he was born with good luck rather than bad. He escapes lethal blows with a quick dodge, avoids falling stones because they land on an enemy or otherwise dodges misfortune with a dash of fortuity. Also, because of their size, bannaw can stand toe to toe with most foes.

The problem with most bannaw is they feel a compulsion to leave the caravan in search of their own fortune. Seeing himself as distinct and unique from their kin, once he reaches adulthood, a caravan master has to find ways to keep a bannaw from leaving. Some are faithful to their parents and remain, even after their mother and father are dead. But others see adventuring parties and Courages traveling the countryside and long for adventures of their own.

And many Courages would welcome a bannaw. Some report that having the “great goblins” around is like wearing a good luck charm. “I just can’t explain it,” said one Courage Captain. “Whenever he’s around, good things just happen.”

**Requirements:** Gobowin

### **Racial Traits**

The following are racial traits of the bannaw.

**Medium:** Bannaw have no special bonuses or penalties due to their size.

This racial trait replaces *small*.

### **Class Features**

The following are class features of the bannaw.

**Lifesaving Buwuk:** If an attack would reduce the bannaw to zero hit points or less, he can spend a point of buwuk to save himself. He rolls a 1d6 and keeps that many hit points after the attack resolves. This does not represent an actual gain of health, but a fortunate incident that avoids injury.

This ability replaces the fighter’s 1st level bonus feat.

**Ba-Buwuk:** At 5th level, the bannaw can spend a point of his buwuk to cancel buwuk used on an ally within 30 feet, as a free action.

This ability replaces the fighter’s 5th level bonus feat.

### **Wizard Archetype: The Footha**

Among the gobowins are those who seem to have a powerful command of fortune. Whether this is the case or just clever sleight of hand and suggestion is still a heated debate among human scholars. Gobowins, of course, know for certain. And they aren’t telling humans a thing.

A footha (meaning, “one who sees”) does not have *command* of fortune, but can anticipate it, capitalizing on opportunities while dodging misfortunes. Because of this distinct sense, it appears as if she can command luck, when in fact, all she does is get out of bad luck’s way. She can also predict good and ill fortune in others and even guide them, keeping their sails toward good fortune and away from bad.

Footha are also unique in the world of arcane spellcasters in that they have no spellbooks. Instead, a footha has the strange ability to memorize a spell she sees, regardless of its potency or power. While she may not have the skill or willpower (in other words, “casting level”) to use the spell, she knows how it works and can use it when she gains the proper ability.

**Requirements:** Gobowin, Shifting Luck Arcane School

### Class Features

The following are class features of the footha.

**Spells:** The footha’s spells work exactly the same as the wizards normal spells except they do not have a physical spellbook (See Mental Spellbook). She still has to prepare her spells as normal but spends an hour meditating rather than studying out of her book.

This ability modifies the *spells* class feature.

**Mental Spellbook:** A footha must meditate on her spells each day to prepare them. She cannot prepare any spell not already memorized into her mental spellbook.

A footha begins play with all 0-level wizard spells (except those from her opposed schools, if any; see Arcane Schools) plus three 1st-level spells of her choice already memorized. The footha also selects a number of additional 1st-level spells equal to her Intelligence modifier to memorize.

#### Adding Spells to a Mental Spellbook:

Footha can add new spells to their spellbooks through several methods. A footha can only learn new spells that belong to the wizard spell lists (see Magic).

**Spells Gained at a New Level:** Footha perform a certain amount of spell research between adventures. Each time a character attains

a new wizard level, she gains two spells of her choice to add to automatical memorize. The two free spells must be of spell levels she can cast.

**Spells Copied from Watching:** A footha can also memorize whenever she sees one being cast. This works as per the memorize class feature. A footha who has specialized in a school of spells gains a +2 bonus on the Spellcraft check if the new spell is from her specialty.

This ability replace the *spellbook* class feature.

**Memorize (Ex):** At 1st level, a footha can learn any spell she sees. She must have an unobstructed view of the spell being cast and make a spellcraft check (DC 15 + the spell’s level). If she is successful, she “memorizes” the spell and adds it to her mental spellbook. She cannot cast the spell until she has the proper spellcasting level.

This ability replaces the *scribe scroll* class feature.

### New Focused Arcane School: Shifting Luck

While human scholars are still baffled by the gobowin’s ability to seemingly twist fate, gobowins continue to do so with little or no effort.

**Requirements:** Gobowin

**Associated School:** Divinations

**Replacement Powers:** The following school powers replace the *diviner’s fortune* power of the divination school.

**Call Luck’s Name (Sp):** As a swift action, a footha may attempt to give good luck to anyone within 30 feet. She may call high (11-20) or low (1-10) and then roll a d20. If she is correct, she may grant one creature a +2 *luck* bonus.

If the footha wishes, she can call a specific number and then roll a d20. If she is correct, she may grant one creature a +20 *luck* bonus.



# Uvandir

## **Bard Archetype: The Instrumentalist**

The uvandir have presented mankind with many musical instruments. Strings, woodwinds, percussion. An uvandir instrumentalist is the finest in his class, making masterpieces that the most skilled musicians travel miles to acquire. But he has another role as well. One much more dangerous....

**Requirements:** Uvandir

### **Class Features**

The following are class features of the instrumentalist.

#### **Weapon and Armor Proficiency:**

In addition, to his normal proficiencies the instrumentalist gains proficiency in all martial weapons.

This ability modifies the bard's *weapon and armor proficiency* class feature.

**Rebel Yell:** A instrumentalist may spend a round of his bardic performance to grant himself a +2 bonus to his attack and damage roll on a charge. He must meet all of the prerequisites of a charge to gain this bonus. This is a free action during his charge. At 5th level, the target of his charge

must make a Will Save DC 10 + 1/2 the instrumentalist's level + the instrumentalist's Cha modifier or become *shaken* for a round.

This ability replaces the bard's *fascinate* class feature.

**Banner:** At 5th level, a instrumentalist's banner becomes a symbol of inspiration to his allies and companions. As long as the instrumentalist's banner is clearly visible, all allies within 60 feet receive a +2 morale bonus on saving throws against fear and a +1 morale bonus on attack rolls made as part of a charge. At 10th level, and every five levels thereafter, these bonuses increase by +1. The banner must be at least Small or larger and must be carried or displayed by the instrumentalist to function.

This ability replaces the *lore master* class feature.

## **Fighter Archetype: Miner**

Digging in the Enemy's mines, those who survived collapses, encounters with unspeakable horrors and other dangers earned the name (uvandir name). When the uvandir dug themselves out from the Enemy's clutches, those who stood at the forefront were the (uvandir name). It was

they who not only dug the tunnel that led to freedom, but also faced any dangers that stood between the underfolk and that freedom. Those who were granted the position of (uvandir name) followed the tradition of shaving their beards. They did so for two reasons. First, the beard got in the way of digging. And second, because they did not need a beard to show their honor: their title already told that story.

Today, some of those uvandir still walk through the Reign. They are highly respected throughout uvandir culture, and the only uvandir who can wear a clean chin without shame.

**Requirements:** Uvandir

### **Class Features**

The following are class features of the miner.

**Improved Sunder:** At 2nd level, the miner gains the *improved sunder* feat as a bonus feat even if he does not meet the prerequisites for it.

This ability replaces the fighter's 2nd level bonus feat.

**Pick Mastery (Ex):** Starting at 5th level, when a miner uses a light or heavy pick, he gains a +1 bonus on attack and damage rolls. Every three levels thereafter, this bonus increase by +1.

A miner also adds this bonus to any combat maneuver checks made with light or heavy picks. This bonus also applies to the fighter's Combat Maneuver Defense when defending against disarm and sunder attempts made against light or heavy picks.

This ability replaces the weapon's training class feature.

**Nothing in My Way:** At 6th level, the miner may use a light or heavy pick to

sunder or break an object. When using his pick in this way he gains a +4 to his roll.

This ability replaces the fighter's 6th level bonus feat.

**Greater Pick Mastery (Ex):** At 20th level, whenever a miner uses a light or heavy pick he automatically confirm all critical threats and their damage multiplier increased by 2 ( $\times 2$  becomes  $\times 4$ , for example). In addition, he cannot be disarmed while wielding a light or heavy pick.

This ability replaces the weapon mastery class feature.

### **Ranger Archetype: Carpenter**

The Battle of Alden Forest was famous for two reasons: it was the first time the uvandir and elves made war, and it spawned the invention of the crossbow. Although the uvandir had Watchmakers, the vast number of elven archers simply overwhelmed the uvandir. Thus, they set their minds to solving what they called "the elven problem of distance."

It was a carpenter who created the first crossbow: Gillheim Wintersbeard. His invention was easy to make, easy to learn and easy to use. The next time the elves and uvandir fought, at the Battle of Valius Lake, the crossbow was the major factor in turning the battle to the uvandir.

Since then, the uvandir who specialize in using the weapon have been referred to as "carpenters," out of respect for Wintersbeard and his innovation.

**Requirements:** Uvandir

### **Class Features**

The following are class features of the carpenter.



**Weapon and Armor Proficiencies:** A carpenter is proficient with all simple and martial weapons and with light armor, medium armor and shields (except tower shields). In addition they are proficient with the uvandir crossbow.

This ability modifies the ranger's *combat style* class feature.

**Crossbow Combat Style (Ex):** At 2nd level, the carpenter must choose crossbow combat style. Otherwise this ability functions exactly like the ranger's combat style.

This ability modifies the ranger's *combat style* class feature.

**The Silence of Stone (Ex):** A carpenter adds half his level (minimum 1) to stealth skill checks made to follow a creature.

This ability replaces the *track* class feature.

**Deadly Aim (Ex):** If the carpenter studies his target for a round, he gains a +1 to his attack and +2 to his damage. These bonuses increase by 1 for every 4 carpenter levels he possess.

This ability replaces the *wild empathy* class feature.

**Hidden Hunter:** At 4th level, the carpenter knows how to hide his shots from his target. If he attacks from 30 feet away, he can still make a stealth check to hide from the target of his attack immediately after his shot. This stealth check follows all of the normal rules of stealth. If he attacks from 60 feet or more away he gain a +5 *circumstance* bonus to his check.

This ability replaces the *hunter's bond* class feature.

## The Fiver: The Uvandir Crossbow

While humans have developed crossbows similar to the uvandir original, human designs

rely on ease of use and less restrictive weight. But the uvandir crossbow remains one of the standard weapons in the uvandir arsenal.

The uvandir crossbow weighs ten pounds more than its human counterpart. This weight comes from a heavy iron binding that allows its user to parry blows when the enemy rushes the line. (Another lesson from the Battle of Valius Lake.)

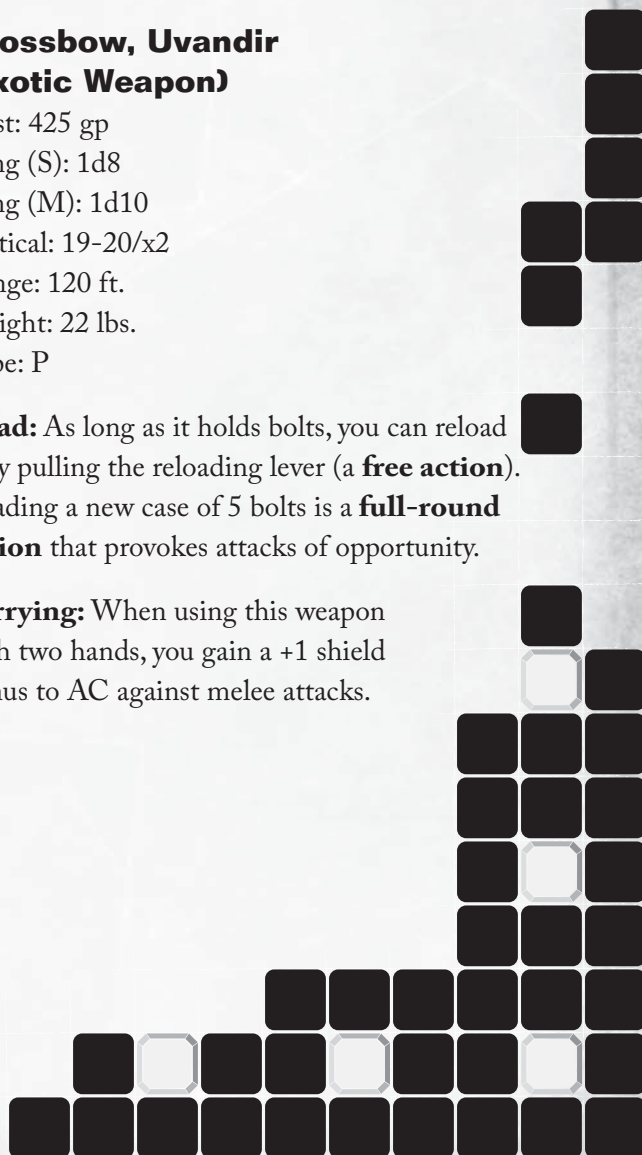
A later innovation was a loading case that carries 5 bolts and a simple lever that allows another bolt to be loaded quickly. This gave the crossbow its human nickname, "the fiver."

### Crossbow, Uvandir (Exotic Weapon)

Cost: 425 gp  
Dmg (S): 1d8  
Dmg (M): 1d10  
Critical: 19-20/x2  
Range: 120 ft.  
Weight: 22 lbs.  
Type: P

**Load:** As long as it holds bolts, you can reload it by pulling the reloading lever (a **free action**). Loading a new case of 5 bolts is a **full-round action** that provokes attacks of opportunity.

**Parrying:** When using this weapon with two hands, you gain a +1 shield bonus to AC against melee attacks.





## Roddun

### New Racial Trait: Tsituk

The tsituk is a horrible creature. A twisted and horrible thing to behold, the tsituk appears as a mutated roddun, often larger and more fierce than his cousins. Why the tsituk exist is a mystery. Most human scholars do not even know they exist. And if the roddun know, they aren't talking.

The roddun use tsituk as heavy muscle when needed in street wars, unleashing them against unwitting enemies. When humans speak of "the war rats," it's the tsituk.

### Racial Traits

**Acid Resistance:** The tsituk's fur is so thick that he gains resistance 2 to acid damage. At 5th, 10th, 15th and 20th character level the resistance increases by 2. They also gain a flaw from the tsituk flaw list.

This trait replaces the *fast healing* racial trait.

**Acid Immunity:** The tsituk is immune to acid damage. They also gain two flaws from the tsituk flaw list.

This trait replaces the *fast healing* racial trait.

**Contortionist:** The tsituk can contort their body to fit through any space wide enough to accommodate their ribcage. They also gain two flaws from the tsituk flaw list.

This trait replaces *fast healing* racial trait.

**Large Nose (Ex):** The tsituk gains scent ability up to 90 feet. Their scent ability is so strong they know the location of creatures and objects as if they could see. They also gain a flaw from the tsituk flaw list.

This trait replaces the *blindsight* racial trait.

**Natural Armor:** The tsituk gains natural armor equal to 2. At 5th, 10th, 15th and 20th character level the natural armor increases by 2. They also gain a flaw from the tsituk flaw list.

This trait replaces the *fast healing* racial trait.

**Prehensile Tail:** The tsituk can use his tail as though it was an extra limb. It is as powerful as one of his normal arms and as the dexterity as a tail. It cannot perform any action that requires five fingers. They also gain a flaw from the tsituk flaw list.

This trait replaces the *tooth & nail* racial trait.

**Third Arm:** The tsituk has a third arm, it can grow from anywhere on his upper torso. It is as dexterous as their other limbs and can perform any action a normal arm can. Including wielding a weapon or shield. They also gain two flaws from the tsituk flaw list.

This trait replaces the *tooth & nail* racial trait.

### Tsituk Flaws

**Musk:** The tsituk has a musk about them irritates and incites other creatures. In any social situation they start one step lower than normal on the reaction chart. Any creature with the dragon, magical beast or monstrous humanoid type automatically attacks the tsituk and tries to eat them.

**Bad Reaction to Healing:** The tsituk has a 30% chance of reacting badly to healing potions and effects. If the spell or potion reacts badly take 2 points of damage for every level of the spell or potion instead of healing.

**Ill:** The tsituk has been ill their entire life. If they reach 0 hp at anytime they die. At the end of each session they roll a d20, if they roll a 1 then they die.

**Off Balance:** The tsituk has never been well balanced. They take a -5 to all skill checks that require balance. Their DC for Relax saves to keep their balance are increased by 10.

**Socially Stunted:** The tsituk can not put any ranks into Charisma, Intelligence or Wisdom based skills.

### Fighter Archetype: Tkisk

In the poorer barrios of the City, street gangs rule with intimidation and violence. When the roddun arrived, they brought with them many

weapons including cunning and ruthlessness. But sometimes, to rule a City, you need muscle. For that, the roddun turn to the *tkisk*.

The word means, “tooth and claw.” And that’s exactly how the tkisk fights. He can use weapons, and often does, but the deadliest weapon in a tkisk’s arsenal are his natural weapons. For a long while, human scholars thought roddun claws were poisonous, but after study, they came to the conclusion that a roddun’s claws carry many diseases. A single scratch causes red irritation, healing very slowly. It is not a debilitating infection, but inconvenient. A bite can do the same. Reign scholars have discovered that many humans have allergic reactions to roddun saliva, causing similar symptoms (inflammation, scratching, etc.)

For the tkisk, this is doubly so. Their claws are so filled with bacteria, a single scratch infects a victim’s blood system immediately, causing confusion, delirium and vomiting. On the street, it is well known that if a roddun drops his weapons and bears his claws, it’s time to run.

**Requirements:** Roddun

### Class Features

The following are class features of the tkisk.

#### Weapon and Armor Proficiency:

The tkisk is not proficient with medium armor, heavy armor or shields.

This ability modifies the *weapon and armor proficiency* class feature.

**Bleeding (Ex):** At 5th level, whenever the tkisk scores a critical hit with his natural weapons, the target takes 1d6 points of bleed damage each round on their turn, in addition to the damage dealt by the critical hit. Bleed damage can be stopped by a DC

15 Heal skill check or through any magical healing. At 10th level and every five levels thereafter the bleed damage increases by 1d6.

This ability modifies the *armor training* class feature.

**Tikikso (Ex):** At 18th level, a tkisk can bite a single target and infect them with the tikikso disease. This immediately causes the target to become nauseated and then follows the all normal rules of diseases. He may do this once a day.

This ability modifies the *armor mastery* class feature

**Weapon Mastery (Ex):** The tkisk archer must choose a type of natural for his Weapon Mastery class feature.

This ability modifies the *weapon mastery* class feature.

### **Tikikso**

Tikikso is a potent blend of roddun saliva and blood. When it enters a non-roddun's bloodstream, it attacks the nervous system, causing the target's muscles to convulse violently and uncontrollably. The victim is helpless while under its effects, his muscles tightening and constricting. Finally, the victim's entire body bends into a painful arch while every muscle spasms. The victim dies quickly thereafter.

**Type** disease, injury;

**Save** Fortitude DC = 10 + 1/2 the roddun's level + the roddun's Constitution modifier

**Frequency** 1/day

**Effect** 1d6 Str, Con and Dex damage (this damage cannot be healed while the creature is infected);

### **Oracle Mystery: Gemstones**

While the uvandir were the first to stumble across the magic and power of gemstones, it was the roddun who tapped into their true power. Roddun oracles have discovered something even the uvandir have not been able to reproduce. Why is that? What is different about the roddun that allows them to do this? Human scholars have pondered the question for years, but so far, they have no answers.

The roddun gemstone oracle—called a *sitchik*—not only taps into innate powers, but also receives visions from the stones she uses. She sees visions of the past, the future and places far away. She feels as if all the world was a tiny drop of water falling through a black, endless sky. She feels voices speaking through her fingers, the language alien and yet familiar. She feels at one with the world and separate from it, all at once.

Most *sitchik* go mad from these visions. A few survive. Those who reach the highest levels receive a final vision: a sense that all the world is a piece of art. A painting or sculpture that is in constant flux by the creator. All the world is one thing, every single living creature is part of a vast tapestry or plan. And that every moment is the same moment, that all events are a single event, all happening at once.

This last vision is the one that either blasts the roddun into complete madness or lifts her to powers that few can understand and that she cannot begin to articulate.

**Requirements:** Roddun

**Class Skills:** An oracle with the gemstones mystery adds Appraise, Climb and Survival to her list of class skills.

**Bonus Spells:** vanish (2nd), owl's wisdom (4th), haste (6th), stonewall (8th), interposing hand (10th), owl's wisdom, mass (12th), statue (14th), protection from spells (16th), fiery body (18th).

### Revelations:

*Amber (Su):* As a swift action, you may touch a piece of amber to a melee weapon imbuing the weapon with the *rest eternal* spell. The first creature slain by this weapon activates the spell. The weapon remains imbued until the spell is used or 24 hours passes, whichever comes first. This ability may be used once a day and one additional time at 14th level. You must be at least 7th level to select this revelation.

*Amethyst (Su):* You conjure an earring made of amethyst that grants you a +2 enhancement bonus to Charisma. At 8th level, this earring's bonus increases to +4. At 16th level, this earring's bonus increases to +6. You can use this earring for 1 day per oracle level. The duration does not need to be consecutive; it can instead be spent in 1 day increments.

*Chrysoberyl (Su):* You may hold a piece of chrysoberyl up to your eye. When looking through the gemstone you gain a bonus to perception checks equal to half your oracle level.

*Coral (Ex):* While holding a piece of coral in your mouth you breathe water as if it was air.

*Garnet (Su):* If you are wearing garnet when any ally of yours is critically hit within 30 feet of you, you can negate any damage. This is a free action. You can only do this once per day and an additional number of times for every 3 oracle levels you possess.

*Jade (Su):* While wearing jade, when an ally within 30 feet of you fails a Fortitude save against any kind of disease, they can immediately re-roll

their saving throw with your Charisma modifier as a morale bonus. You can do this a number of times a day equal to 3 + your Charisma modifier.

*Jet (Ex):* While wearing jet, your base speed increases by 10 feet. At 7th level you gain *combat reflexes* as a bonus feat even if you do not meet the prerequisites. At 15th level, you can add your Charisma modifier to your AC as a dodge bonus.

*Pearl (Sp):* You can use pearls to send messages to your allies. You may link a number of pearls equal to 3 + your Charisma modifier together. When placed in the ear, the pearl can be used to send a message as per the *message spell* to all other pearls linked to it. You must be at least 7th level to select this revelation.

*Spinel (Su):* You conjure a necklace made of spinel that grants you a +4 armor bonus. At 7th level, and every four levels thereafter, this bonus increases by +2. At 13th level, this necklace gains the *reflecting* property. You can use this necklace for 1 hour per day per oracle level. The duration does not need to be consecutive; it can instead be spent in 1-hour increments.

*Tourmaline (Sp):* If you are wearing tourmaline, you may choose a number of allies up to 3 + your Charisma modifier. They automatically succeed at a *fear*-based saving throws, magical or mundane. This is a free action. You can only do this once per day.

### Final Revelation:

Upon reaching 20th level, you understand the world's inner workings. As a free action, you can change a successful action into a failure or vice versa. You can do this a number of times a day equal to your oracle level.



## Kuba-chubisi

### **Bard Archetype: Sheshen**

The word “sheshen” is a bit of a backhanded compliment. The kuba-chubisi use it to describe one of their kind who has developed a strong empathetic bond with humanity. Too strong. The kuba-chubisi believe a distant respect is the best way to interact with humanity, but a “sheshen” is one who has “fallen in love” with their silent allies.

Sheshen also have a unique advantage over their kin: because of their relationship with humanity, they can do more than just influence them indirectly. Through his own generosity and kindness, a sheshen can earn favors from men, and thus, expect favors in return. A sheshen rarely uses these favors for his own personal advantage, but instead, uses them to better the lives of others. “We all need help,” a sheshen may say. “I just make it easier for everyone to get the help they need. And the more we are connected, the less we feel alone.”

It is a different kind of magical geometry the sheshen practice: a complex network of interpersonal connections that makes the whole City thrive.

**Requirements:** Kuba-Chubisi

### **Class Features**

The following are class features of sheshen.

**Favors:** A sheshen knows that the simple connections between individuals can have far greater value than any treasure. Starting at 1st level he may use the friendships and contacts he has made to call in a favor representing debts owed, friendly assistance, or convenient aid on the wrong side of the law. He gains a number of favor points (FP) equal to 3 + his Charisma modifier. At 4th level, and at every three levels thereafter, the sheshen gains one additional favor point. The sheshen regains 1 FP per week.

*Minor Favor (1FP):* A favor that does not require significant resources, cause inconvenience to the giver, or require the breaking of any laws. Examples include providing a night’s food and lodging, the loaning of minor personal items of no significant value, assistance navigating through a city for a day, or arranging a meeting with an accessible NPC.

*Significant Favor (2FP):* A favor that may require the expenditure of minor resources on the part of the giver. Laws may be broken, but the consequences of being detected are not particularly harsh and personal risks are minimal. Examples include the loan of valuable but replaceable possessions, arranging a meeting

with a normally inaccessible NPC, acting as a guide through a safe region for several days, or gaining access to lightly restricted area.

*Weighty Favor (3FP):* A favor that forces the expenditure of significant resources, breaks multiple laws, and puts the giver at great risk of harm or punishment if their involvement is found out. Examples include providing an escort through dangerous territory, procuring highly illegal items from the black market, obtaining highly valuable information known only to a select few, or setting aside one's duty to assist the sheshen.

At the GM's discretion, particularly unusual, dangerous, or hard-to-come-by favors may require the expenditure of additional favor points. This ability replaces the *bardic knowledge* class feature.

**Mundane Semblance:** At 2nd level, the sheshen gains the *Mundane Semblance* feat even if he does not meet the prerequisites.

This ability replaces the *well-versed* class feature.

**Friendly Reputation:** At 5th level, when the sheshen is within a City and meeting a creature for the first time, the creature has already heard of him in a positive manner unless the sheshen has acted hostile to them prior to the meeting. The sheshen gains a bonus equal to half his character level (minimum 1; round down) to all social rolls during his first interactions with the creature.

This ability replaces the *lore master* class feature.

## New Sheshen Feats

### Extra Favors

*You've spent enough time in human Cities to know the true economy isn't gold; it's favors.*

Prerequisite: Favors class feature

Benefit: You gain three additional favor points.

Special: You can gain Extra Favors multiple times.

## Wizard Archetype: Nuahltec

The first race to contact and focus the energies of the planes were the kuba-chubisi. It was their knowledge, passed down through found scrolls and wall drawings, that allowed men to capture that same knowledge. Unfortunately for men, not all secrets survived in those sources. The nuahltec, a kuba-chubisi fluent with the secrets of magic, has control over the powers of earth, air, fire and water like no man ever dreamed.

**Requirements:** Kuba-chubisi

### Class Features

The following are class features of nuahltec

**Antimagic School:** The nuahltec must specialize in the Antimagic focused arcane school. In addition, he also gains a metamagic bonus feat at 1st level.

This ability modifies the *arcane school* class feature.

**Arcane Bond:** The nuahltec must taken a bonded item when choosing his arcane bond. This ability functions like the normal arcane bond expect the nuahltec can add metamagic feats when using the bonded item's ability. The spell must follow all of the normal rules of using metamagic feats.

This ability modifies the *arcane bond* class feature.

### New Focused Arcane School: Antimagic

More than any other spellcaster in the Known World, the kuba-chubisi understand the deep secrets of magic. This

knowledge allows them to use magic – and dispel it – unlike any other wizard.

**Requirements:** Kuba-Chubisi, Nuahltec Archetype

**Associated School:** Abjuration

**Replacement Powers:** The following school powers replace the *protective ward* and *energy absorption* power of the abjuration school.

**Antimagic Field:** At 8th level, the nuahltec can create an aura around himself that stops magic from functioning as per the spell *antimagic field*. Except he can only use this aura for 1 min per wizard level. The duration does not need to be consecutive; it can instead be spent in 1 minute increments.

**Modified Antimagic Field:** At 15th level, the nuahltec can modify his antimagic field to be more selective. He can identify 3 + his Intelligence modifier creatures or items that are immune to his antimagic field. He must identify them upon the use of his antimagic field and cannot be changed until he casts a new antimagic field.

### **Prestige Class: Thesall**

Centuries of knowledge compacted into one mind. That is the thesall. The kuba-chubisi word means “vessel of knowledge,” and is usually reserved for libraries. But some of their kind have memories like reservoirs: they can visually draw memory from everything they’ve ever read, ever seen, ever heard, ever done.

What’s more, the thesall sees subtle links where others do not. He can put together disparate pieces of knowledge, forming patterns. Idea geometry.

But a thesall’s duty isn’t just to collect information. He studies the enemies of his race, collates the data, identifies weaknesses and exploits them. He shares his knowledge with those he trusts, and together, they undo the strength of their nemesis.

### **Requirements:**

To qualify to become a thesall, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Race: Kuba-Chubisi, Ageless Racial Trait

Skills: Three Knowledge skills 3 ranks, Sense Motive 2 ranks

Spells: Able to cast 3rd-level divine spells.

### **Class Skills**

The Thesall’s class skills are Appraise (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (all) (Int), Linguistics (Int), Perception (Wis), and Sense Motive (Wis)

**Skill Ranks per Level:** 5 + Int modifier

### **Class Features**

The following are class features of the thesall.

**Weapons and Armor Proficiency:** Thesalls gain no proficiency with any weapon or armor.

**Spells per Day/Spells Known:** When a new thesall level is gained, the character gains new spells per day as if had also gained a level in the spellcasting class she belonged to before adding the prestige class. She does not, however, gain other benefits a character of that class would have gained, except for additional spells per day, spells known (if she is a spontaneous spellcaster), and an increased effective level of spellcasting. If a character had more than one spellcasting class before becoming a thesall she must decide to which class she adds the new level for purpose of determining spells per day.



**Secret Insight:** At 1st level, a thesall selects a creature type to be highly knowledgeable about. As a swift action, she can make the appropriate knowledge check at DC 15 against a selected creature to grant an ally within 30 feet a bonus to attack and damage equal to her current thesall level. At every new thesall level she can select a new creature type.

### Secret Insight Types

- Aberration
- Animal
- Construct
- Dragon
- Plant
- Fey
- Humanoid
- Magical Beast
- Monstrous Humanoid
- Ooze
- Outsider
- Undead
- Vermin

**Insightful Step (Ex):** At 2nd level, a thesall gains her Wisdom modifier as a *dodge* bonus to her AC against her secret insight creatures.

**Weakness Revealed:** At 3rd level, a thesall automatically confirms all criticals against her secret insight creatures.

**Improved Insightful Step (Ex):** At 4th level, a thesall grants her Wisdom modifier as a *dodge* bonus to all allies within 30 feet against her secret insight creatures.

**Masterful Insight:** At 5th level, a thesall gains her thesall level to any saving throws against her secret insight creatures. In addition, whenever she grants her ally a secret insight bonus, they also gain her thesall level to any saving throws against the secret insight creature.

**Table: Thesall**

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1st	+0	+1	+0	+1	1st secret insight	+1 level of existing class
2nd	+1	+1	+1	+1	2nd secret insight, insightful step	+1 level of existing class
3rd	+1	+2	+1	+2	3rd secret insight, weakness revealed	+1 level of existing class
4th	+2	+2	+1	+2	4th secret insight, improved insightful step	+1 level of existing class
5th	+2	+3	+2	+3	5th secret insight, masterful insight	+1 level of existing class



# uz: The Enemy

How fast do you have to run when evil is on your heels?

I know the answer. You can never run fast enough.

They have no name. Names are a convention they dropped long ago. The closest thing to a name they have is what we called them.

The uz. The Enemy.

They made us. Crafted us to be slaves. They crafted the uvandir to dig their underground palaces. They crafted the gnomes to hunt and breed their captive creatures. And they crafted us to serve.

They controlled us from their still, dark pools. I still remember the bathing. That salty water, spreading it over their bulbous skin. They controlled us with just their thoughts. Sending pain for punishment and pleasure for rewards. I have seen men drunk on wine. The uz kept us drunk so we would obey. And when we did not... I still wake at night from the memory.

Shaking sweat. Terror. A scream caught in my throat.

There is no hate in the world greater than the hate I have for my old master. And there is no love greater. Even now, I pine for him. Even now I wish to feel his thoughts caressing my mind. Reassuring whispers that calm my fears and still my troubled thoughts. Oh, if I could only return to him, the love he would give me would be worth the pains of my punishment...

– Vilhelm Gansj, haffun bulter

Uz. Enemy.

That is the only name they have. Long ago, they surpassed the need for names. Now, they are known by the name their slaves gave them. They say the name means, “enemy.” But that is only half the truth.

“Baln’Uz.” Beloved enemy.

But as far as men are concerned—and elves and gnolls and goblins and anyone else who asks—they are simply “the uz.” That is, if the underfolk even speak of them at all.

But who is this Enemy? And how did the underfolk escape their grasp? Now that, my friend, is a tale worth telling...

## **Creatures of Dim Water**

The uz are an ancient race. Perhaps even as old as men. But men came to this place from another, traveling across the water. The uz came from elsewhere as well: a magical accident.

The continent men call “Estvere” is not the native home of the uz. They came from another world. And the accident that brought them here has trapped them here as well. There is no going back. Not that the uz care. They have found their new home to be a place of great opportunity. They have built an underground empire—through the hands of others—and created servants to serve them in this empire.

Each of the underfolk—the haffuns, the uvandir and the gnomes—were created by the uz for the purpose of luxury. You see, the uz have evolved beyond the need for physical bodies, although they have not evolved to the point where they can

do without them. So, they created their slaves to undertake what they consider to be “dirty work.”

As for the uz themselves, there is a significant physical and social difference between males and females. To be clear, the uz are almost completely alien in physiology than the other races in Estvere. All uz could be considered cephalopods, although this is mostly a cosmetic similarity. Males are bloated, nearly immobile creatures. Females are generally slender and more physically active. This is because males dominate a dark, thick, oily substance they call *oszttechnik* (“dim water”) that provides nutrients through the skin and also boosts inherent abilities within all uz. Males keep it for themselves and make sure it does not get into the hands of their females.

Because of their dependence on dim water, male uz cannot exist long without it. But, if as long as their skin remains moist, they can move outside their pools for short periods of time. Most uz have servants who constantly “bathe” them in dim water, allowing the substance to seep through their skin, providing power, sustenance and pleasure.

Meanwhile, female uz are slimmer, more physically capable and are not as reliant upon dim water to survive. They can use it as male uz do, to augment natural abilities, but they do not suffer when they go without it. If a female *does* become dependent upon dim water, they can suffer the same withdrawal symptoms their male counterparts do.

All uz have abilities unique to the world. These are not magical or divine powers, but something else entirely. They are alien to Estvere, as are the uz themselves, belonging in another place with

different rules. These abilities allow the uz to control the will of another, to bend his mind, to make him subservient to the desires of the uz. Because males spend their entire lives swimming in dim water, these powers overwhelm any need to pursue physical activities. A male uz can simply command another to do his bidding. He need never lift a tentacle his entire life. Also, dim water keeps all uz virtually immortal. A fact that has stagnated uz culture for thousands of years.

Female uz have a far different life than their male counterparts. The female uz, also immortal, serve as “wives” for the males. Each male has a concubine of females who all perform his bidding. They do so out of threat of violence and overwhelming willpower. They are forced to serve, forced to mate and forced to do as their husbands command. A female uz has little choice in her life; her husband makes all her choices for her.

All females undergo a degrading and humiliating ritual that binds them to their male counterparts. They are forced to drink the water of their husband’s pool and perform other acts of subservience and submission.

After mating, if a female becomes pregnant, the male uz mentally kills the child. There are two reasons for this. First, the uz want no more children. Their culture is one that hangs on the edge of a blade, delicately balanced above a sea of chaos. We’ll explain more in a moment. Second, the uz make dim water from the minds of living creatures. They impregnate their women so they may kill the children and produce more dim water.

Male uz sometimes trade wives. When a male uz becomes bored with one of his spouses, he makes arrangements with another male uz for a trade. Male uz also force their wives to fight for their pleasure, betting on the outcomes.

Yes, the life of a female uz is dark, pitiless and near hopeless. They are slaves trapped in a world of wickedness and depravity. True evil. And any of them would do *anything* to escape.

Anything.

## **A Labyrinth of Tyranny**

The uz have no youth, no adulthood, no old age. Because of dim water, they are effectively immortal. The uz who exist now have existed for thousands of years. Even the females—who have little access to dim water—have been alive for just as long, their physical perfection maintained by minute amounts of *oszttechnik*.

The uz live in a vast labyrinth of caves carved out by the hands of their uvandir slaves. Each uz is the king of his own territory, the emperor of his own domain (the uz word is *ukrull*, or “overlord”) These domains extend to as far as their mental powers can reach. The more powerful a mind the uz has, the further his “reach” extends.

Each ukrull protects his invisible borders with slaves, hunting for intruders. All of the slaves are beasts created by the uz for specific purposes. Giant, bulbous and carnivorous oozing horrors that slide through the corridors, devouring everything in their path. Warrior insects that poison and kill those who infiltrate the master’s realm. Floating masses of eyes who scan the

corridors for intruders. All of these creatures serve the uz, maintaining their strict borders.

For thousands of years, the uz have maintained a kind of peace. They seldom, if ever, violate the invisible borders created by their neighbors. The uz know that if war ever broke out, their delicate peace would be shattered. It happens from time to time—one uz invades the territory of another—but it has happened only three times in the history of their culture. All three times, the population decreased by significant amounts. The uz then swear they will never shed blood again. At least, until it happens again.

However, this time, that oath may remain in place. The last civil war nearly destroyed the race. And with so few uz remaining, another war might drive the species to extinction. This is why the uz murder all their children: any new uz would compromise the balance they now have. There will never again be another uz overlord. The peace is too important and having children is too great a risk. At least, that is what the overlords tell themselves. The deeper truth may be that the uz have reached a geographical limit: their empire can stretch no further. Another ukrull would mean someone would have to give up ground, and no ukrull wants that. Therefore, all children are devoured while still in their mothers' wombs. The act feeds the need for more dim water and keeps another ukrull from entering the world.

## **The Slaves**

The uz have an affinity for corruption and manipulation. Over the centuries, they have created many species to serve them while they bathe in their dim water pools. Some servants are unique: only one exists. Others are

entire races of slaves, specifically designed to serve the degraded whims of their masters.

Listed below are some of the species designed by the uz and how these slaves fulfill their masters' needs.

### **The Kaszh'nek**

Originally bred for tournament fighting, the uz also noticed the kaszh'nek had a knack for obeying orders without question. This profound loyalty made them the perfect personal guards.

An adult kaszh'nek stands a full head taller than the average human (about the same size as an ork). They are thin and wiry, moving as if their bones were made of rubber. Their blood is poisonous to most other creatures: cutting open a kaszh'nek's skin risks a splash of venom. Kaszh'nek weapons are made from the bones of their fallen, and thus, their weapons are even more poisonous. kaszh'nek poison initially causes a sick, wretched broil in the guts, then limb weakness. Finally, the victim falls, spasming to death. Additionally, the kaszh'nek's bones jut out from their skin. The bones are barbed and spurred, making them perfect tearing and ripping weapons.

The kaszh'nek bodyguard will fight to protect his master without any consideration to his own safety. The kaszh'nek love to fight. They were bred for it. A kaszh'nek does not think of "I" or "me." He thinks only of the master. The master feeds him, gives him comfort, gives him everything he desires. There is only the master's wishes and fulfilling them. Reasoning with a kaszh'nek is impossible. Trying to get him to betray his master is impossible. The kaszh'nek are not competitive. When they fight in the pits, it is not for personal pride, but because their master wished it. No other reason. The very thought of his own personal gain is a completely

alien idea to him. He is the master's limb. Does an arm or a leg think of its own needs? No.

The kaszh'nek reproduce through parthenogenesis (embryos occurs without sexual reproduction).

Kaszh'nek become pregnant once per year.

Pregnancy lasts for one month. After that, the

kaszh'nek lays between five to ten eggs. The

eggs are heavy and leathery. A kaszh'nek lays

them in a clutch in their master's dim water

and they hatch approximately one month later.

That time in the dim water mutates the embryos inside the eggs, making them loyal to the uz.

## **The Hunger**

They cannot think. They cannot reason. They only hunger.

A hunger (a name dubbed by the gnomes) is a large, viscous blob of ooze that wanders the labyrinths of the uz. The blob takes up the entire width of the cavern, allowing nothing to move by it.

Hungers are not born but bred. One of the side effects of living an entire life in dim water are the pustules that grow on the uz's skin. The uz use these to breed hungers.

A hunger moves through the labyrinth looking for food. It can smell, but it cannot see. It also feels vibrations and follows them. When a hunger finds a target, it emits an electrical shock (up to 20"). The shock stuns its target, immobilizing it. Then, the hunger oozes over its target. The ooze contains oxygen, so the victims do not immediately die. Rather, they remain alive as the hunger digests them. The hunger also acts as a kind of "mental amplifier," sending the pain and despair of its living victims into the minds of future targets. This often causes those around the hunger to suffer from despair and helplessness.

Hungers are vulnerable to fire, but their size often extinguishes any blaze. Covering the oozing substance with oil, and then igniting the oil, is the best way to harm a hunger.

## **The Adon'de'nadoi**

Once a proud people, the adon'de'nadoi are now slaves of the uz. The uz conquered the adon'de'nadoi while they travelled the astral plane. They made war with the adon'de'nadoi, conquered them, and made them slaves.

Now, the adon'de'nadoi serve as astral guardians for the uz, monitoring the regions around their labyrinth. The physical bodies of the adon'de'nadoi are trapped in the physical world, bound by silver chains, while their astral forms wander the plane, looking for intruders.

In the physical plane, the bodies of the adon'de'nadoi are pathetic creatures. They look like thin, nearly mummified corpses. Slaves feed the bodies drops of dim water to keep them alive, but only barely. This way, if an adon'de'nadoi chooses to return to his body, there is no hope for escape.

Meanwhile, on the astral plane, the adon'de'nadoi are impressive creatures. Humanoid and beautiful. They fight with silver swords and other weapons designed for astral combat. In other words, "designed to cut your silver cord."

Enslaved in their physical bodies, the adon'de'nadoi have little choice but to serve their masters. Disobedience means death.

## **The Remains**

Not all the underfolk escaped the uz. Some were captured, others did not have the courage to flee. Some even disagreed with escape. And so, there are haffuns, gnomes and uvandir who still serve the uz in the

Labyrinth. Those who lament never leaving and those who are content in their servitude.

## A Silent Revolt

The male uz are confident in their control of the Labyrinth, but under their notice, a small rebellion is taking place. The females have been working for centuries against the males, plotting and scheming. In fact, the female uz were a key component in the Escape. Without their assistance, it would have never worked. The females made an agreement with the leaders of the Escape: We assist you and you bring back help.

It has been a few hundred years since that agreement was reached. Only a few underfolk even know about it. Most believe they escaped on their own accord. Meanwhile, the females wait in the Labyrinth. Waiting for the underfolk to fulfill their end of the bargain.

Even hundreds of years later, the females maintain hope. And they still find quiet, invisible ways of working against the males. And there are so few ways to do it. Because the males use the females as spies on the other males, they spread misinformation and distrust. But the females practice a much more important form of revolt...

The males believe there have been no new children for a millennia. They are wrong. The females have been hiding pregnancies, giving birth, and sequestering the children. This is a deadly game. Any disobedience at all requires a slow, painful and public death from the males. And so, the females have been careful. In the last one thousand years, they have managed to sequester only a dozen or so children. But these are children free from the influence of the males. Children unbound to any master. Soon, they will have an army of their own.

## Uz Subservient

*This creature's torso has the rough approximation of a mouthless female human, except for its smooth hairless gray skin and wide unblinking black eyes. It possesses a long slug-like lower body that secretes a trail of slime behind it.*

### Uz Subservient CR 12 XP 19,200

NE Medium female aberration

**Init** +10; **Senses** darkvision 60ft., Perception +10

**Aura** bonded servant (100 ft.)

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 27, touch 17, flat-footed 20 (+6 Dex, +10 natural, +1 dodge)

**hp** 198 (17d8+124)

**Fort** +9, **Ref** +11, **Will** +12

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** 2 slams +16 (1d6+4 plus grab)

**Special Attacks** constrict (1d6+4 plus poison)

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 17th, concentration +21)

1/day – *blindness/deafness* (DC 16), *borrow skill* (APG), *calm emotions* (DC 16), *charm person* (DC 15), *command* (DC 15), *lesser confusion* (DC 15), *reckless infatuation* (DC 17, UM), *suggestion* (DC 17)

3/day – *quicken lesser confusion* (DC 15), *quicken suggestion* (DC 17)

#### STATISTICS

Str 18, Dex 24, Con 20, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 18

Base Atk +12; CMB +16 (+20 to grapple); CMD 32

Feats dodge, improved initiative, improved natural attack, quicken spell-like ability (*suggestion*), quicken spell-like ability (*lesser confusion*), skill focus (bluff), skill focus (perform), spell penetration, greater spell penetration

**Skills** Acrobatics +26, Bluff +27, Diplomacy +21, Perception +10, Perform (dance) +20, Sense Motive +18, Spellcraft +10, Stealth +19, Swim +12

**Languages** none (telepathy, 100 ft.)

**SQ** bonded servant, dim pool potential

## ECOLOGY

**Environment** any

**Organization** solitary or harem (3-12)

**Treasure** standard

## SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Bonded Servant (Su)** It is rare to the point of legendary for a female uz to not be bound to an uz sovereign by the drinking of the dim water. As such, each uz subservient possesses the abilities of a bonded servant (see the uz sovereign description). The mentally powerful nature of the female uz makes them ideal conduits for the powers of their male counterparts and extends the radius of their dominion aura to 100 ft.

**Dim Pool Potential (Su)** If a uz subservient spends at least 24 hours within a dim pool, she gains all of the special and spell-like abilities of an uz sovereign. Furthermore, she gains immunity to mind affecting effects and spell resistance equal to 10 + her HD + her Charisma modifier. These abilities fade 24 hours after the uz subservient exits the dim pool.

**Euphoria (Ex)** The slime exuded by the lower half of an uz subservient is a natural euphoric, but is also said to cause hallucinations and madness. This acts as a contact poison that

the uz subservient can apply to opponents as part of a constrict special attack.

**Euphoria (Ex)** Constrict-contact; *save* Fort DC 23, *frequency* 1/round for 2 rounds, *effect* 1d4 Wis; *cure* 1 save

## Variant: Uz Subversive (+0 CR)

Untold years of mind controlled servitude to their male counterparts have slowly built up a burgeoning natural resistance to the mental chains of the males. Fortunately, the males are not yet aware of this mutation and how widespread it has become among their harems.

**Guarded Thoughts (Su)** An uz subversive may project whatever surface thoughts she chooses for the purposes of the *detect thoughts* spell. Furthermore, she may project any alignment she wishes for the purposes of divination effects and receives a +4 racial bonus to Bluff checks.

**Subversion (Su)** An uz subversive is always aware of when she is affected by any enchantment (charm or compulsion) effect. She may always choose to resist a direct order or actively work to subvert commands or requests with a successful Will save. If she can pass a Bluff check with a DC equal to the 10 + the save DC of the effect, she can convince the caster that they have been commanded or controlled as normal.

## Adon'de'nadoi

*Rising from the emaciated half-dead creature bound by silver chains is a beautiful spectral humanoid that shines with a brightness that belies the heart wrenching look of depression on its face. It reaches behind itself to draw a long shining silver scimitar.*

## Adon'de'nadoi CR 9

XP 4,800

LN Medium outsider (incorporeal, native)



**Init** +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Perception +18  
**Aura** bonded servant (30 ft.)

## DEFENSE

**AC** 26, touch 26, flat-footed 14 (+4 deflection, +5 Dex, +2 monk, +5 Wis)  
**hp** 125 (10d10+70)

**Fort** +8, **Ref** +12, **Will** +12

**Defensive Abilities** incorporeal

## OFFENSE

**Speed** fly 60 ft. (perfect)

**Melee** +4 brilliant energy ghost touch scimitar +21/+16/ (1d6+6/15-20) or +4 brilliant energy ghost touch scimitar flurry of blows +19/+19/+14/+14 (1d6+6/15-20)

**Special Attacks** silver blade

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 10th)

At Will – *mage hand*, *dimension door*

1/day – *telekinesis* (DC 19)

## STATISTICS

**Str** -, **Dex** 20, **Con** 20, **Int** 16, **Wis** 20, **Cha** 18

**Base Atk** +10; **CMB** +15; **CMD** 25

**Feats** Dimensional Agility (UC), Dimensional Assault (UC), Dimensional Dervish (UC), Dimensional Savant (UC), Improved Critical (scimitar)

**Skills** Acrobatics +18, Bluff +17, Intimidate +17, Knowledge (planes) +16, Fly +18, Perception +18, Sense Motive +18, Spellcraft +16, Stealth +18

**Languages** Common, Elven, Undercommon; telepathy 30 ft.

**SQ** bonded servant, natural monastic, projection

## ECOLOGY

**Environment** any

**Organization** solitary, pair, or gang (3-8)

**Treasure** none

## SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Bonded Servant (Su)** All adon'de'nadoi have the bonded servant template (which is factored into their statistics).

**Natural Monastic (Ex)** All adon'de'nadoi instinctually understand martial techniques that other creatures take a lifetime to master. An adon'de'nadoi counts as a monk of its HD for the purposes of the flurry of blows ability and the monk bonus to AC.

**Projection (Su)** An adon'de'nadoi is capable of projecting his mind and spirit away from his physical form as a free action. While so projected he may travel either the material or astral plane and may switch between them as a standard action. When on the astral plane he acts as if under the effects of the *astral projection* spell. While on the astral or material plane he is incorporeal and connected to his comatose body by an incorporeal silver cord as the *astral projection* spell. He may end or resume this ability as a free action. The statistics above are for an adon'de'nadoi projection. When an adon'de'nadoi is not projecting, his physical ability scores all become 1 and he loses access to his spell-like abilities.

**Silver Blade (Su)** While using his projection ability, an adon'de'nadoi is capable of forming weapons from his incorporeal silver cord as a standard action. While this ability is active, the adon'de'nadoi's does not possess a silver cord. The silver blade acts as a +4 silver weapon with both the brilliant energy and ghost touch weapon enhancements. The silver blade may take the form of any weapon that the adon'de'nadoi is proficient in, but is most commonly a scimitar.

These weapons are capable of destroying the silver cords of other astral travelers on a successful critical hit that specifically targets a silver cord. If this weapon is sundered, it acts as if the adon'de'nadoi's silver cord had been cut. A weapon formed using the silver blade ability always counts as both a light weapon and special monk weapon no matter what form it takes.

## Kaszh'nek

*This tall and thin creature moves with deadly swiftness and purpose. Its greenish-black body appears to have more bony spikes and quills than flesh, giving it the appearance of a living weapon.*

### Kaszh'nek CR 15

XP 51,200

LE Large aberration

**Init** +9; **Senses** darkvision 60ft., Perception +13

**Aura** bonded servant (30 ft.)

### DEFENSE

**AC** 29, touch 17, flat-footed 21 (+7 Dex, +12 natural, -1 size, +1 dodge)

**hp** 210 (20d8+120) fast healing 5

**Fort** +9, **Ref** +13, **Will** +12

**DR** 10/bludgeoning

**Defensive Abilities** bone quills

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 40 ft.

**Melee** 2 slams +23 (1d8+6/19-20 plus poison)

**Special Attacks** barbed bones, venomous

### STATISTICS

**Str** 18, **Dex** 24, **Con** 17, **Int** 8, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 8

**Base Atk** +15; **CMB** +19; **CMD** 35

**Feats** Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Critical, Improved Natural Attack, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Stand Still, Toughness, Weapon Finesse

**Skills** Acrobatics +30, Climb +12, Perception +13, Survival +8, Swim +17

**Languages** none (telepathy, 30 ft.)

**SQ** bonded servant

### ECOLOGY

**Environment** any

**Organization** solitary or pack (3-6)

**Treasure** none

### SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Barbed Bones (Ex)** The bones of the kaszh'nek are covered in barbed spurs that lodge themselves in the skin of its victims. Creatures who are damaged by the attacks of a kaszh'nek receive an additional dose of poison each round after the first until the bone spurs are removed. The barbs may be removed with a full round action and a DC 25 Heal check. Spells that end the poisoned condition on the affected creature, such as *heal* or *neutralize poison*, end this effect.

**Bonded Servant (Su)** All kaszh'nek have the bonded servant template (which is factored into their statistics).

**Bone Quills (Ex)** Creatures who deal damage to the kaszh'nek with natural or unarmed attacks take damage as if they had been successfully hit by the kaszh'nek in melee, and are exposed to its barbed bones and venomous abilities.

**Venomous (Ex)** Every portion of the Kaszh'nek's body is poisonous to all non-aberrations. Additionally, their blood is slightly pressurized and tends to burst from their wounds. Any creature that damages a kaszh'nek in melee

must succeed on a Reflex save at DC 23 or be exposed to the poison. Creatures who employ a weapon with reach are immune to this effect. The save DC is Constitution based.

**Poison (Ex)** Body – injury; save DC 23; *frequency* 1/round for 2 rounds; *effect* 1d6 Constitution damage; *cure* 1 save. The save DC is Constitution based.

## The Hunger

*The large bluish slime takes up the entirety of the tunnel ahead. Bits of rotting flesh and bone are boiled around within the ooze by bubbles of gas and arcs of electricity play upon its surface.*

### The Hunger CR 6

XP 2,400

N Large ooze

**Init** -5; **Senses** blindsight 60ft., Perception -5  
Aura aura of anguish (30 ft., DC 19)

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 4, touch 4, flat-footed 4 (-5 Dex, -1 size)

**hp** 94 (9d8+54)

**Fort** +9, **Ref** -2, **Will** -2

**Defensive Abilities** amorphous; **Immune** electricity, ooze traits; **Vulnerability** fire

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 20 ft.

**Melee** slam +7 (1d6+3 plus 1d6 nonlethal electrical)

**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 5ft.

**Special Attacks** engulf (DC 16), digestion (1d6 nonlethal electrical and paralysis, DC 19)

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 14, **Dex** 1, **Con** 22, **Int** -, **Wis** 1, **Cha** 1

**Base Atk** +6; **CMB** +9; **CMD** 14 (can't be tripped)

**SQ** ooze traits

#### ECOLOGY

**Environment** any

**Organization** solitary or cluster (4-12)

**Treasure** none

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Aura of Anguish (Su)** The hunger psychically broadcasts the pain and despair of those it is digesting to everyone around it. When the ooze is engulfing a living creature that has been paralyzed by its digestion ability, all creatures within 30 feet of the hunger must succeed on a DC 19 Will save or be shaken for as long as they remain within 30 feet of the ooze. If a creature succeeds on the Will save, they must make a new save each round on their initiative for as long as they remain within the radius of the hunger's aura of anguish. This is a mind affecting effect. The save DC is Constitution-based.

**Digestion (Ex)** Creatures engulfed by the hunger are slowly digested by the electrical currents running constantly through the ooze. The ooze produces oxygen within its body through electrolysis and so creatures that have been engulfed by the hunger are in no danger from suffocation. Creatures who have been engulfed must succeed on a DC 19 Fortitude save or be paralyzed for 3d6 rounds. Creatures within the hunger take 1d6 nonlethal electrical damage each round. The save DC is Constitution-based.

**Size Alteration (Su)** At will as a standard action, the hunger can change its size between Large and Huge. Any objects within the hunger do not change size with it.. When the hunger becomes Huge, it

gains +8 Strength, +4 Constitution and -1 size penalty to its AC and attacks.

**Shock (Su)** The hunger can release a stored up electrical charge against all creatures within 20 feet as a full-round action. The hunger can use its shock ability once every 1d4 rounds. Creatures affected by the hunger's shock ability must succeed on a DC 19 Fortitude save or be stunned for 1d6 rounds and take 7d6 nonlethal electrical damage. Succeeding on the Fortitude save halves the damage and negates the stunned effect. The save DC is Constitution-based.

### **The Hunger (Huge Size) CR 6 XP 2,400**

N Huge ooze

**Init** -5; **Senses** blindsight 60ft., Perception -5

**Aura** aura of anguish (30 ft., DC 21)

#### **DEFENSE**

**AC** 3, touch 3, flat-footed 3 (-5 Dex, -2 size)

**hp** 112 (9d8+72)

**Fort** +11, **Ref** -2, **Will** -2

**Defensive Abilities** amorphous; **Immune** electricity, ooze traits; **Vulnerability** fire

#### **OFFENSE**

**Speed** 20 ft.

**Melee** slam +10 (1d6+9 plus 1d6 nonlethal electrical)

**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 5ft.

**Special Attacks** engulf (DC 20), digestion (1d6 nonlethal electrical and paralysis, DC 21)

#### **STATISTICS**

**Str** 22, **Dex** 1, **Con** 26, **Int** -, **Wis** 1, **Cha** 1

**Base Atk** +6; **CMB** +14; **CMD** 19 (can't be tripped)

#### **SPECIAL ABILITIES**

**Digestion (Ex)** A huge hunger's digestion save is DC 21.

**Shock (Su)** A huge hunger's shock save is DC 21.

#### **Bonded Servant (CR +1)**

Individuals who imbibe the dim water of the Uz find themselves gifted with immortality and empowered with the power of stolen minds, but at the great cost of their freedom. This template may only be removed by a *miracle* or *wish* spell.

**Rebuild Rules:** +2 enhancement bonus to Intelligence and Charisma, telepathy (30 ft.), +2 hit points per HD, and a +2 insight bonus to attack, damage, and initiative rolls. The creature ceases aging once it reaches adulthood, but retains any existing aging penalties.

The creature is a bonded servant for the uz that controls the pool they have drunk from and is thus subject to the create bonded servant special ability of the uz sovereign (see next page).

### **Uz Sovereign**

*This great pulsating lump of flesh and pustules rests in a shallow pool of brackish gray water. Surrounding it are dozens of dead eyed creatures mechanically wetting towels in the liquid in order to keep the great monster moist.*

### **Uz Sovereign CR 18**

**XP 153,600**

NE Huge male aberration

**Init** +2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft., Perception +34

**Aura** dominion (300 ft., DC 21)

#### **DEFENSE**

**AC** 12, touch 6, flat-footed 12 (-2 Dex, +6 natural, -2 size)

**hp** 294 (28d8+168)

**Fort** +14, **Ref** +6, **Will** +19

**Immune** mind-affecting; **SR** 31

## OFFENSE

**Speed** 5ft.

**Melee** none

### Spell-Like Abilities (CL

20<sup>th</sup>, concentration +26)

Constant – *detect thoughts* (DC 21)

At Will – *blindness/deafness* (DC 19), *borrow skill* (APG), *calm emotions* (DC 19), *charm monster* (DC 21), *greater command* (DC 22), *confusion* (DC 21), *coordinated effort* (APG), *interrogation* (DC 18, UM), *reckless infatuation* (DC 20, UM), *mass suggestion* (DC 23)

3/day – *demand* (DC 25), *quicken confusion* (DC 21), *quicken coordinated effort*, *quicken mass suggestion* (DC 23)

## STATISTICS

**Str** 12, **Dex** 6, **Con** 23, **Int** 21, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 25

**Base Atk** +21; **CMB** +24; **CMD** 32

**Feats** ability focus (dominion), broken wing gambit (UC), coordinated charge (UC), coordinated defense (APG), coordinated maneuvers (APG), duck and cover (APG), improved initiative, lookout (APG), pack attack (UC), spell penetration, greater spell penetration, quicken spell-like ability (*coordinated effort*), quicken spell-like ability (*mass suggestion*), quicken spell-like ability (*confusion*), skill focus (bluff)

**Skills** Bluff +41, Diplomacy +35, Intimidate +38, Knowledge (arcana) +33, Knowledge (local) +36, Knowledge (history) +23, Perception +34, Sense Motive +31, Spellcraft +25, Stealth +13, Swim +13

**Languages** none (telepathy, 300 ft.)

**SQ** create bonded servant, delayed command, sense desire

## ECOLOGY

**Environment** any

**Organization** solitary with guardians (20-100)

**Treasure** double standard

## SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Create Bonded Servant (Su)** When any creature drinks from an uz sovereign's pool of dim water, they must pass a Will save at DC 25 or become a bonded servant. The uz sovereign may communicate with a bonded servant telepathically at any distance, as long as they are on the same plane. The uz sovereign is considered to have a *dominate monster* effect on the bonded servant. The uz does not need to concentrate upon the servant to maintain the effect, but must still spend a move action giving orders or a standard action to use their senses. A bonded servant controlled in this manner can be made to perform self-destructive actions, although they may make a Will save at DC 25 to resist such commands. Each bonded servant radiates an aura of dominion out to a radius of 30 feet from themselves that an uz sovereign can *detect thoughts* or use its spell-like abilities within, as the dominion special ability. Once a creature becomes a bonded servant, the effects are permanent and can only be removed by a *miracle* or *wish* spell.

**Delayed Command (Su)** An uz sovereign can implant a subtle command into any creature's mind to be triggered later when certain conditions are met. This works like either the *command* or *suggestion* spell, except the casting time is increased to ten minutes, and the spell does not trigger until certain conditions as defined by the uz sovereign are met. The effects and duration of the spell is then delayed until these conditions are

met. The conditions needed to bring the spell into effect must be clear, although they can be general. In all cases, the spell is cast instantaneously when the prescribed circumstances occur. If complicated or convoluted conditions are prescribed, the spell may fail when triggered. A single creature may only have one delayed command cast upon them at any one time. Additional delayed commands overwrite previous delayed commands. This effect is permanent until discharged or dispelled.

**Dominion (Su)** An uz sovereign radiates a powerful psychic aura out to a radius of 300 feet. Within this area, the uz sovereign counts as having a continuous *detect thoughts* spell active at all times that does not require concentration to maintain. If this effect is dispelled or suppressed, the uz sovereign may resume it as a free action. Additionally, the uz sovereign may use any of its special or spell-like abilities to target any creatures within range of its personal dominion aura or the dominion aura of any bonded servant, ignoring the normal range and target restrictions for the spells and effects.

**Sense Desire (Su)** The uz sovereign instinctually understands the deepest workings of mortal minds as easily as most creatures perceive the meaning behind a smile or laughter. Whenever it uses an enchantment (charm) or (compulsion) effect, it is always aware of requests that would meet with resistance or go against the nature of the target. Whenever it uses an enchantment (compulsion) effect, it automatically understands how to phrase requests in such a way as to appear reasonable to the target. The uz sovereign receives a +4 bonus on all Charisma checks made to convince a charmed subject to take a given action.

## Hassja: The Whispering Darkness

With iron on our ankles, we ran. Far from the Reign, far from the man who called himself our master. We ran. But he found us. And when he found us, he killed her.

Feeling her warm blood ooze between my fingers, I looked up at the man with the bloody sword who took her life and saw no pity in his eyes. He looked down at me and smiled, his dirty beard speckled with her blood.

I stood and took my lover's blade in my own hand. The man said something in his vulgar tongue I did not understand and he thrust his iron weapon at me.

There was no skill in my hands. There was only rage. I killed him. A thrust under his throat and all the life spilled from him. It splashed on my chest and on my face. It was over. The man collapsed and I let him, the sword still jutting from under his chin rammed up into his skull and out the other side.

I stood there for only a moment, and then, fell to my knees. She was there, with no life in her. Her body already beginning to cool. Her life, gone. Her love, gone. All taken by this brutal beast who did not even know her name. A bandit looking for "elven gold," no doubt. And I felt the rage in my heart. It spread to my limbs and into my throat. I screamed.

I screamed until there were no more tears, until my throat was numb, until the sun was gone and there was only darkness. And I sat in the darkness, her body now stiff. Her empty eyes staring up at me. Her last word, "please," still stuck to her bloody lips.

And in the darkness, I heard another voice. A whisper.

She loved you, it said.

so much, it said.

Then, it told me, she loved you. You loved her. Love isn't enough. I can give you the strength to avenge her. I can make more than you were.

It promised me, Together, we will avenge her.

I felt the darkness wrap around me, its cold scales against my skin, its poison tongue in my ear. Its eyes... its mesmerizing eyes.

The Darkness offered its promise to me.

And with her corpse on my lap, I said, "Yes."

The elves call it, "the Darkness." That voice that tempts them. An ancient voice with a powerful promise.

But the elves are not the only race who has heard the whisper, nor are they the only race who has a connection to the Darkness. The orks do not call them, "the darkness." Instead, they call them, "the dead gods."

And even if they do not know it, the roddun share a common bond with both the elves and the orks. That bond is the race that calls itself, "the hassja."

The hassja created the orks and the roddun and are currently "experimenting" on elves. But who are they? And for what purpose?

For the highest purpose, of course. Knowledge.

## The Highest Priority

The hassja are an ancient race. They remember when men arrived, for they were hiding in the shadows even then. Centuries before, they ruled the continent of Estevere, but that was before they encountered the Enemy. After that meeting, everything was downhill.

But in the centuries before, the hassja were kings. They ruled from above and below the soil, in great mountain keeps and subterranean cities, and studied the four elements as well as Estevere's most elusive element: magic.

In the mind of the hassja, his world is broken down into *pratha*, or "priorities." He categorizes and sorts everything in his life into different importances. If something is less important than another, it is given no attention whatsoever. Only the highest current priority is worth attention.

All of hassja culture works this way. Every element of it.

For the hassja, the highest priority of all is *janja*, or "knowledge." The gaining of knowledge is *always* the top priority. Everything else falls by the wayside. Nothing is as important as gaining knowledge. All must be put at risk for knowledge. All other priorities are rescinded.



For the hassja, the following “hierarchy of priorities” apply to nearly every decision in their lives.

1. Increasing our knowledge
2. Knowledge preservation
  1. Preserve myself
  2. Preserve my assistants
  3. Make offspring
  4. Raise offspring properly to increase knowledge
3. Unnecessary to increasing or preserving knowledge

Part of that high *pratha* (or *ashta pratha*) is the passing down of knowledge to others. For the hassja culture, losing knowledge—or even worse, for knowledge to be knowingly and willfully destroyed—is the highest crime one of their kind can commit. Thus, passing their knowledge down to others becomes part of that *ashta pratha*. And that is where “knowledge families” come into play.

## The Knowledge Family

A knowledge family (or, *paripratha*) includes those the hassja has both genetic and sympathetic bonds with. The hassja do not automatically acknowledge their own offspring as part of their family; sometimes, you may have a stronger bond to one who is not related to you than those who are. The hassja recognize this and organize their family units by those who share similar interests and passions. Together, they compile their discoveries into large volumes called “family books” (*parikinta*) that the family shares.

And only the family.

The hassja families protect their discoveries and only share with other families when the sharing is mutual. “One of my discoveries for one of yours.” That sort of thing. Of course, “stealing” discoveries is also a part of hassja culture. It is considered a serious crime, but it happens all the time, and it is only a crime if you get caught, right?

Over the centuries, the hassja have gained all sorts of knowledge through various experiments. The issue for men rises (or *will rise*, if men ever meet them) when one considers that “moral consequences” of these experiments are things that never occur in the minds of the hassja.

All for knowledge. All other priorities rescinded.

### Personal Safety

The hassja do not throw their own lives away for discovery. Not necessarily. If you end your own life for discovery, that murders all the knowledge you possess. Remember: not only is discovery of knowledge important, but so is the preservation of knowledge.

### **Jhunsha: False Information**

The hassja have a taboo against lying, or as they would put it, “propagating false knowledge.” Because of their obsession with obtaining and preserving knowledge, lying creates the possibility of misinformation (or *jhunsha*).

A hassja wants his actions to be based on correct knowledge; a single lie can cause a misstep that leads him in a false direction.

Now, the hassja do not have a taboo against lying to non-hassja. In fact, misleading humans, elves and others is almost necessary to perform certain experiments; if the subject knows the intent of the experiment, that knowledge can corrupt the experiment itself, leading to false conclusions.

Finally, lying to superiors (the heads of your family) is considered not just a taboo, but a serious crime, often punished by isolation, mutilation or even death.

Want to know what happens when you release a magical plague on the Reign of Men that’s specifically designed to transform them into something else? That means you have to release a magical plague on the Reign of Men and see what happens. Men may suffer, yes, but knowledge comes first.

Want to know what happens when you create a race of bloodthirsty creatures and let them loose on the world? Yes, they could murder entire civilizations, but knowledge comes first.

Want to know what happens when you expose elves who have lost their souls to “dark magical energy?” Perhaps they will become a new species of elf. Perhaps they may even become so powerful, they rip holes in the world. Yes, but knowledge comes first.

Experiments don’t need to be “controlled.” Why would you attempt to *control* an experiment? Isn’t it better to watch what happens if you leave it to its own devices?

Shouldn’t safety be a priority? No. Knowledge is the priority. Unless, of course, it would mean the destruction of knowledge.

How about morals? No. Knowledge is the priority.

What if we damage the world permanently? Then we’ll know how to damage the world permanently, won’t we? And we’ll be put into the position of having to learn how to fix it.

Knowledge first. Everything else is second.

Of course, each hassja has to decide on his secondary and tertiary priorities. Everything falls into a cascading ladder of importance. This includes goals, other hassja, the human race, the health of the world, etc.

Just where do *you* fall on the hassja’s ladder of priorities? If something falls above you, he will let you die to protect it.

## **The Life of a Hassja**

The following section details the life of a hassja, covering youth, adulthood and old age.

### **Youth**

A hassja begins his life breaking free of a leathery egg in a hutch of perhaps a dozen eggs. He is usually one of the first (if not the first) to hatch because the first to hatch usually eats the eggs that have not yet

hatched. The hassja see this as “survival of the fittest.” Typically, the hassja separate the males and females, thus getting two eggs per clutch.

He is born with no arms or legs; he will learn how to “shed” into those later. His family takes care of his basic needs for the first year or so as he develops and grows. His family (the *paripratha*) consists of those who have bonded together out of mutual respect, not necessarily biology, as explained above. His parents are two hassja who have used a ritual to determine the biological strength of their offspring. Those who perform the ritual and find their offspring will be weak usually do not mate, although there are exceptions.

While growing up, our young hassja goes through rigorous training. His instruction begins almost immediately and continues until he reaches the age of maturity (about 16 years). He is taught the virtue of learning and is expected to continue his own education on his own.

But one word our young hassja learns demonstrates the weakness of other cultures. That word is, “empathy.” Empathy and emotion are weaknesses. They distort perception, and thus, endanger pure knowledge. The hassja mate because it preserves the species, and thus, preserves knowledge. They perform experiments on living creatures because it increases the knowledge of the species. While the survival of their own species is an important priority to the hassja, the survival of *other* species is not... unless it benefits the hassja or helps preserve their own culture.

Our hassja also learns how to “shed” (or *shedna*). This not only allows him to grow, but also allows him to change his shape. A hassja can shed into a pure snake form, a snake form with arms, a snake form with arms and legs or whatever combination he prefers.

His knowledge family contains two “heads of household.” The first is the *sintha*, and he is responsible for the first priority (gaining information). The second is the *mastha*, and she is responsible for the second priority. Other family members, called *sabi*, are responsible for maintaining assisting the *sintha* and the *mastha*. Neither the *sintha* nor the *mastha* are considered “higher” in authority; they share equally important responsibilities. (We should also note that although we used male and female genders to distinguish the two roles, the roles are *not* gender specific.)

## Adulthood

When he gains maturity, a hassja chooses an area of expertise to specialize in. His elders expect him to devote his life to research, study and experimentation. He picks an area that his family lacks and begins his own work, building on the work of others. His greatest accomplishment is discovering an error in another’s work; not because he seeks to prove others wrong, but because he hopes to increase the knowledge of his own family; it is considered an accomplishment to remove false beliefs from his family’s store of knowledge.

“Marriage” does not exist in hassja culture, nor does monogamy. Hassja mate because their union will produce strong offspring. Thus, our hassja mates with every female hassja who is a good match. The family raises children together, making the concept of “parentage” almost meaningless.

Meanwhile, our hassja continues his studies. He experiments and records his findings in the family library. He trades information with other families, thus adding even further to the family’s knowledge base.

## Old Age

After their defeat by the Enemy, the hassja were nearly extinct. They needed to discover a way to preserve their species, and thus, their knowledge. It took nearly a generation, but the hassja discovered a way. With magic, they have extended their lifespan from decades to centuries. Most live to at least three hundred years while some live even longer. The ritual requires drinking the life of other sentient creatures, and thus, hassja collect sentient life from all over Estevere for that very purpose.

But the end of our hassja's life is coming, no matter how long he postpones it. As he ages, his physical body begins breaking down, but his mind remains keen. As his body finally fails him, his family preserves his mind in a gemstone, forever keeping his wisdom and knowledge. Each family has hundreds of such stones, making a "library of minds" available for each member to consult when needed.

## The Science of Magic

Like everything else in the world, arcane energy is something that can be observed, recorded and predicted. That's how the hassja approach magic. Simple observation, repeated experimentation and revision of previous hypotheses is the proper method of gaining knowledge, and magic is no exception.

Magic operates under the same rules as everything else. Perform this gesture, say these words and use these materials and you get a predictable effect. A fireball is a fireball is a fireball. If you perform the ritual correctly, you get fire. Perform it incorrectly, you get nothing. Or an explosion. But what causes the explosion? Let's find out. We'll need some test subjects. Well, let's abduct them from above ground and see what happens...

Because of this approach, hassja are some of the most brilliant wizards in the world. In fact, much of what others know about magic comes from lost volumes from hassja ruins. The Reign gained their understanding of magic from those volumes. Yes, they build on the basic foundation, but every "magic user" in the Reign has the lost hassja empire to thank for its knowledge.

But the hassja have learned much more than the Reign has in the centuries that have passed by. That's because the hassja are much more willing to perform "morally dubious experiments" than men or their fellow arcane casters. Spells cast by the hassja are more effective than those cast by others. More cruel. More damaging. The effects last longer, the fires burn hotter and the cold bites deeper. Unhindered by moral limitations, their understanding of how magic works is so much more profound than the other races.

## Experiments

Long ago, the hassja co-existed on Estevere with many other peoples. They were a peaceful people, living in "hutches," studying magic, trading with their neighbors.

Then, the Enemy came.

The Enemy rampaged across the continent, destroying everything, absorbing technology and knowledge, adapting it to their own culture. They enslaved the people who surrendered and destroyed the cultures who did not. Two of the last races to stand against them were the *kuba-chubisi* and the hassja.

The *kuba-chubisi* fell first. Then, with no allies left, the Enemy turned to the hassja. The serpent-men who were not killed fled into the darkness, hidden from the Enemy. And, in hiding, they continued their experiments, but now with a more focused aim. A deadlier aim.

All experimentation was directed to defeating the Enemy.

Thus, the orks. An army of mindless, blood-thirsty killing machines who were taught to eat their enemies to gain their strength. They taught their soldiers that the hassja were gods and if the orks did their bidding, they would be rewarded. Unfortunately, the orks turned against their “gods” and a third of the hassja population was killed and eaten by their own experiment.

Thus, the roddun. The experiment attempted to strengthen men through forced evolution. Those who were weak would die and those who were strong would breed and make stronger men. But the experiment took on a different dimension entirely. Nobody knows where the roddun came from. Are they transformed men? Are they transformed rats? The hassja disagree on exactly what happened, but they do know the roddun are a result of the Plague of Blue Fire.

And finally, the gobowins. Again, there is some dissent among the hassja as to where the gobowins came from, but almost all of them agree that they are the result of hassja experimentation. At least, they’re mostly sure. Almost certain. Let’s grab a few and see... oh, that didn’t work out well. Let’s leave those things alone for now...

## Hassja, Spawn

*The six foot long black snake’s skin sloughs off in seconds before it rears back to show two long fangs dripping venom and eyes that shine with an alien intelligence.*

### Hassja CR 2

XP 600

NE Small aberration

**Init** +1; **Senses** darkvision 60ft., Perception +7

## DEFENSE

**AC** 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12  
(+1 Dex, +2 natural, +1 size)

**hp** 19 (3d8+6)

**Fort** +3, **Ref** +2, **Will** +3

**Weaknesses** light sensitivity

## OFFENSE

**Speed** 20 ft.

**Melee** bite +4 (1d4+1)

## STATISTICS

**Str** 12, **Dex** 12, **Con** 14, **Int** 13, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 8

**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 13

**Feats** Combat Expertise, Skill Focus (Knowledge)

**Skills** Escape Artist +7, Knowledge (any one) +10, Perception +7, Stealth +11, Survival +6

**Languages** common and hassja

**SQ** lesser shedding

## ECOLOGY

Environment any underground

**Organization** solitary, pair, or clutch (4-12)

**Treasure** none

## SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Lesser Shedding (Su)** A hassja spawn is capable of altering his form to resemble different types of snakes with some effort. As a full-round action, a hassja spawn may choose to transform into either a constrictor or venomous snake form and may remain in that form indefinitely. A hassja spawn in its constrictor form gains the grab, constrict, and swallow whole universal monster abilities. A hassja spawn in constrictor form can swallow whole any helpless creature that is up to one size category larger. If he swallows a creature

that is his size category or larger, the hassja spawn's size increases to the size of his victim and he is rendered immobile for 24 hours. A hassja spawn in his venomous form gains an immunity to poisons and his bite attack becomes poisonous.

**Venomous Form Poison (Ex)** bite – injury; save DC 12; *frequency* 1/round for 2 rounds; *effect* 1d2 Dexterity damage; *cure* 1 save. The save DC is Constitution based.

The hassja spawn hatch from large clutches of eggs. From an early age they must fight each other for scant resources when they are not being educated by their elders. Hassja spawn learn very quickly, but the first lesson is how to stay alive when surrounded by creatures as brutally intelligent and amoral as themselves. The venom of a hassja spawn slowly paralyzes their victims, and they prefer to weaken a foe before devouring their victim whole.

## Hassja, Young Adult

*The massive thick bodied black python rears back as long scale covered arms and legs burst from its body. Its head turns down to look at you with a disturbingly human curiosity in its eyes.*

**Young Adult Hassja CR 4**  
**XP 1,200**

NE Medium aberration

**Init** +3; **Senses** darkvision 60ft., Perception +10

### DEFENSE

**AC** 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14 (+3 Dex, +4 natural)

**hp** 37 (5d8+15)

**Fort** +5, **Ref** +5, **Will** +5

**Weaknesses** light sensitivity

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 20 ft.

**Melee** bite +7 (1d6+6)

### STATISTICS

**Str** 18, **Dex** 16, **Con** 16, **Int** 14, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 12

**Base Atk** +3; **CMB** +7; **CMD** 20

**Feats** Combat Expertise, Magical Aptitude, Skill Focus (Knowledge)

**Skills** Escape Artist +9, Knowledge (any one) +13, Perception +10, Spellcraft +9, Stealth +7, Survival +9, Use Magic Device +5

**Languages** common, draconic, and hassja

**SQ** shedding

### ECOLOGY

**Environment** any underground

**Organization** solitary, pair, or family (4-12)

**Treasure** standard

### SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Shedding (Su)** As the lesser shedding ability of the hassja spawn, except the young adult hassja masters the natural shapeshifting abilities of his race. As a full-round action the hassja may grow either a single pair of arms with hands or a single pair of legs with feet or he may shed any limbs that he has grown. The hassja may not possess the benefits of the constrictor form when he possesses both arms and legs. When the hassja possesses arms he may wield weapons or perform any other act that requires manual dexterity. When the hassja possesses legs, his base speed is increased to 40 feet.

**Venomous Form Poison (Ex)** bite – injury; save DC 15; *frequency* 1/round for 2 rounds; *effect* 1d4 Dexterity damage; *cure* 1 save. The save DC is Constitution based.

A hassja spawn between the ages of five and seven years experiences a rapid growth spurt, becoming a young adult hassja. The young adult hassja is no longer forced to compete with others of his kind for simple survival and his education begins in earnest. The young adult hassja is encouraged to explore and absorb a wide variety of information in order to find what specialty and family will suit him best.

## Hassja, Adult

*The unnaturally massive black snake's body contorts and compresses itself into the form of a nine foot tall reptilian humanoid with a long sweeping tail. Its eyes stare with clinical interest and detachment.*

### Adult Hassja CR 8

XP 4,800

NE Large aberration

**Init** +2; **Senses** darkvision 60ft., Perception +18

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 17, touch 11, flat-footed 15  
(+2 Dex, +6 natural, -1 size)

**hp** 102 (12d8+48)

**Fort** +8, **Ref** +6, **Will** +12

**Weaknesses** light sensitivity

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 20 ft.

**Melee** bite +16 (1d8+12)

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 26, **Dex** 14, **Con** 18, **Int** 18, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 14

**Base Atk** +9; **CMB** +18; **CMD** 30

**Feats** Combat Expertise, Iron Will, Improved Iron Will, Lunge, Magical Aptitude, Skill Focus (Knowledge)

**Skills** Escape Artist +8, Knowledge (any one) +22, Perception +18, Spellcraft +18, Stealth +2, Survival +10, Use Magic Device +13

**Languages** common, draconic, elven, goblin, hassja, and orcish

**SQ** caste, shedding

#### ECOLOGY

**Environment** any underground

**Organization** solitary, pair, or family (4-12)

**Treasure** standard

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Caste (Su)** Each adult hassja chooses a specialty area of study to devote his life to. Each adult hassja possesses one of the sets of abilities below: arcanist, archivist, scientist, shapeshifter, or warrior. These are simply the most common castes that an adult hassja may join and many more may exist or wait to be discovered.

*Arcanist:* The hassja arcanist may prepare and cast spells as a wizard of his CR. He knows at least 4 spells of every level he can cast and acts as if he possessed the Spell Mastery feat for every spell known. The hassja arcanist can create spellbooks or learn new spells from spellbooks as a wizard if he so chooses. Any wizard class levels taken stack with this ability to determine the adult hassja arcanist's wizard caster level and spells per day.

*Archivist:* The hassja archivist has trained his mind to retain even greater information than the average hassja and has become the custodian of the archived minds of its deceased family. The hassja archivist treats all Knowledge skills as class skills and gains a bonus to all Knowledge skills equal to half its HD. He may cast *legend lore* as a spell-like ability usable at will as long as he is within his family's library of gems containing the minds of the deceased.

*Scientist:* The hassja scientist has devoted his life to magical and biological experimentation on the lesser races. He gains the ability to extend his shapeshifting abilities to other creatures. This works as the *polymorph any object* spell usable at will, except that the casting time is increased to 1 hour, the ability only functions on living creatures, and the hassja may only perform changes that are minor enough to be of permanent duration. These changes are always permanent, but if the creature willingly submits to the procedure, all changes propagate themselves into any offspring the creature may have.

*Shapeshifter:* The hassja shapeshifter has worked to develop his natural shedding abilities far beyond those of normal hassja. He may wild shape as a druid with a level equal to their CR. When he is not wild shaping, he possess all of the benefits of both the constrictor and venomous forms at all times, and may use his shedding ability as a move action instead of a full-round action.

*Warrior:* The hassja warrior has trained to face the uz and their minions in battle. The hassja warrior is immune to any mind-affecting spell or effect and gains proficiency in all martial weapons, light armor, medium armor, heavy armor, and shields.

**Shedding (Su)** As the ability of the same name possessed by the young adult hassja.

**Venomous Form Poison (Ex)** bite – injury; save DC 20; *frequency* 1/round for 2 rounds; *effect* 1d6 Dexterity damage; *cure* 1 save. The save DC is Constitution based.

At some point between the ages of 10 and 12, the young adult hassja experiences his final growth spurt and becomes a recognized adult by his society. At this point in the hassja's development, he is expected to select a specialty to pursue fanatically. The hassja often joins

a family of like minded individuals who then consider the new adult to be a member of their clan. The hassja either apprentices beneath a more experienced individual or seeks out entirely new avenues of investigation. Over time the hassja learns to master his chosen specialty. Considering the extreme age of the hassja as a species, it is widely believed that the hassja castes inspired similar talents in the lesser races, or were perhaps taught to slaves in some bygone era.

## Hassja, Ancient

*This massive black python features relatively small arms and a massive bulging stomach. Its scales have begun to crack and fall off and it moves with a deliberate slowness. Embedded into its forehead is a red glowing gemstone.*

### Ancient Hassja CR 12

XP 19,200

NE Large aberration

**Init** -1; **Senses** darkvision 60ft., Perception +25

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 14, touch 8, flat-footed 14 (-1Dex, +6 natural, -1 size)

**hp** 93 (17d8+17)

**Fort** +6, **Ref** +4, **Will** +16

**Weaknesses** light sensitivity

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 20 ft.

**Melee** bite +16 (1d8+7)

**Special Attacks** absorb knowledge, life drink

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 20, **Dex** 8, **Con** 12, **Int** 22, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 18

**Base Atk** +12; **CMB** +16; **CMD** 25



**Feats** Combat Expertise, Iron Will, Improved Iron Will, Lunge, Magical Aptitude, Skill Focus (Knowledge)

**Skills** Escape Artist +10, Knowledge (any one) +33, Perception +25, Spellcraft +25, Stealth +4, Survival +12, Use Magic Device +20

**Languages** common, draconic, elven, goblin, hassja, and orcish

**SQ** caste, shedding

## ECOLOGY

**Environment** any underground

**Organization** solitary, pair, or family (4-12)

**Treasure** standard

## SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Absorb Knowledge (Su)** An ancient hassja may steal the thoughts, memories, and experiences of creatures in order to supplement its own understanding. When a creature fails their save against the ancient hassja's life drink ability, the ancient hassja may choose to gain the benefits of the *borrow skill* spell (APG). While the effect is active, the target takes a penalty to all skill checks made using the stolen skill equal to their ranks in the skill. If the creature perishes due to the ancient hassja's life drink ability, the benefits of absorb knowledge last for one month.

**Caste (Su)** As the adult hassja ability of the same name, except the ancient hassja may select two caste abilities.

**Life Drink (Su)** Ancient hassja are adult hassja that have developed and used the ability to devour the life force of living creatures to extend their own lifespan. The ancient hassja must succeed on a touch attack against a living creature or he may use this ability as a standard action on any living creature that he has consumed using swallow whole. The hassja deals 1d3

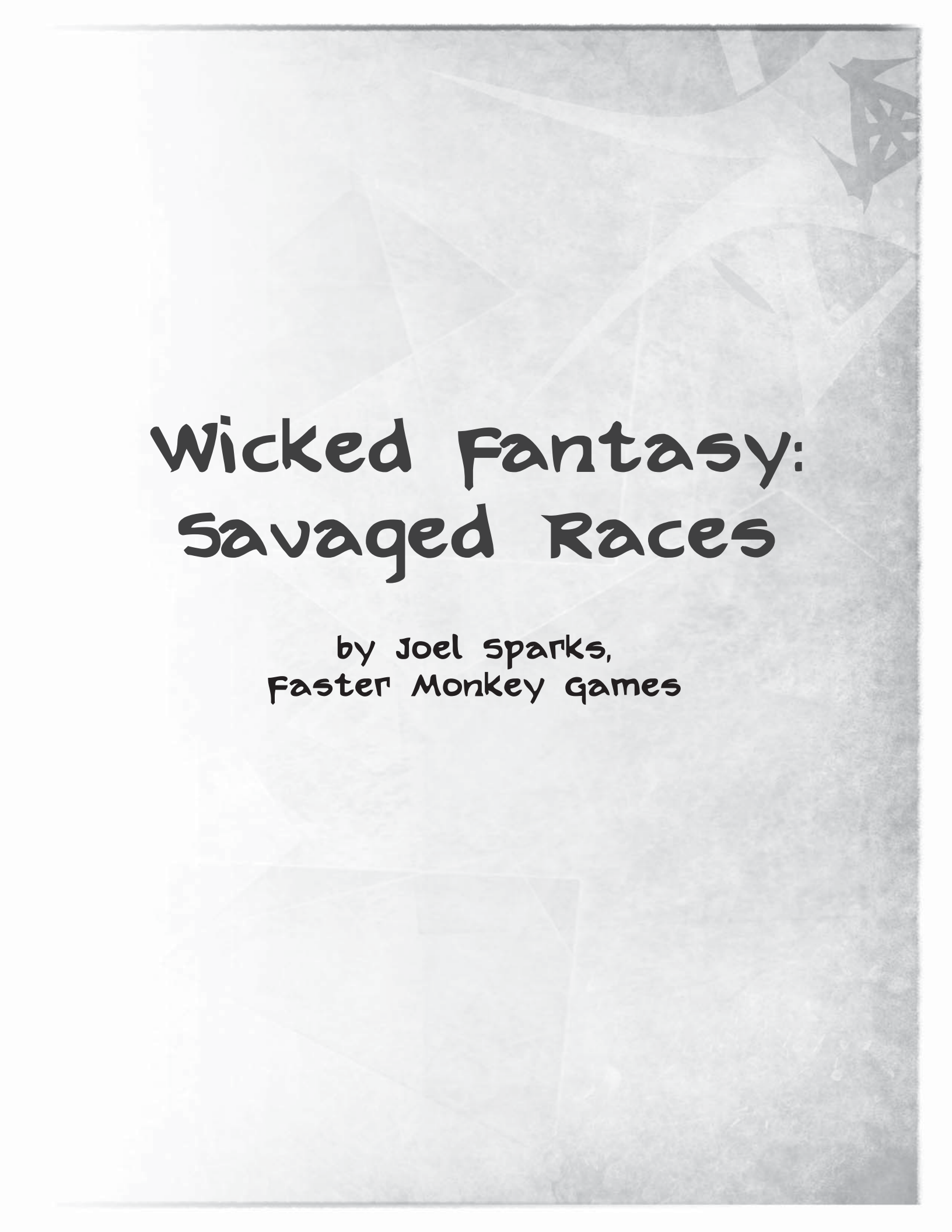
damage to the creature's Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution ability scores and the ancient hassja gain 5 temporary hit points unless the creature succeeds on a Fortitude save at DC 22. The temporary hit points last for 1 hour. If a creature is killed through the use of this ability, the hassja adds 1 month to their maximum life span. The save DC is Charisma-based.

**Shedding (Su)** As the ability of the same name possessed by the young adult hassja.

**Venomous Form Poison (Ex)** bite – injury; save DC 19; *frequency* 1/round for 2 rounds; *effect* 1d6 Dexterity damage; *cure* 1 save. The save DC is Constitution based.

The hassja lifespan is relatively short, with adults reaching middle age at 20, old age at 30, and venerable age at 35. Few hassja live beyond 40, naturally, but the race has discovered a technique to extend their lifespans indefinitely. The ancient hassja is a hassja who has preserved its existence far beyond the natural span of their species by consuming the life force of other living creatures. To their delight, the hassja found that they could absorb some of the creature's skills and memories in the process. While this does not prevent the hassja from aging and weakening, it does prevent them from dying, and some hassja have been known to survive for centuries in this manner. Eventually, the unending torture of their own existence drives them to have their memories stored within a magical gem to be stored in their family's library.





# Wicked Fantasy: Savaged Races

by Joel Sparks,  
Faster Monkey Games

### **SAVAGED WORLDS OFFICIAL LICENSED PRODUCT**

This game references the Savage Worlds game system, available from Pinnacle Entertainment Group at [www.peginc.com](http://www.peginc.com). Savage Worlds and all associated logos and trademarks are copyrights of Pinnacle Entertainment Group. Used with permission. Pinnacle makes no representation or warranty as to the quality, viability, or suitability for purpose of this product.

These rules use *Savage Worlds Deluxe* (2011), abbreviated to SDW in page references, including many mechanics not present in previous editions of Savage Worlds.

## DESIGN NOTES

*Savage Worlds*<sup>™</sup> statistics are much more compact than those in *Pathfinder*<sup>™</sup>. The system has no character classes, only 22 skills, and very limited lists of “spells” (powers) and “feats” (Edges.) Starting as a Novice, a PC can only advance four major Ranks, not 20 levels. Races must be balanced with one another, and are at their best with only a few abilities, simply worded. Yet *Savage Worlds*<sup>™</sup> provides plenty of room for surprising combinations and fresh ideas. They’re just expressed in a different way than a d20 book would use.

Thus, a one-to-one translation of *Wicked Fantasy*<sup>™</sup> is undesirable as well as almost impossible. What this book presents is not a *conversion*, but a *Savaged version*, of John Wick’s fantastically re-imagined races and their ways of life. I believe that anyone familiar with the original, and with *Savage Worlds*<sup>™</sup>, will find that these rules still offer the flavor of his creations, though cooked in a different kitchen.

– Joel Sparks, May 2013

## THE RACES

1. Dwarves (Uvandir): Don’t Call Them Dwarves
2. Elves: Tree, Soil, Iron, and Darkness
3. Gnolls (Dach’youn): Runners by Moonlight
4. Gnomes: Adapted to Anything
5. Goblins (Gobowins): Fortune’s Thralls
6. Halflings (Haffuns): Keepers of the Home
7. Humans: The Reign of Men
8. Kobolds (Kuba-Chubisi): Hidden Immortals
9. Orks: Blood of the Gods
10. Ratmen (Roddun): Guardians of the Streets

## NOTE: LANGUAGES

In the Known World of *Wicked Fantasy*, each of the ten races has its own unique language, spoken by all members of the race. Everyone also speaks the tongue of humans, in ten different dialects depending on city of origin. In a variant campaign, the GM could simplify matters by assuming that the five races from “under the earth,” recently arrived, share a single language in slightly different dialects. The races from this common past, speakers of “Undertongue,” are the dwarves (uvandir,) gnomes, goblins (gobowins,) halflings (haffuns,) and the kuba-chibisi along with their kobold shadows. Presumably this is the tongue spoken by the mysterious Enemy that chased these races into the Known World. Under such a scheme, the ancient elves, dog-mouthed dach’youn gnolls, fiercely independent orks, and rat-faced roddun ratmen would still speak their own distinct languages, and Human would still be the *lingua franca* for all to use.

# Uvandir: Don't Call Them Dwarves

## Savage Worlds Racial Traits

- **God-Forged:** Uvandir are stony mechanisms with no gender, their biology something between a living creature and a construct. Unlike other races, uvandir do not sleep or age, and they get +2 on attempts to recover from Shaken. Their stonemade bodies give them 1 point of natural Armor and a load limit of 8 times Strength. Like other races, uvandir do need food, water, and air. They take the usual extra damage from called shots, suffer Wound penalties, and heal normally.
- **Tunnel Eyes:** Precise and efficient uvandir eyes make the most use of any light. They have Low Light Vision.
- **Deliberate:** Uvandir have a Pace of 4 and a d4 running die.
- **Beer Lovers.** Alcohol does not affect uvandir adversely except in quantities of over a gallon of ale, and even then they become inebriated at half the rate of other races. They may not take the Liquid Courage Edge. See below.
- **Uvandir Pride (vandirtuvaldinshan):** Uvandir openly consider other races inferior and react violently to perceived disrespect. They have -2 Charisma when dealing with other races.
- **Craftmasters:** Uvandir possess a built-in understanding of materials and mechanisms. Each starts with a free d6 in Repair skill. Furthermore, they make all untrained craft skill rolls at a d4 default instead of d4 -2.
- **Moody:** Uvandir emotions are strong and unwavering, giving them both advantages and disadvantages compared to other races. An uvandir is almost always Obsessed, Melancholy, Annoyed, or Drunk. See below.
- **Respect the Beard:** The closest thing to hair on an uvandir body is “his” wire-like beard, carefully grown and tended throughout the years. For these unaging creatures, Young is a Minor Hindrance with no effect on attributes, skill points, or bennies. Instead

it indicates an uvandir with fewer than 300 braids to his beard, who therefore suffers -1 Charisma among his fellows. Elderly is an Edge reserved for uvandir of more than 500 braids; it includes +1 Charisma among uvandir and 5 extra points for skills linked to Smarts, with no effect on Pace or attributes. If an uvandir commits a crime against his race's unwritten laws, he will have part or all of his beard cut off, making normal social interaction with his kind almost impossible for years.

## Uvandir Moods

Strange of mind are the uvandir, with most human emotions forever unknown to them, but their own moods overtake them and seem to dictate their behavior uncontrollably. Not only do they suffer these behaviors, but at his discretion the GM can simply declare what mood a PC uvandir is in, and the player has to deal with it.

**Obsessed:** In his most usual mood, an uvandir focuses on a single goal to the exclusion of everything else. He has the Stubborn Hindrance regarding any distraction and +2 to resist any attempts to get his mind off the current project, including Persuasion, tricks, tests of will, and arcane powers. At the GM's discretion, he may also get +1 on one Smarts-based roll to accomplish the goal.

**Melancholy:** If the goal of his Obsession proves impossible, an uvandir falls into Melancholy. This can also happen when the hero suffers some other great loss or disappointment. A Melancholy uvandir does not do anything; he merely sits and broods, unless forced into action by some outside stimulus. He is at -2 to resist tests of will or arcane powers. A

physical attack strong enough to Shake him will bring him out of it and directly into an Annoyed state against whoever hit him.

**Annoyed:** If someone manages to interrupt an uvandir at work on his Obsession, or hits him until he recovers from Melancholy, or insults his craftsmanship or dedication or race in the slightest way, he will become Annoyed, which he expresses through punching. Unless he resists by making a Spirit roll (and many uvandir heroes don't even try to resist,) he makes an immediate unarmed attack on the target of his annoyance. This is a Wild Attack (+2 to Fighting, -2 to uvandir's Parry), and a target with a ready weapon gets +2 Fighting if he chooses to strike back. This "annoyance punch" does Str+2 damage; once he lands one, if the target doesn't respond in an annoying way such as complaining or fighting back, the uvandir is done. He returns to his Obsession or looks for the next one, or for a drink.

**Drunk:** Despite their great resistance to alcohol, uvandir spend a lot of time drunk. It requires a Spirit roll for one of these beer lovers to pass up the chance at a pint, at +2 if it interrupts a current Obsession. Once he starts, getting drunk becomes his temporary Obsession. After the equivalent of eight pints of ale, he suffers -2 on all Smarts and Agility-based rolls. His temporary Obsession then becomes the need to keep drinking and talking until he hears, or tells, a truly great story. Trait penalties continue for 1d6 hours after his last drink. Once the binge ends, if he had an Obsession that he abandoned for drinking, he returns to it.

## **New Edge**

### **Arcane Background (Gemstone Magic, *oberstanvir*)**

**Requirements:** Novice, uvandir

**Arcane Skill:** Knowledge (Gems & Minerals)

**Power Points:** 10

**Starting Powers:** 1

This version of Arcane Background (Weird Science) relies on the uvandir's unique insight into the nature of gems and crystals. Each power includes one special gemstone with its own Power Points equal to the uvandir's. On an arcane skill roll of 1, the power fails, regardless of modifiers. On snake eyes, the gem is destroyed and the power can't be used until a new gem is found or purchased.

**Trappings:** More subtle powers issue their magic effects directly from a held gem, but for damaging powers, gemstone mages craft gem-powered weapons. Attack powers like *blast*, *bolt*, *burst*, and *stun* come from gun-like devices and use the Shooting or Throwing skill. A roll of 1 on the skill die causes such a weapon to jam, requiring a Repair roll and 1d6 hours to fix, with each raise cutting the time in half. Snake eyes mean that the weapon explodes, destroying the gemstone in it and inflicting 2d6 damage in a Large Burst Template. As with Weird Science, the magician can give his stones and devices to others to use at their own skill level.

The uvandir is assumed to have acquired the stones along his adventures and must hold the appropriate gem or device in his hand to use a power. Unlike the initial stone, replacement gems must be acquired through play, and must be worth at least \$100 for a Novice power, \$200 for Seasoned, \$400 for Veteran, \$800 for Heroic, or \$1,600 for a Legendary power. Gemstone magicians can never learn the *healing* or *greater healing* powers.

See also Junk Magic, the roddun's poor imitation of this Arcane Background.



# Elves: Tree, soil, Iron, and Dark

## Savage Worlds Racial Traits

- **Shade Eyes:** Elves live under heavy foliage and have Low Light Vision.
- **Photosynthetic:** Elves are closely related to the Great Trees, and they derive sustenance from the light of the sun. An elf who spends at least six hours in sunlight does not need to eat food that day. He still needs water.
- **Iron Curse:** From a time before history, elves have suffered from a mystical vulnerability to iron bonds. In an hour-long ritual, known to some NPCs, an iron band can be fixed around an elf's ankle, wrist, or neck. This makes the elf "iron bound" (*cwthellean*) and forces him to glumly obey the orders of the one who bound him. The elf cannot attack or oppose the binder, nor try to escape, and any time the binder gives a command, the elf must win a contest of Spirit or promptly obey. Even if he resists, his master can just give the order again. The binder can transfer ownership to a new

master by reciting a ritual set of orders. Iron bound elves wither and die quickly; each has only 1d6+6 years to live once the band goes on. See below for ways to overcome the curse.

- **Heritage:** An elf comes from one of two social backgrounds: Tree bound (*cyffathellean*) or soil bound (*cyllabellan*.) Each provides a particular ability equivalent to one free Edge.

## Half-elf (*dzunkaveth*)

### Savage Worlds Racial Traits.

- **Shade Eyes:** Like his elven parent, a half-elf has Low Light Vision.
- **Between Worlds:** Neither society admires these half-breeds and they suffer -2 Charisma among both elves and humans. The elven word *dzunkaveth* means "abomination."
- **Kind of Human:** A half-elf starts play with one free Edge.
- **Not an Elf:** A half-elf is not subject to the iron curse, cannot photosynthesize, and is neither tree bound nor soil bound.

- **Sterile:** Half elves cannot breed children; some call them “mules.”

## Heritage

### Tree Bound Elves

Tree bound elves form the elite of elven society. Each is said to be the walking, living soul of one of the few remaining Great Trees. A tree bound elf does not grow old, so long as his Great Tree survives. The elf receives a special ability, equivalent to a free Edge, depending on the type of tree.

**Ash Bound:** An elf connected to a Great Ash Tree has a special affinity with bows and gets the benefits of the Marksman Edge when using bows.

**Birch Bound:** Elves bound to Great Birch Trees display a fascinating personal beauty, and start play with the Attractive Edge.

**Blackthorn Bound:** Quiet and clever, elves bound to Great Blackthorn Trees slip easily into shadows. They receive +2 Stealth when trying to go unseen or unheard.

**Elm Bound:** Elves revere the Great Elm Trees as wise lords of the forest, and elves bound to them start play with Spirit d6.

**Oak Bound:** Wiry and agile, the elves bound to Great Oak Trees have the Acrobat Edge.

A tree bound elf that falls under the Iron Curse loses the use of his Great Tree ability.

### Soil Bound Elves

While the tree bound scheme, study, and socialize, others must do the dirty work of raising crops, hunting animals, and driving out pests. These are the soil bound elves.

Without the benefit of a Great Tree, they age and die as quickly as humans, but their bodies are strong and resilient. A soil bound Wild Card starts play with the Brawny Edge.

### Iron Bound Elves

Elves of both tree bound and soil bound origin can fall under the Iron Curse. The iron band around an enslaved elf's neck or limb cannot be removed by ordinary means. If it were destroyed or forced off without the curse first being broken, the elf would die. There are only a few ways out of the iron curse: becoming a Dark Elf, achieving the near-mythical Heart Bond, or gaining the help of the probably imaginary Iron Biters.

**Iron Biters:** Rumors persist of a group of elves that know a secret ritual to reverse the effect of binding. Whether this is true falls into the purview of the GM.

**Heart Bond:** If two iron bound elves choose each other as lifetime mates, there is a ritual known to a few formerly iron bound elves that transforms the binding to one of the heart, ending the curse. Both elves must take the Common Bond Edge at the same time, which requires a Spirit of d8, although an NPC need not be a Wild Card. Alternatively, a Legendary elf can form a Heart Bond with any one iron bound elf by taking the Sidekick Edge.

**Dark Elves:** An iron bound elf can overcome his enslavement by selling his soul to the dark powers. He then becomes a *durzhab*: a Dark Elf, with the Arcane Background (Dark Elf.)

## New Edges

### Arcane Background (Dark Elf, *durzhah*)

**Requirements:** Novice, background as former iron bound elf

**Arcane Skill:** Knowledge (Arcana)

**Power Points:** 10

**Starting Powers:** 2 + *darksight*

A Dark Elf's miracles come from evil supernatural forces and operate with darkness trappings (SDW p106.) They start with two Novice powers of the player's choice, plus the *darksight* power. They can never cast *light*, only *obscure*. Summoned creatures have a demonic aspect, with shiny black and red skin, wicked horns, and barbed tails. His devilish masters expect the Dark Elf to exact revenge, not just against his former enslavers, but also against the "normal" elven society lead by the tree bound. Failure to pursue these goals can result in temporary or permanent loss of powers (SWD p103.)

### Arcane Background (Speaker for the Trees, *cyllawellan*)

**Requirements:** Novice, tree bound elf

**Arcane Skill:** Knowledge (Nature)

**Power Points:** 10

**Starting Powers:** 2 + *entangle*

These priests hold very high status in elven society, and draw their miracles from the Great Trees themselves. Their powers operate with plant and forest trappings and may not work as well in barren environments, at the GM's discretion. A Speaker who takes the *shape change* power can cast it for one fewer Power Points when assuming the form of a plant. Bodyguards summoned with the Summon Ally power are figures of hard, polished wood. Using the *warrior's gift* power, a Speaker can imbue one of the special abilities given to tree bound elves by the various types of Great Tree (ash, birch, blackthorn, elm, or oak.) Failure to protect the Great Trees and the status quo of elven society can result in the Trees withdrawing their power from the Speaker, temporarily or permanently (SWD p103.)

# Gnolls (Dach'youn): Runners by Moonlight

## Savage Worlds Racial Traits

- **Canine Senses:** Dach'youn are nearsighted, perceive color poorly, and find bright light painful to their weak eyes. They get -2 on rolls to attack or visually Notice something more than 5" away. However, their hyena-like snouts and ears are very sensitive. They get +2 on Notice rolls to hear, smell, or taste something, and +2 on Tracking rolls using scent. This also makes them excellent cooks.
- **Double Gaited:** Dach'youn have Pace 5 when walking on two legs, but can move with Pace 8 and a d8 running die when moving on all fours with nothing in their hands.
- **Bone-Cracking Jaws:** A dach'youn has a natural bite attack causing Str+d6 damage and is not considered an unarmed defender.
- **Moon Sign:** Each dach'youn has an ability based on when he was born in the lunar cycle, chosen at character creation. See below.
- **"Fleabags:"** Humans and their associates consider dach'youn filthy and malformed.

Dach'youn get -2 Charisma when dealing with other races.

- **Pack Loyalty:** Each dach'youn belongs to a pack and puts the pack's welfare ahead of his own. When traveling with the pack, a dach'youn hero may have access to special NPC allies called Pack Leaders. See below.

## Moon Signs

In the Wicked Fantasy setting, these signs correspond to the seven moons. To use dach'youn in a different setting, each sign can represent a phase of a single lunar month.

**Cha'ppa Moon:** Start with a d6 in Agility.

**Gu'sha Moon:** Start with a d6 in Spirit.

**Gur'gha Moon:** Start with a d6 in Vigor.

**Hav'ha Moon:** Start with a d6 in Strength.

**Or'gha Moon:** Start with a d6 in Smarts.

**Sh'va Moon:** Start with +2 Charisma, giving a net +0 with other races.

**Vax (Dark Moon):** Start with a d6 in Intimidation and a d6 in Taunt.

**Khu'chala (All Moons):** This rare sign indicates a dach'youn born when all six bright moons are in the sky, and the hero can pick any of the other moon sign advantages except that of the Dark Moon. (In an alternate cycle, this is the full moon.)

## Pack Leaders

There are certain leadership roles within a “gnoll” pack. If no PC pack member has appropriate traits, then a non-player character fills the role. Once per session, one hero in the pack can appeal to these leaders for help through a Persuasion roll, with results similar to the Connections Edge. Only one roll per session can be made, but multiple heroes can attempt to assist.

LEADER	ROLE	TRAIT
<b>Bach</b> (the Alpha)	Chief	Sm d6, Command Edge
<b>Kech</b> (the Beta)	Second-in-command	WC, Common Bond Edge (2 Bennies per session if NPC)
<b>Eecha</b> (the Nose)	Scout	Stealth d6, Scavenger Edge
<b>Grr'khun</b> (the Talon)	Champion fighter	St d8, Brawler Edge
<b>Owoun</b> (the Voice)	Shaman	Sp d8, Arcane Background (Owoun)
<b>Shu'sha</b> (the Hunter)	Tracker	Sp d6, Survival d8+2, Tracking d8+2 (Woodsmen Edge)

## New Edges

### Arcane Background (**Owoun, Voice of the Pack**)

Requirements: Novice, dach'youn

Arcane Skill: Performance (Howling) (Spirit)

Power Points: 10

Starting Powers: 1 + *boost/lower trait*

The owoun strikes fear into the hearts of the pack's enemies and prey, and courage into the hearts of her fellow dach'youn, with rousing howls to the sacred moonlight. Such magic cannot be performed quietly! On an arcane skill roll of 1, the howl fails regardless of modifiers, but there is no other drawback. Owoun can never take these powers: *blast, bolt, burst, fly, growth/shrink, or zombie*. An owoun can take *divination* as a Veteran power and *banish* as Seasoned. When howling in natural moonlight, each raise on the arcane skill roll reduces the Power Point cost of a howl by 1, to a minimum of 1. The owoun must have the points available for the howl in the first place.

# Gnomes: Adapted to Anything

## **Savage Worlds traits**

**Small:** Gnomes have Size-1 and -1 Toughness.

**Clever Eyes:** Gnomish eyes are keen and adjust easily to changes in lighting. They get +2 to visual Notice rolls and have Low Light Vision as well.

**Wisdom of the Wild (*Gunabar*):** Gnomes understand the natural world to an uncanny degree. Animals won't attack them unless provoked, and gnomes can predict animal behavior or weather, or identify an animal or plant, with a Common Knowledge roll. A gnome can take the Beast Master Edge even if her Spirit is below d8.

**Regional Adaptation (*Tilsspan*):** A gnome comes from one of six regional populations, each adapted to its own niche. See below.

## **Regional Adaptations**

A gnome starts with a free d6 in a skill appropriate to his regional background. Each background also makes available a particular Edge open only to gnomes from that region.

These Edges have all the usual requirements and are not free! Ryttervast pony riders, for example, number in the hundreds or thousands, but only characters who take the Gnomish Cavalier Edge get those special abilities.

**Coareg:** Urban Crafters of the Eastern Shore

**Free Skill:** Streetwise d6

**Available Edge:** Zaubermachgyver (McGyver)

**Forsterken:** Water-Bound

Gnomes of the Lakelands

**Free Skill:** Swimming d6

**Available Edge:** Annven Visions (new)

**Haufbreg:** Barbarian Gnomes  
of the West Mountains

**Free Skill:** Climbing d6

**Available Edge:** Wrath of the Mountain (Berserk)

**Ryttervast:** Ponymasters of  
the Central Grasslands

*Free Skill:* Riding d6

*Available Edge:* Gnomish Cavalier (new)

**Skogland:** Tree-Watchers of the Central North Forest

*Free Skill:* Stealth d6

*Available Edge:* Forest Guardian (Woodsmen)

**Vanktjenner:** Lonely Ones of the Xeric Shrublands

*Free Skill:* Survival d6

*Available Edge:* Gnomish Monk (new)

## New Edges

### Annven Visions

**Requirements:** Novice, Forsterken regional background, Spirit d8+

Each Forsterken gnome is bound ritually to the spirit of a body of water, known as her *annven*. For a Forsterken with the Annven Visions Edge, this supernatural bond can sometimes provide important information. This ability works similarly to the Connections Edge and can be used once per play session. The gnome must be in or beside her *annven* and able to study its surface intently for an hour or so. She then makes a Spirit roll. On a success, she has a vision determined by the GM, usually a clairvoyant view of recent events or a predicted outcome of some considered action. A basic success provides a vision, but it may be difficult to understand or act on; one raise indicates an understandable vision; two or more raises means that the vision is clear, timely, and important. The GM is absolute arbiter of how much is shown, as this ability cannot be allowed to outright solve important campaign mysteries. Because use of Annven Visions precludes much

travel, it's commonly seen in wise old Forsterken NPCs, but it is available to PCs as well.

### Gnomish Cavalier

**Requirements:** Novice, Ryttervast regional background, Agility d8+

A Cavalier is a gifted and experienced rider of the small ponies of the grasslands. He gets +2 to all Riding rolls and can spend Bennies on his pony. This combines aspects of the Ace and Beast Bond Edges, but it affects only Riding, does not impose a -2 on soak rolls for the mount, and can't be used to give Bennies to other types of animals.

### Gnomish Monk

**Requirements:** Novice, Vanktjenner regional background, Fighting d6+, special

No gnomish communities exist in the Shrublands, only a few isolated monasteries and the emotionally damaged wanderers called Vanktjenner. When a gnome loses his soulmate, or otherwise suffers an irreparable loss, he departs the region of his birth and sets out as a solitary wanderer. The monks of the Xeric Shrublands sometimes take in a Vanktjenner and give his injured spirit new strength through religious and physical discipline. In time, the patient becomes a monk himself and gains the Martial Artist Edge. Gnomish Monk characters can also take the Improved Martial Artist or Martial Arts Master Edges when they qualify. A Gnomish Monk can be an Adept, but the strict vows of the Xeric monasteries require that their Adepts never kill a sentient being. For purposes of Arcane Background (Miracles), putting someone at serious risk of death is a minor sin; accidentally killing is a major sin; and deliberate murder is a mortal sin (SWD p103.)

# Gobowins: Fortune's Thralls

## Savage Worlds Racial Traits

- **Small:** Gobowins have Size-1 and -1 Toughness.
- **Keen Ears:** Gobowins get +2 to Notice rolls for hearing things.
- **Gender Switcher:** Gobowin bodies frequently change sex, becoming male or female at different times. At the GM's discretion, there is a 1 in 20 chance per month that a gobowin starts to change to the other sex. Before the roll is made, a gobowin PC can attempt a Spirit roll at -4 to prevent the change, or to force it to happen. The process takes about a month; a month after that, the d20 checks begin again.
- **Short Timer:** These little folk don't live long. A gobowin is mature at 10 years old, getting decrepit by 20, goes blind soon after, and dies by 25. They make up for it by having lots of children.
- **Tricky:** Gobowins love confusing and confounding others. They get +2 to Smarts rolls when attempting to Trick a foe (SWD p76.)
- **Throwing Buwuk:** Every adult gobowin has the ability to cast a curse of *buwuk*: bad luck. This works as the *Lower Trait* power with a trapping of unlikely accidents hindering the target. Throwing buwuk uses Spirit for the arcane skill roll and does not affect other gobowins. The gobowin has 2 Power Points for throwing buwuk, kept separate from other PP unless the character is a *sheesha* witch. Every time a gobowin PC uses the Buwuk Curse, the GM gains a Benny.
- **Blocking Buwuk:** A gobowin can give a token to a trusted friend—any small, well-made object—and make it a *buda*: a charm that makes that recipient immune to all gobowin buwuk until he lets it leave his possession. Each gobowin can only create a number of budas equal to his Spirit die type; to make a more budas, he must wait until a prior recipient loses one or dies.



- **Numerate Savant:** Gobowin brains are built differently from those of most races. At a glance, a gobowin can make an accurate count of a group of objects: apples in a basket, coins on a table, horses in a herd. They remember these numbers years later. At the GM's discretion, gobowin PCs may make Common Knowledge rolls to "recall" important counts such as the number of knights in a certain baron's retinue.

## New Edges

### Arcane Background (*Sheesha*)

**Requirements:** Novice, gobowin; includes Blind Hindrance

**Arcane Skill:** Faith

**Power Points:** 15 (17)

**Starting Powers:** 2 (3)

A gobowin witch, or *sheesha*, is born under a heavy burden: her share of the race's bad luck renders her sightless and haunted by madness. However, she can also direct good and bad luck to others with unusual effectiveness. This version of Arcane Background (Miracles) includes the Blind Hindrance and five extra Power Points at Novice. A *sheesha* also adds her two racial *buwuk* PP to her pool and can use them all for casting powers or *buwuk*. Including the racial *buwuk* ability, a starting *sheesha* has 17 PP and three powers. Her powers have subtle trappings of bad luck or unlikely coincidence. For example, a foe is injured by a falling stone, or *entangled* by getting his foot stuck under a root; *healing* means an injured friend's wound turns out not to be as bad as thought; and so on.

### Professional Edge: Caravan Owner (*Buk*)

**Requirements:** Seasoned, gobowin, Driving d6+, Knowledge (Merchant) d6+

A gobowin Caravan Owner has his or her own small trading cart, along with responsibility for a spouse and children. Upkeep costs for the typical cart and family-crew come to \$10 every week, in addition to any specific repairs required. If the *buk* can't afford that much in supplies, condition of the cart and the gobowins begins to suffer.

**Cart:** Acc/Ts 6, Toughness 8 (2), Crew 1+3 Small creatures, typical worth \$500. A mule or pony draws the wagon, which is just big enough for a few gobowins and their stock in trade. Tarps keep out the weather.

**Shuks:** Other adults in the caravan, such as the *buk*'s spouse, are called *shuks*, or carriage riders. *Shuks* who are lost or killed are not automatically replaced. NPC *shuks* are Allies of PCs in the caravan, and have personalities and experience like any other Allies (SWD p81).

**Children:** Gobowins have new litters frequently. Offspring under 5 are called "imps," and they are so small, numerous, and identical that they should be played more as a swarm of animals than true NPCs. At any time, only two offspring per cart are old enough to be of help—roughly 5 to 9 years old—and these are the "tyros." Each tyro has one skill at d4, chosen by the player from the list below, which the *buk* can use for the benefit of the caravan. If a child is lost or killed, it is not automatically replaced.

**Gobowin Tyro Skills** (one at d4): Climbing, Notice, Stealth, Streetwise, or Survival.

**Caravans and Edges:** A *buk* or *shuk* with the Ace Edge applies it to his cart. A *buk* with the Common Bond or Leadership Edges can cover his whole caravan and all its gobowins with the effects.

## Professional Edge: New Cart

**Requirements:** Veteran, Caravan Owner

The buk adds another cart to his caravan, with two more shuks and two more tyros, plus a cloud ofimps. Since gobowins mature by age 10, one of the new shuks is often the buk's offspring. This Edge can be taken multiple times; each time *doubles* the number of carts in the buk's caravan. Each cart requires its own upkeep costing \$10 per week. Without this Edge, a PC buk can increase the size of his caravan through simply purchasing a new cart, but he will also have to acquire stock and a crew through other means.

## CARAVAN TRADING

Each cart starts with a load of what's basically junk. Typical examples: Piles of rags clipped from worn-out clothes, bits of leather string, bent nails, bags of cleanish sand, a rusted horseshoe, a few pretty rocks, bundles of brush for fires, some tent stakes inexpertly carved from wood, and so on. Objectively, a townsman would be as likely to light the whole thing on fire as ever buy anything. But from such lowly beginnings, many buks have grown huge caravans and great wealth.

Children run alongside the carts and off into the surroundings, gathering anything that looks valuable. This includes possessions of other people that are not properly watched, and therefore must not be wanted. Adults keep a sharp eye out for opportunity as well, of course, but most of the profit to a caravan comes from sharp trading: convincing locals to exchange food, supplies, cash, or better trade goods for the modest contents of the cart.

Depending on the preferences of the gaming group, the GM might hand-wave specifics and just assume that trading covers the upkeep of the caravan, except when he wants supplies to

run low. Alternatively, a PC buk can make one Persuasion roll and one Knowledge (Merchant) roll for each full day of trading in a place at least as populous as a village. Each success and raise earns \$1, and each failure loses \$1, so it's possible to break even or get the worse of it. On a critical failure, the locals decide that the gobowins are nothing but thieves and attack as an angry mob. At these times any gobowins with the caravan carts make a run for it; those left behind may fare poorly.

Major trades that affect the game, such as attempting to ransom a captive character, or trying to trade hard-won jewels for a magical relic, are handled as Social Conflicts (SWD p96). The buk rolls on the lower of his Persuasion or Knowledge (Merchant) skills, with a +2 to -2 modifier assigned by the GM based on how reasonable the proposed trade sounds.

## GOBOWINS IN THE REIGN OF MEN

Gobowin caravans roam between the ten human cities, and their reception varies. They are forbidden entirely from Upper Nevarnare but operate normally in Lower Nevarnare. Tamerclimb does not permit trading but will grudgingly allow a caravan in trouble to enter the town for help. In the cities of Ashcolmb and Jinix, gobowins have a bad reputation. They suffer -2 Charisma in those towns or when dealing with people from those towns. The caravans get on well with the Roadmen from Shavay, sharing protection and information during their travels. The other cities of men accept gobowin caravans, but always keep an eye on the little buggers.

# Haffuns: Keepers of the House

## Savage Worlds Racial Traits

- **Small:** Haffuns have Size-1 and -1 Toughness.
- **Quiet (*Talda*):** Every haffun starts with a free d6 in Stealth.
- **Servant's Ear:** Haffuns stay quiet partly so they can hear more. They get +2 on Notice rolls based on listening.
- **Sympathetic Ear:** Haffuns excel at communicating with others. If a haffun can take a full minute to work with an intelligent creature with no common language, he can attempt to understand and get across basic concepts at an effective language skill of d4-2. The creature must not have a Hostile or Uncooperative Reaction level and each important idea requires a separate roll. The GM can award up to +2 on each roll for excellent roleplaying of the communication attempt.
- **Family Membership:** Each haffun character is part of a family with its own special skills and benefits. See below.
- **Giving Curse (*ghuva*):** Haffuns are mystically bound to help other intelligent beings in need. If another person looks in the haffun's eyes and concentrates for five seconds, the haffun learns that person's current desire and must try to accomplish it. The haffun suffers -1 on all trait tests until the desire is fulfilled or the person dies. Powers such as *dispel* do not affect the curse, and a haffun tasked with a desire would not even try to have it counteracted. Only one task can affect a haffun at a time; other *ghuva* attempts fail until the first is completed.
- **Among Us:** Haffuns exist within human society. Like humans, they start with one free Novice Edge.

## Haffun Families

When creating a haffun character, the player chooses one of six areas of expertise as his family's specialty. Each specialty is its own Knowledge skill, covering a variety of related crafts and professions. Every member of the family starts with a free d4 in the relevant skill. Many also include ability at cooperative rolls (SWD p63.)

### **Family Expertise: Bookkeeping.**

This family specializes in keeping sums, scribing books, and maintaining records and libraries. Every member starts with Knowledge (Bookkeeping) at d4. Additional abilities:

- Knowing what things are worth helps. A family member can attempt a Knowledge (Bookkeeping) roll whenever buying or selling to avoid being overcharged or underpaid.
- When two or more members of a Bookkeeping family are together, they can always make cooperative rolls at Knowledge (Bookkeeping).
- When three or more members are present, each success and raise on a cooperative Knowledge (Bookkeeping) roll improves a buying or selling deal by roughly 5%, to a maximum of 25%.

### **Family Expertise: Décor**

These haffuns study the art and craft of everything beautiful for the home, from paintings to architecture. Every member starts with Knowledge (Décor) at d4. Additional abilities:

- A family member receives +2 on Knowledge (Décor) or Notice rolls to identify a work of art as a fake or a forgery.
- When two or more members of a Décor family are together, they can always make cooperative rolls on Knowledge (Décor).
- When three or more members of a Décor family are together, they can also make cooperative rolls on Persuasion when speaking with humans and other haffuns of the Reign of Men culture, due to their combined air of refinement and *savoir-faire*.

### **Family Expertise: Fashion**

From hats to shoes and everything in between, this family knows how it's made,

what it should look like, and how it should be worn. Every member starts with Knowledge (Fashion) at d4. Additional abilities:

- A Knowledge (Fashion) roll tells a family member what clothing is appropriate for any situation, from an ancient ritual to the most stylish current event.
- When two or more members of a Fashion family are together, they can use a basic sewing kit to alter any one complete outfit and make it appropriate for any situation. This takes an hour and a successful cooperative Knowledge (Fashion) roll; each raise cuts the time in half. The outfit is rigged together and won't last for more than one wearing.
- Three or more members of a Fashion family can whip up any outfit required in 10 minutes, using whatever is at hand: old tablecloths, draperies, flour sacks, anything. No skill roll is required so long as a basic sewing or disguise kit is available. The outfit is rigged together and won't last for more than one wearing.

### **Family Expertise: Food & Drink**

This family understands the secrets of baking, brewing, butchering, making wine, and most of all cooking. Every member starts with Knowledge (Food & Drink) at d4. Additional abilities:

- A family member receives +2 on Knowledge (Food & Drink) or Notice rolls to detect impurities, decay, or poison in any food or drink.
- When two or more family members cook a meal with a successful cooperative roll on Knowledge (Food & Drink), the resulting meal will restore a level of Fatigue due to hunger in only half an hour, or a level of Fatigue from another source in an hour, to people who eat it while it's hot and fresh. Up

to five people can benefit per family member cooking, if sufficient ingredients are available.

- When three or more family members take 1d6 hours and make a successful cooperative roll on Knowledge (Food & Drink), they can create up to five tasty, portable snacks per family member, working from only basic supplies. Each snack weighs half a pound and stays edible for one week, and counts as a full meal for a human-sized person or a haffun.

### **Family Expertise: Housekeeping**

Haffuns in this family learn the lore of running a household, from gardening to laundry to simple home repairs, and including an intimate knowledge of how rooms, halls, and stairs fit together to make a home. Every member starts with Knowledge (Housekeeping) at d4. Additional abilities:

- When in an ordinary house or similar building, such as a shop or inn, a family member can attempt a Notice roll to spot areas where a secret room or panel might be hidden.
- When two or more family members are together in an ordinary building, they can always make cooperative Notice Rolls when opposed by Stealth.
- When three or more family members are together in an ordinary building, they can make a cooperative Stealth Roll that applies like a Group Roll to all family members and up to 5 companions.

### **Family Expertise: Transport**

These little teamsters are familiar with using wagons, carts, and draft animals to transport people and cargo, as well as warehousing and storage. Every member starts with Knowledge (Transport) at d4. Additional abilities:

- A family member can make a successful Knowledge (Transport) roll to find the best route overland to any known destination.
- Two or more Transport family members together can increase the efficiency of a traveling group of up to 5 people or animals per family member, such that travel time is reduced by roughly 10%.
- Three or more family members can attempt a cooperative Knowledge (Transport) roll, once per play session, to scrounge up an essential piece of gear or extra day's worth of supplies, similar to the Scavenger Edge.

### **Tuan/Tuana (Husband/Wife)**

If a haffun marries another haffun through full haffun ritual, they count as members of each other's families, and each spouse gains the other's family skill at d4 so long as the union lasts.

### **Family Friends**

In rare cases, a haffun family ritually adopts a human as a trusted and valued family friend. For example, a human who includes a haffun in his Loyal Hindrance for long enough may receive this sign of devotion. Thereafter, the human counts as a family member for purposes of family abilities, including a free d4 in the family's Knowledge skill.

## **New Edges**

### **Professional Edge: Butler (Tatura)**

**Requirements:** Novice, haffun, Smarts d6+, Knowledge (Décor) d4+, Knowledge (Housekeeping) d6+, Stealth d4+

When taking this Edge, the haffun must pick a particular household (*manna*) as his home ground. While usually a human family's house, the home ground can be a mobile campsite so

**The Twenty  
Tatura  
Names:**

Balla Utyn

Ban Fortuda

Col Bean

Gar Gallan

Hiram Agaves

Jyss Shallan

Mal Bubray

Martha Hudsen

Nama Unnan

Nav Gall

Nuo Prunt

Oliffar Shen

Rin Palla

Sam Yffur

Sunja Sav

Tab Collum

Tan Garlan

Tol Binx

Tom Bing

Wes Fassa

long as the Butler sets it up himself each time with no assistance. The campsite accommodates one person for each 15 minutes of setup. When on his home ground, the Butler adds +2 to any Knowledge, Notice, or Persuasion roll related to serving and protecting the household and its members.

**Professional Edge: Ghost  
Speaker (Jorsha)**

**Requirements:** Novice, haffun, Arcane Background (Miracles), Spirit d8+, Faith d6+

This is a version of the Holy Warrior Edge. Jorsha are haffun priests specializing in communicating with ghosts: the Ethereal remains of haffuns or humans. A jorsha perceives all ghosts, and can speak with the haffun ones. The Jorsha equivalent of the Repulse Evil ability is called Expulsion Energy, and it affects even “good” or friendly ghosts. Jorsha never learn the *blast* or *bolt* powers, but they gain access to *banish* at Seasoned Rank instead of Veteran.

**Arcane Background  
(Butler Magic) (Ishu)**

**Requirements:** Novice, haffun, Butler Professional Edge

**Arcane Skill:** Spellcasting

**Power Points:** 10

**Starting Powers:** 2

This form of magic may be taken after start of play if the GM allows. The haffun is ritually re-named to one of the Twenty Names of Tatura, the Great Butlers. He gains 10 Power Points, two

powers from the Butler list, and access to the Spellcasting skill, which must be bought normally. Each Ishu magic spell requires inscribing a special mark on the person or object to be affected. Making or erasing a mark requires using a tool or writing instrument to write on the subject for a few seconds. This can be done on a helpless target, or one who uses his own action to stand still and accept the mark, but not with a Touch Attack. Exception: The Butler may cast *fear*, if he has that power, simply by invoking his Tatura Name out loud as an action. Most Butler’s marks cannot be seen by others without *detect arcana*, but if the Butler rolls a 1 on his Spellcasting die, the mark is visible on a simple Notice roll, whether successful or not. Butlers select powers from this list: *armor, boost/lower trait, confusion, darksight, deflection, detect/conceal arcana, disguise, dispel, divination, elemental manipulation, farsight, fear, invisibility, mind reading, slumber, speak language.*

**NOTE: HAFFUN CULTURE  
AND RITUALS**

The haffun have their own culture. A child somehow raised apart from other haffuns does not get the Sympathetic Ear or Family Membership racial abilities. Also, no haffun can acquire the Tuan/Tuana marriage benefit, the Butler or Ghost Speaker Professional Edges, or the Arcane Background (Ishu) Edge without a community of haffuns to perform the relevant rituals. Starting characters are assumed to have already undergone the rituals for their Edges unless something in a character’s background makes that impossible.

# Humans: The Reign of Men

## Savage Worlds Racial Traits

- **Cultured:** Humans start with one free Novice Edge.
- **Teamwork:** Humans learn to work together. A human Wild Card can share Bennies with any other human who is close enough to touch, and multiple humans can always attempt group and cooperative rolls (SWD p63.)
- **Hometown:** Each human was raised in one of the ten Towns of Men, and has a free d6 in his town's specialty skill (see below). A human gets +1 Charisma when in his hometown or dealing with others from there. In addition, a human automatically knows all the main merchants, important citizens, neighborhoods, and other basic information about his town. For detailed questions, he makes Common Knowledge rolls at Smarts+2. If he is away long enough, of course, important facts may change.
- **Politics:** Every human has a stance and an interest in the complex, often fractious politics of the Reign of Men. Among other factors, frequent elections, competition between cities, the acts of the noble class, the outcomes of battle, and shifts in the financial power of the Guilds keep things lively. When two humans meet, unless the politics of both are known, both humans attempt a Spirit roll. If either rolls a 1 on the Spirit die, regardless of Wild Die, they hold strong and conflicting opinions. If they are from different cities, the conflict may be just rivalry between their home towns. Non-player characters use the Reaction Table and respond at one worse category. If *both* roll a 1, the divide runs deep: The characters hate each other immediately and cannot get along unless forced to it by necessity. An NPC always has the Hostile Reaction toward someone with opinions deeply divided from his own.

## THE CITIES OF MEN

Each hometown grants its citizens a particular skill appropriate to the local culture. The city needn't be where the hero was born, but he grew up there. Tamerclimb, however, is only adopted as a new hometown by adult humans wishing to become Palatines. They put aside their past cities and hometown benefits and live in Tamerclimb for years, training and hoping.

### Ajun, Ancient Home of Scholars

**Governor:** Rische Tomsson

**Population:** 890,000

**Free Skill:** Two Knowledge skills at d4

### Ashcolmb, Hive of Assassins

**Governor:** Balan Vre

**Population:** 750,000

**Free Skill:** Streetwise d6

### Jinix, City of Thieves

**Governor:** Joran Bron

**Population:** 300,000

**Free Skill:** Stealth d6

### Millford, the City Reclaimed

**Governor:** Tarkin Vanor

**Population:** 400,000

**Free Skill:** Survival d6

### Nevarnare, the Great City

**Governor:** Riscala Fols

**Population:** 2 million

**Free Skill:** Persuasion d6

### Shavay, the City Built on Letters

**Governor:** Palla Venor

**Population:** 650,000

**Free Skill:** Second language at d4

### Tamerclimb, Home of the Palatines

**Governor:** Usav Vanir

**Population:** 500,000

**Free Skill:** Knowledge (Law) d6

### Tomkin, the City of Orphans

**Governor:** Auntie Rose

**Population:** 490,000

**Free Skill:** Knowledge (Nature) d6

### Vanta, the City of Soldiers

**Governor:** Tamin Avente

**Population:** 750,000

**Free Skill:** Intimidate d6

### Vinnick, the City of Magic

**Governor:** Wayson Flann

**Population:** 560,000

**Free Skill:** Knowledge (Arcana) d6

## New Edges

### Arcane Background (Philosophy)

**Requirements:** Novice, human

**Arcane Skill:** Knowledge (Philosophy)

**Power Points:** 10

**Starting Powers:** 2

Humans acknowledge the authority of no gods. Their priests are Philosophers, students of the natural world and especially mankind's role in it. From their learning and willpower they create magical effects, triggered by reciting proverbs, aphorisms, quotes from famous philosophers, and similar trappings. Such spellcasting does not have Backlash, but if a Philosopher violates the ideals and laws of the Reign of Men, he



may lose power similar to a Miracles user who violates her religion. Breaking a law can be a minor or major sin. Treason to the Reign of Men is a mortal sin. See SWD, p103.

### **Professional Edge: Palatine**

**Requirements:** Novice, human, Tamerclimb hometown, Arcane Background (Philosophy), Spirit d8+, Strength d6+, Vigor d8+, Knowledge (Law) d6+, Fighting d8+

Palatines travel the Reign of Men, enforcing the law with swift and generally violent justice. This equivalent of the Champion Edge gives the Palatine +2 damage when attacking criminals who violate the laws of the Reign of Men. The Palatine also gains +2 Toughness against attacks by criminals, including arcane powers. Exactly who qualifies as a criminal is a matter of some dispute, but Palatines believe in the rightness of their own judgment. The GM always has the final call. No character can have both the Palatine and Shadow Hand Edges.

### **Professional Edge: Shadow Hand**

**Requirements:** Novice, human, Arcane Background (Philosophy), Knowledge (Law) d8+, Intimidate d4+, Stealth d4+, Taunt d4+

Opposing the methods of Order of the Palatines, but quietly, the Shadow Hands seek to enforce the will of the Senate in more subtle ways. They gain the effect of the Strong Will Edge, and also receive +2 on Stealth rolls meant to disguise identity, blend into a group, or perform a sleight of hand such as palming an item or adding poison to a drink. This bonus does not help the Shadow Hand move silently or go unseen by guards or other people, though it can help him remain unrecognized. No character can have both the Palatine and Shadow Hand Edges.

# Kuba-Chubisi: Hidden Immortals

## Savage Worlds Racial Traits

These peculiar creatures are reptilian immortals by nature, but they transform into the likeness of a human at maturity. They then move to a city and carry on the pretense of humanity, attempting to guide society along a righteous and aesthetically pleasing path.

- **Ancient Wisdom:** The intellectual traditions and training of a kuba-chubisi cover great realms of knowledge. They make all untrained Smarts skill tests at a d4 instead of a d4-2, as the Jack of All Trades Edge.
- **Unaging:** It takes countless years for age to catch up with a kuba-chubisi body. They cannot take the Young or Elderly Hindrances.
- **Arcane Resistance:** The magic of mortals has little effect on these powerful beings. They have +2 Armor against damaging arcane powers and resist opposed powers with +2 on Trait rolls.
- **Great Secret (Wanted, Major):** Should humans ever discover the existence

of a kuba-chubisi among them, they almost certainly react with resentment and violence. Should the existence of a whole race of such hidden advisors, or manipulators, be revealed to general knowledge, the very fabric of the Reign of Men might be destroyed. A kuba-chubisi would die rather than let that secret out.

- **Code of Honor (Pacifism):** Almost every member of this sophisticated race abhors violence and will only reluctantly use it in self-defense. This is equivalent to the Minor Pacifism Hindrance. Two exceptions exist: A few kuba-chubisi become, by nature and tradition, those who must carry out necessary bloodshed. These *savu-kaven*, designated assassins, take -2 Charisma instead of Pacifism. Alternatively, a kuba-chubisi hero might refuse to use deadly force under any circumstances; such characters have Major Pacifism as one of their chosen, additional Minor Hindrances and are called *free-dienun*, or noble hearts.

- **Among Men:** Every kuba-chubisi lives in one of the ten Cities of Men. When choosing Edges and Skills, a kuba-chubisi can buy the advantage given to humans from that city, regardless of requirements.

## New Edge

### Arcane Background (City Master) (*mahsh-ah tahd*)

**Requirements:** Novice, kuba-chubisi

**Arcane Skill:** Knowledge (Specific City)

**Power Points:** 10

**Starting Powers:** 3

This version of Arcane Background (Magic) is suitable only for spellcasters who spend all their time in one city, getting to know it intimately and feeling responsible for the town as a whole. In most settings such mages will be NPCs, but in the right campaign a hero could be a City Master as well. There can be only one City Master in each city, and his magic works *only* in the confines of his chosen burg, using secret symbols and architectures built into the city itself over many years of subtle kuba-chubisi influence. Even the patterns of the streets and squares conduct mystical force that he bends to his will. An arcane skill roll of 1 always fails regardless of modifiers, but there is no other backlash.

Wherever possible, the city itself intervenes to create the effects of the City Master's powers. Some examples, assuming the City Master has the appropriate power: Sudden crowds rush past foes, causing *confusion*; cobblestones roll underfoot and feet get jammed in mud, causing *slow* or *entangle*. A swarm of rats might surround an ally, acting as a *damage field* on all who get too close, while shoving, running mobs cause *havoc*. *Speak language* might cause a bilingual

local to stroll up and translate, and *succor* might simply find a willing nurse suddenly nearby. Flower pots and roof-tiles fall from above, doing damage; apparently open streets end in dead ends; ordinary-seeming folk become fearsome brawlers; runaway carts sweep through a square as *pummel* or a *blast*. *Teleport* is a special case: a City Master with this power can teleport to any one of the city's major monuments, regardless of distance, for the basic PP cost. The GM should reward a player's creative use of the city's characteristics with interesting successes and the occasional Bennie, while reserving less sympathy for spells that don't involve the city at all.

## Kobolds

These diminutive reptilian bipeds are cousins to the kuba-chubisi, a dark echo of their primitive past, with a name corrupted from "kuba-chubisi" as well. Kobolds exist to harass human society; fortunately they lack the wit and wisdom to realize that the kuba-chubisi live among men, fearing exposure. Kobolds appear in bands of 2d6, preferring ambush to a straight fight.

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d4, Vigor d4

**Skills:** Climbing d8, Fighting d4, Notice d4, Taunt d4, Stealth d10, Throwing d6

**Pace:** 5; Parry: 4; Toughness: 4 (1)

**Gear:** Short spears, two (Str+d4) (2/4/8)

### SPECIAL ABILITIES:

- Small: -1 Size and Toughness.
- Reptile Hide: +1 natural Armor.
- Low Light Vision: Kobolds ignore penalties for bad lighting except for pitch dark.

# ORKS: Blood of the Gods

## Savage Worlds Racial Traits

- **Divine Heritage:** Infused with more than mortal bloodlines, orks are naturally strong and impressive. An ork starts with a d6 in one attribute, or else +2 Charisma, depending on which god's blood he most strongly manifests. See below.
- **Low-Light Vision:** Orks have large, sensitive eyes. They ignore attack penalties for Dim and Dark lighting.
- **Cult of Pain (*shathula*):** When an ork recovers from being Shaken by painful injury, he can attempt an immediate additional Spirit roll to gain +1 to Fighting rolls for one round.
- **Tribal Reputation (*shash*):** An ork's reputation follows him for life. At the GM's discretion, an ork can gain a Bennie from either an extraordinary success ("glory") or a remarkably disastrous failure ("blunder"), so long as members of his tribe witness the memorable event.
- **Tribal Heraldry (*ghutha*):** A leader visibly accompanied by the tribe's banner enjoys the Command Presence Edge, extending his command radius to 10" on the tactical for all orks of his tribe.
- **Bit the Hand:** Orks rebelled against their own gods, killed them, and ate them, gaining great freedom, a mighty inheritance, and the curses of the dying immortals. An ork starts play with one fewer Bennie.
- **Red Rage (*bludga*):** Once an ork gets mad, he tends to lose control. To resist the Red Rage, an ork must make a Bludga Check: a Spirit roll that fails if a 1 comes up on the Spirit die (regardless of Wild Die.) Ork Extras make Bludga checks as group rolls. An ork with the Natural Leader Edge can use his own Bennies to allow his troops to retry a group Bludga check.

## BLUDGA CHECKS

Here are some sample situations in which an ork must check for the Red Rage.

- If defeated in a non-combat contest, such as a Social Conflict (SWD p96,) Test of Wills (SWD p75,) or romantic rivalry, the ork must check to resist escalating to fisticuffs (non-lethal, unarmed fighting).
- If defeated in a non-lethal fight, the ork must check to resist switching to deadly weapons.
- In combat, the ork must check to resist fighting to the finish. On a failure, he refuses to stop until all his foes are defeated or he is physically incapable of fighting on.

The GM might choose to award a Bennie for excellent roleplaying of the struggle with rage.

## Divine Heritage

Each of these six tribes produces orks with a particular gift, whether through training and culture, or, as the orks would have it, due to the blood of a particular god.

### SHIELD BREAKERS: SONS OF BHUGAN

Through the hero Bhugan, these orks most strongly manifest the blood of the god Thranna the Shield Breaker. They start with a d6 in Strength.

### IRON BENDERS: THE USH

These orks inherit the blood of the god Ghursha the Smith through the hero Ush. They start with a d6 in Smarts.

### KEEPERS OF SECRETS

Through descent from the hero Ighusha, these orks manifest the blood of the resourceful god Teel. They start with a d6 in Spirit.

### KHAVU'S CHILDREN

The hero Khavu is ancestor to these orks, and she gave to them the blood of the

goddess Dwimnga the All-Mother. Khavu's Children start plays with a d6 in Vigor.

### THE SHADOW STEPPERS

The god Shuvala the Knife-Thrower dealt with unknown forces of darkness to gain power, and when the hero Tuvanka ate his heart, she inherited the bargain. The shadow lingers over her descendants, although details remain secret. Shadow Steppers start with a d6 in Agility.

### THE GUILF OF KHUSMET

The limitless charm of the goddess Vampkh did not protect her from the hero Khusmet, who passes the blood down to her kin. Orks manifesting Vampkh's divine heritage have the Charismatic Edge.

## New Edges

### Background Edge: Strong Blood

**Requirements:** Novice, ork, Wild Card, Strength d8, Vigor d6

This Edge is inborn and must be taken at character creation. The unusually strong concentration of divine blood in this ork gives him +1 Toughness and wins the respect of the tribe. His natural might also gives the ork +2 on Climbing rolls.

### Professional Edge: Tribal Champion (*Gahthrak*)

**Requirements:** Seasoned, ork, Strong Blood, Fighting d8+

Having grown up marked for greatness, at adulthood the strong-blooded ork assumes the status of gahthrak, or tribal champion. Although champion is not a formal rank, the gahthrak has the Command Edge as applied to other orks of the same tribe, including as a prerequisite

### **Feth'ork Dire Wolf**

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d4 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6

**Pace:** 10; Parry: 6; Toughness: 6

### **Special Abilities**

- **Bite:** Str+d6.
- **Go for the Throat:** Wolves instinctively go for an opponent's soft spots. With a raise on its attack roll, it hits the target's most weakly armored location.
- **Fleet-Footed:** Dire wolves roll d10s instead of d6s when running.
- **Berserk Beast:** When Shaken by an injury, or when it sees its master Shaken or wounded, the feth'ork immediately goes berserk. It fights with -2 Parry, +2 Fighting, +2 Toughness, and +2 to Strength rolls including melee damage. On a roll of 1 on its Fighting die, the beast attacks a random adjacent target, friend or foe, or else charges the closest living thing, but it never attacks its master. The beast fights until dead or until its master calms it down by spending a full action and making a Spirit roll at -2.
- **Feth'ork Loyalty:** The feth'ork is bound to an ork master with the Blooded Beast Edge and will not attack its master even when berserk.

to other command Edges. The gahthrak also gains the mystical ability to gain strength by consuming the heart of an enemy (see below). By vote (*thunda*) or the orders of the elders, the tribe can demand that the gahthrak fight another tribe's champion, and he must obey or lose all his gahthrak privileges and be drummed out of the tribe or killed.

**Heart Eating:** When the gahthrak devours the heart of an enemy he has just defeated, no more than an hour ago, he mystically absorbs its strength. It takes a cutting weapon and two successful Fighting or Healing rolls to cut out a helpless creature's heart, modified by its Size (minimum 1 roll). The skill rolls go against a TN 2, plus any armor that must be penetrated. Once the ork gains access to the heart, taking a serious bite of the organ requires a full round. Upon completing this ritual, the gahthrak gains +2 to Fighting, Intimidation, and Strength rolls, including melee damage, for a number of rounds equal to the creature's Size, modified by the gahthrak's Rank (+1 for Novice, +2 for Seasoned, etc., or double that if the enemy was a Wild Card). Successfully completing the Heart Eating ritual in view of tribe members is good for the gahthrak's reputation (*shash*).

### **Background Edge: Blooded Beast (feth'ork)**

**Requirements:** Novice, ork, Spirit d6

The ork has spent six months on the ritual of Feth'ork Bleeding: feeding a captive animal every day on food mixed with the ork's own blood. As a result, the beast has become a feth'ork: an animal companion magically loyal to the ork, similar to the effect of the Beast Master Edge. The animal also gains a form of the Berserk Edge, but will never attack the ork even when fighting at random. Only a carnivore of Size 0 or less can be Blooded. An ork can only have one feth'ork at a time and no one can make a feth'ork for someone else. If and only if the beast dies, the GM may allow the ork to create another from a new animal, but this requires another six months of daily feeding. Missing even one day requires that the hopeful beast master start all over with a new beast. See details of a typical Feth'ork Dire Wolf below.

### **Arcane Background (Blood Shaman) (*Ghashoh*)**

**Requirements:** Novice, ork

**Arcane Skill:** Intimidation (Spirit)

**Power Points:** 10

**Starting Powers:** 2

The gods of the orks no longer exist, except in the veins and arteries of living orks. The ghashoh's magic functions just as Arcane Background (Miracles), but she draws power from ork's blood—literally. There must always be a supply of blood available to perform miracles with. Usually the ghashoh's own blood suffices: a few drops for Novice powers, an ounce or so for Seasoned powers. For stronger miracles, the GM might require a pint or more, and the source becomes important. An arcane skill roll of 1 means that some blood spills, drips, or stains, possibly leaving evidence or making it easier for foes to track the ghashoh. On snake eyes, the ghashoh or other ork contributing the blood takes 1d4 damage. Ghashoh powers also have trappings involving splashes of hot blood, the stink of iron everywhere, and affecting the blood in other creatures. Failing to put the interest of her own tribe before all else counts as sin for the ghashoh, and might alienate her from the source of her power as on SWD p103.

### **Arcane Background (Keeper of Memories) (*Fala*)**

**Requirements:** Novice, ork

**Arcane Skill:** Knowledge (History)

**Power Points:** 10

**Starting Powers:** 2

The Fala functions as the repository of his tribe's history and knows the shash or reputation of each tribe member. Fala magic comes from the recitations of glorious deeds or memorable blunders in the tribe's history. Such songs can inspire fellow orks with beneficial effects or call down harmful powers on foes. This form of Arcane Background (Miracles) has emotional trappings, such as stunning foes by calling forth their most humiliating memories or causing actual damage from shock. Certainly highly physical powers may not be appropriate, as the GM sees fit. As with the Ghashoh, the Fala can lose access to his abilities if he does not work for the benefit of the tribe.

# Roddun: Guardians of the streets

## Savage Worlds Traits

- **Short-Timers:** Roddun are mature by the age of two years and start to get run down around age 12, living only a few years beyond that.
- **Rodden Reputation (Code of Honor):** Roddun live by a code of loyalty and acknowledge the power and status of even humans and businesses in their neighborhoods. So strict is the roddun code of respect that it almost balances out the revulsion humans naturally feel to sewer-dwelling rat-men. The net is -1 Charisma with other races. See below.
- **Claws:** Roddun have long, sharp claws. These natural weapons do Str+d6 damage and a roddun whose hands are free is not considered unarmed. Roddun also start with Climbing skill at d6.
- **Plagueborn:** Roddun are immune to normal diseases.

## Roddun Reputation

The roddun code of honor defies perfect comprehension by other races, but certain elements are clear. From his immediate family out to the world at large, the closer a roddun is to someone, the more respect and protection he owes that person. In order of increasing size, the levels run as follows.

- **First Kin:** Parents and siblings get total devotion.
- **The Mischief:** Each roddun runs in a small group known as a Mischief. They all have the Loyalty Hindrance to one another and consider themselves “guardians of the streets.” Each Mischief has a leader known as the *itztitl*.
- **The Inner Circle:** In addition to his Mischief, a roddun has strong respect for people he knows personally.
- **The Barrio:** A barrio is a poor neighborhood in a human city. Roddun who live there feel personal responsibility for the well-being of the barrio, and many humans



have come to appreciate their efforts. All the Mischiefs in a barrio work together to protect it. They attack thieves and gangs who would prey on residents, eliminate vermin (including normal-sized rats,) and patrol for trouble. In exchange, they help themselves to the occasional excess possession that might be unneeded by its human owner, at least in the roddun mind. Established businesses formalize this into regular payments, usually of food. Roddun term this *tseet*, “gratitude.”

- **The King Rat:** Each barrio has one King Rat with the highest reputation. He has his own large Mischief and exercises power over all the others.
- **The Outside World:** Roddun feel very little respect for those outside their home barrio. Such folk are fair game for theft and other foul play.

## Roddun In The Cities Of Men

Roddun populations occupy barrios in eight of the ten Cities of Men, with varying degrees of acceptance and influence. In Upper Nevarnare, Tomkin, and Vanta, a roddun showing himself on the street is marked for extermination, and even elsewhere, humans from those towns react to them at a total of -2 Charisma. In Lower Nevarnare, Ajun, and Millford, roddun are tolerated as part of the city, and they have no Charisma penalty with humans from those towns. The other five cities of men view them with suspicion but not hatred, for -1 Charisma. In addition, the thieves' guilds of Jinix fight the roddun in a hidden war for control of the streets.

## New Edges

### Arcane Background (Junk Magic)

**Requirements:** Novice, roddun

**Arcane Skill:** Repair (Smarts)

**Power Points:** 10

**Starting Powers:** 1

The roddun learned their Weird Science magic by watching human and uvandir mages and copying what they did. They draw powers from shiny rocks, the pages of books stolen from humans, and contraptions thrown together from scrounged material and trash. Junk magic works exactly as uvandir gemstone magic except for two factors. First, the value of replacement stones and materials is one-tenth as much (\$10 for a Novice power.) Secondly, the magic is slipshod and improvised. On an arcane skill roll of 2, regardless of wild die or modifiers, the power fails. On a roll of 1, the power fails and the device is damaged, requiring a Repair roll and 1d6 hours to fix. On snake eyes, it explodes, doing 2d6 damage in a Large Burst Template.

### KING RAT (*skiztatt*)

**Requirements:** Roddun, Heroic rank, 1 year in same town

The roddun hero is boss of a barrio, a neighborhood where he's been operating and increasing his reputation for at least a year. He has +2 Charisma with roddun from his neighborhood and a total of +1 with the humans, and can call on 1d6 roddun Extras as allies with a few hours' notice. Residents of the barrio often come to the King Rat with requests for help, and he can count on small favors in return.



# Dungeon World

## New Character Creation Rules

To represent the vast diversity of the races in *Wicked Fantasy*, a change should be made to Chapter 3, Section 2 of *Dungeon World* (replace the existing text with the following).

### **2. Choose a Race**

All characters have a race - the stock and culture from which they hail.

These grant them special advantages or abilities. Choose one from your playbook or from the appropriate race section in the [WICKED FANTASY DW CONVERSION GUIDE]. Members of any class may hail from any available race.

# Humans

The fate and lives of humans, more than any other race, are tied to civilization. They shape their environment and in turn are bonded to it. The culture of human cities define who they are as people. When creating a human character, choose one of the following cities as your home, and note the move on your character sheet.

In addition, if you are human, you have this move;

## Coming Home

When you **return to your hometown** roll +CHA. On a 10+ someone here will help you; a friend or member of your family will put you up and feed you while you are in town. On a 7-9, there's a debt you must repay, first. On a miss, dire news, a spiteful enemy or a former lover, spurned, are waiting for you.

## Home Cities

### MILLFORD

Your people are rugged and fearless, raised at the edges of the Reign. Your wariness

protects you and your companions. When you *take watch*, treat any miss as a 7-9.

### NEVARNARE

The flow and balance of power are always obvious to the people of Nevarnare. Whenever you *discern realities* you may always ask "Who is in charge, here?" in addition to your normal results (even on a miss.)

### AJUN

Philosophers and academicians, your people are well-schooled, even adventurers. When encountering something of human historical value (statuary, architecture, poetry, etc.) the GM will tell you something interesting about it.

### TOMKIN

Auntie Rose teaches the folk of Tomkin the bonds of love and compassion. When choosing Bonds, pick another member of the party and write an additional, special Bond about why you seek to protect or shelter that person from harm.

## VANTA

No matter your class, you are trained in the sword and the spear as required by the laws of your city. When wielding one of these two weapons, increase your damage die by one size (d4 becomes d6, d6 becomes d8, d8 becomes d10, d10 becomes d12)

## TAMERCLIMB

Tamerclimb is home to humans who understand the rule of law. When you spend some time observing humans in a new civilization, you can infer any major rule or law that governs them.

## SHAVAY

The Roadmen of Shavay are an inspiration to all, carving a path through the darkness of the world. Their stories inspire you - when you *undertake a perilous journey* and take responsibility for a job, you succeed automatically, as if you had rolled a 10+.

## JINIX

You hail from the City of Thieves, a smuggler's den and haven for the villainous. When you **intimidate someone** you can *parley* with STR instead of CHA.

## ASHCLOMB

Treachery, murder and foul sorcery are commonplace in Ashclomb. You know fear better than you know your own thoughts. When you are forced to resist the effects of fear or terror, take +1 forward to do so.

## VINNICK

Wizardry is no mysterious art to the people of Vinnick. Everyone knows a minor spell or two.

You know a number of Cantrips equal to your INT (or 1, whichever is lower) and can *cast a*

*spell* as per the Wizard move of the same name to invoke them. If you are already a Wizard, you can never fail your *cast a spell* roll when using these Cantrips. Treat any miss, in that case, as though you'd rolled a 7-9 instead. When you take a few hours to rest, you automatically gain access to these spells if you'd forgotten them.

## New Human Cleric: The Philosopher

Humans of the Reign have no gods to whom they pay homage. A Cleric is, instead, a student of philosophy and the humanities, drawing upon meditations and insight rather than praying to the gods. Below are modified moves, accordingly. Replace the existing moves with those below. The following changes apply to a Human Cleric;

*Cleric is hence renamed "Philosopher"*

*All reference to Holy Symbol should instead refer to Philosopher's Focus.*

*Deity is replaced with "Philosophy"*

## Philosophy

You study and practice a school of philosophical thought, which grants you access to meditations. Give your philosophical school a name and choose it's core principle:

- Determinism (understanding of the physical world)
- Sensualism (the pursuit of new experience)
- Utilitarianism (the morality of action)
- Nihilism (doom and endings)
- Philanthropy (charity and compassion)

Choose one precept for your school:

- Your school believes that suffering leads to enlightenment, add Petition: Suffering

- Your school is secretive and insular, add Petition: Gaining Hidden Knowledge
- Your school has ancient meditative rituals, add Petition: Complex Rites
- Your school believes in the sanctity of the flesh, add Petition: Ascetic Devotion

*Divine Guidance is replaced with "Meditative Guidance"*

### **Meditative Guidance**

When you perform the precept of your philosophical school you are granted some useful insight related to your philosophy's principles.

### **Turn Undead**

When you **hold your philosophical focus close and direct your will your mind outward** roll+WIS. On a 7+ as long as you continue to concentrate and clutch your focus, no undead may come within reach of you. On a 10+ you also momentarily daze intelligent undead with the paradox of their own existence and cause unintelligent undead to flee. Aggression breaks the effect and they are able to act as normal. Intelligent undead may still find ways to harry you, or may attempt to engage you in discourse. They're tricky like that.

*Commune is replaced with "Meditate"*

When you **spend uninterrupted time (and hour or so) in quiet meditation on your philosophy**, you:

- Lose any spells already granted to you
- Are granted new spells of your choice whose total levels don't exceed your own level+1, and none of which is a higher level than your own level.
- Prepare all your rites, which never count against your limit.

### **Cast a Spell**

When you **unleash a spell you've prepared**, roll+WIS. On a 10+ the spell is successfully cast and you do not lose your capacity to cast it again. On a 7-9, the spell is cast but choose one:

- You draw unwelcome attention or put yourself in a spot, the GM will tell you how.
- Your casting fills your mind with philosophical minutiae, distracting you from the task at hand, take -1 ongoing to cast a spell until the next time you meditate
- After you cast it, the spell is lost from your memory. You cannot cast the spell again until you meditate and restore its mysteries to your memory.

Note that maintaining spells with ongoing effects will sometimes cause a penalty to your roll to cast a spell.

*The standard bonds are replaced by the following:*

### **Bonds**

\_\_\_\_\_ has insulted my school; I do not trust them.

\_\_\_\_\_ is a good and thoughtful person, I trust them implicitly.

\_\_\_\_\_ is in constant danger, I will keep them safe.

I enjoy debating philosophy with \_\_\_\_\_, though they do not see the true way.

*Add the following move to the Level 2-5 Advanced Moves*

### **Bonds of Fellowship**

You gain a new Bond to any other party member. Write it when you take this move. This will increase your total number of Bonds going forward.

*Chosen One is renamed "Apt Pupil"*

*Divine Intervention is replaced by “Eureka”*

## **Eureka**

When you meditate, you get 1 hold and lose any hold you already had. Spend that hold when an ally takes damage to gain a sudden flash of perfect insight. Your shouts of warning allow that ally to leap away to safety before they are harmed. The damage is negated.

*Divine Protection is renamed “Existential Protection”*

*Orison for Guidance is replaced by A Moment of Insight*

## **A Moment of Insight**

When you **sacrifice something of value and reflect on that sacrifice**, your thoughts turn to the situation at hand and a solution to a problem presents itself. The GM will tell you what it is. If you act on that information, mark experience.

*Anointed One is renamed Vaedictorian*

*Apotheosis is replaced with Platonically Solid*

## **Platonically Solid**

The first time you **spend time in meditation upon the mysteries of your philosophy** after taking this move, choose an ideal of your philosophy (an ascended human form, a clear and analytical mind, a spirit free of attachment). When you emerge from your meditation, you embody that ideal in some real, physical way. Tell the other players how you’ve changed.

*Reaper is replaced with “We Believe in Nothing”*

## **We Believe in Nothing**

When you **take time after a battle to reflect on the inevitable demise of all of existence** take +1 forward.

*Divine Invincibility is replaced with Battle Omniscience*

## **Battle Omniscience**

When you meditate, you get 2 hold and lose any hold you already had. Spend that hold when an ally takes damage to gain a sudden flash of perfect insight. Your shouts of warning allow that ally to leap away to safety before they are harmed. The damage is negated.

*Divine Armor is renamed “Ontological Aegis”*

## **Cleric Spells**

Human Philosophers have access to the following spells:

### **ROTES**

Every time you meditate, you gain access to all of your rotes without having to select them or count them towards your allotment of spells.

### **Light Rote**

An item you touch glows with light, about as bright as a torch. It gives off no heat or sound and requires no fuel but is otherwise like a mundane torch. You have complete control of the color of the flame. The spell lasts as long as it is in your presence.

### **Sanctify Rote**

Food or water you hold in your hands while you cast this spell is purified. In addition to now being holy or unholy, the affected substance is cleansed of any mundane spoilage.

### **Guidance Rote**

A symbolic focus appears before you and indicates the direction or course of action that would best serve you, then disappears. The message is through gesture only; communication through this spell is severely limited and is one-way.

## LEVEL 1 SPELLS

### **Inspire (Ongoing)**

Your presence inspires a combatant of your choice. They take +1 ongoing so long as battle continues and they stand and fight. While this spell is ongoing you take -1 to cast a spell.

### **Cure Light Wounds**

At your touch wounds scab and bones cease to ache. Heal an ally you touch of 1d8 damage.

### **Detect Alignment**

When you cast this spell choose an alignment: Good, Evil, Lawful, or Chaotic. One of your senses is briefly able to detect that alignment. The GM will tell you what here is of that alignment.

### **Cause Fear (Ongoing)**

Choose a target you can see and a nearby object. The target is afraid of the object so long as you maintain the spell. Their reaction is up to them: flee, panic, beg, fight. While this spell is ongoing you take -1 to cast a spell. You cannot target entities with less than animal intelligence (magical constructs, undead, automatons, and the like).

### **Perfected Weapon (Ongoing)**

The weapon you hold while casting does +1d4 damage until you dismiss this spell. While this spell is ongoing you take -1 to cast a spell.

### **Sanctuary**

As you cast this spell, you walk the perimeter of an area, measuring its existential boundaries. As long as you stay within that area you are alerted whenever someone acts with malice within the sanctuary (including entering with harmful intent). Anyone who receives healing within a sanctuary heals +1d4 HP.

### **Dialogue With the Dead**

A corpse converses with you briefly. It will answer any three questions you pose to it to the best of the knowledge it had in life

and the knowledge it gained in death. It may ask you a question or two as well.

## LEVEL 3 SPELLS

### **Animate Dead (Ongoing)**

You invoke a hungry spirit to possess a recently-dead body and serve you. This creates a zombie that follows your orders to the best of its limited abilities. Treat the zombie as a character, but with access to only the basic moves. It has a +1 modifier for all stats and 1 HP. The zombie also gets your choice of 1d4 of these traits:

- It's talented. Give one stat a +2 modifier.
- It's durable. It has +2 HP for each level you have.
- It has a functioning brain and can complete complex tasks.
- It does not appear obviously dead, at least for a day or two.

The zombie lasts until it is destroyed by taking damage in excess of its HP, or until you end the spell. While this spell is ongoing you take -1 to cast a spell.

### **Cure Moderate Wounds**

You staunch bleeding and set bones through magic. Heal an ally you touch of 2d8 damage.

### **Darkness (Ongoing)**

Choose an area you can see: it's filled with supernatural darkness and shadow. While this spell is ongoing you take -1 to cast a spell.

### **Resurrection**

Tell the GM you would like to resurrect a corpse whose soul has not yet fully departed this world. Resurrection is always possible, but the GM will give you one or more (possibly all) of these conditions to fulfill:

- It's going to take days/weeks/months



- You must get help from \_\_\_\_\_
- It will require a lot of money
- You must sacrifice \_\_\_\_\_ to do it

The GM may, depending on the circumstances, allow you to resurrect the corpse now, with the understanding that the conditions must be met before it's permanent, or require you to meet the conditions before the corpse is resurrected.

### **Hold Person**

Choose a person you can see and declare a paradox. Until you cast a spell or leave their presence they cannot act except to speak. This effect ends immediately if the target takes damage from any source.

## **LEVEL 5 SPELLS**

### **Revelation**

You undergo a moment of perfect understanding. The GM will shed light on the current situation. When acting on the information, you take +1 forward.

### **Cure Critical Wounds**

Heal an ally you touch of 3d8 damage.

### **Divination**

Name a person, place, or thing you want to learn about. Your understanding grants you visions of the target, as clear as if you were there.

### **Contagion (Ongoing)**

Choose a creature you can see. Until you end this spell, the target suffers from a disease of your choice. While this spell is ongoing you take -1 to cast a spell.

### **Words of the Unspeaking**

With a touch you speak to the spirits within things. The non-living object you touch answers three questions you pose, as best it can.

### **True Seeing (Ongoing)**

Your vision is opened to the true nature of everything you lay your eyes on. You pierce illusions and see things that have been hidden. The GM will describe the area before you ignoring any illusions and falsehoods, magical or otherwise. While this spell is ongoing you take -1 to cast a spell.

### **Trap Soul**

You trap the soul of a dying creature within a gem. The trapped creature is aware of its imprisonment but can still be manipulated through spells, parley, and other effects. All moves against the trapped creature are at +1. You can free the soul at any time but it can never be recaptured once freed.

## **LEVEL 7 SPELLS**

### **Word of Recall**

Choose a word. The first time after casting this spell that you speak the chosen word, you and any allies touching you when you cast the spell are immediately returned to the exact spot where you cast the spell. You can only maintain a single location; casting Word of Recall again before speaking the word replaces the earlier spell.

### **Heal**

Touch an ally and you may heal their damage a number of points up to your maximum HP.

### **Harm**

Touch an enemy and strike them with divine wrath—deal 2d8 damage to them and 1d6 damage to yourself. This damage ignores armor.

### **Sever (Ongoing)**

Choose an appendage on the target such as an arm, tentacle, or wing. The appendage is magically severed from their body, causing no damage but considerable pain. Missing an appendage may, for example, keep a winged creature from flying,

or a bull from goring you on its horns. While this spell is ongoing you take -1 to cast a spell.

### **Mark of Death**

Choose a creature whose true name you know. This spell creates permanent runes on a target surface that will kill that creature, should they read them.

### **Control Weather**

Looks like rain—or sun, wind, or snow. The weather will change according to your will and last a handful of days. This spell takes the appearance of a remarkably accurate prediction.

## **LEVEL 9 SPELLS**

### **Storm of Vengeance**

You predict unnatural weather of your choice. Rain of blood or acid, clouds of souls, wind that can carry away buildings, or any other weather you can imagine: declare it and it shall come.

### **Historical Therapy**

Choose one event in the target's past. All effects of that event, including damage, poison, disease, and magical effects, are ended and repaired. HP and diseases are healed, poisons are neutralized, magical effects are ended.

### **Authoritative Presence (Ongoing)**

Every creature must ask your leave to enter your presence, and you must give permission aloud for them to enter. Any creature without your leave takes an extra 1d10 damage whenever they take damage in your presence. While this spell is ongoing you take -1 to cast a spell.

### **Consume Unlife**

The mindless undead creature you touch is destroyed and you steal its death energy to heal yourself or the next ally you touch. The amount of damage healed is equal to the HP that the creature had remaining before you destroyed it.

### **La Peste (Ongoing)**

Name a city, town, encampment, or other place where people live. As long as this spell is active that place is beset by a plague appropriate to your philosophy (moral weakness, societal breakdown, ethical confusion) While this spell is ongoing you take -1 to cast a spell.

## **New Human Paladin: The Palatine**

Without gods to quest for, Humans who believe fervently do so in their own will and that of their people. The Paladin, here called the Palatine, is instead a man or woman of focus, discipline and skill - a warrior-paragon for all humanity. Below are modified moves, accordingly. Replace the existing moves with those below. The following changes apply to a Human Paladin;

*Paladin is hence renamed "Palatine"*

*All reference to Holy Symbol should instead refer to Inspiring Focus, an object that reminds the Palatine of their quest and devotion to humanity.*

### **Look**

Choose one for each;

Kind Eyes, Fiery Eyes, or Thousand-Yard Stare

Helmet, Styled Hair, or Bald

Worn Focus or Brand New Focus

Fit Body, Bulky Body, or Thin Body

### **Starting Move**

**Human:** Your people have struggled and suffered and grown hearty. You are immune to all non-magical diseases. Magical ailments have some lesser effect on you - the GM will tell you what.

*Lay on Hands is replaced with "Grant Relief"*

## Grant Relief

When you **touch someone else, skin to skin, and say something inspiring**, roll+CHA. On a 10+ you heal 1d8 damage or any debility. On a 7-9 they are healed or a debility removed, but you are exhausted by the result. Take the Weak debility. You cannot use this move if you are already

*I Am The Law is altered as follows:*

## I Am The Law

When you **give an NPC and order backed by your indomitable will**, roll+CHA. On a 7+ they choose one:

- Do what you say
- Back away cautiously, then flee
- Attack you

On an 10+ you also take +1 forward against them. On a miss, they do as they please and you take -1 forward against them

*Replace the trigger for the Quest move with the following:*

**“dedicate yourself to a mission through meditation and ritual focus,”**

## Alignment

*Replace Law Alignment Move with the following*

**Law:** Prove the glory of the Reign of Man to a skeptic.

## Gear

Replace the “mark of faith” with an “inspiring object”.

Remove the “Halberd” option

## Bonds

\_\_\_\_\_ misguided behaviour endangers them, and more importantly, me!

\_\_\_\_\_ has stood by me in battle and can be trusted completely.

I respect \_\_\_\_\_ despite their questionable beliefs.

\_\_\_\_\_ is a brave soul, I have much to learn from them.

*Divine Favour is replaced with Philosopher's Mind*

## Philosopher's Mind

Dedicate yourself to a school of philosophy (name a new one or choose one that has already been established). You gain the *meditate* and *cast a spell* Philosopher moves. When you select this move, treat yourself as a Philosopher of level 1 for using spells. Every time you gain a level thereafter, increase your effective Philosopher level by 1.

*Holy Protection is renamed “Bulwark Will”*

*Evidence of Faith no longer has a move requirement.*

*Divine Protection is renamed “Fortress of Will”*

*Divine Authority is renamed “Unquestionable Authority”*

# Haffuns

You are a Haffun and so, have this move:

## **Custom Move: Ghuva, the Giving Curse**

When someone **looks you in the eye and asks for help, honestly** you may do as they ask, and gain 1 XP. If you do not, you must Defy Danger with CON as the Giving Curse drains you of your life.

## **Haffun Race Moves**

### **FAMILY HAFFUN**

Choose a craft or talent (bookkeeping, fashion, food, housekeeping, etc). Your family is known across the land for their skill in this field. When you are with at least one other member of your family, and do not attempt to hide it, you have the **Reputation** move as per the Bard (DW, page 86). The effects of the move pertain only to the family and their craft, not you alone, though you may benefit or suffer from those effects as usual.

### **Yffur**

You are without house and home, cast adrift in the seas of life. When you visit any large city, the GM will tell you what other Yffur gangs exist there and their codes of conduct.

### **Revolutionary Hobyn**

Your people have been shackled by mankind for too long, the time to rise up is now! When you **Parley** in clear view of a crowd (at a pulpit, atop a soapbox, etc) you may treat the crowd as a single character, affecting them en masse as you would an individual.

### **Wipla**

Every adventuring party appreciates the skills of a Haffun close at hand. Anyone who eats your cooking takes +1 forward to Aid you.

### **New Monster: Ranfa, Haffun Ghost**

*Solitary, Small, Magical, Intelligent*

poltergeist mischief (d6 damage), *Close, Near, Far*

12 HP, 4 armor

**Special Qualities:** intangibility

**Instinct:** to help the living  
(though not always helpfully)

- tidy up unexpectedly
- throw a tantrum of pots and pans
- share the wisdom of the long dead

**New Monster: Shutha, Haffun Spectre**

*Solitary, Small, Magical, Stealthy,  
Devious, Intelligent, Terrifying*

thrown household objects (b[2d8+2]  
damage), *Close, Near, Far*

12 HP, 4 armor

**Special Qualities:** intangibility,  
haunting visage

**Instinct:** get revenge for a life of servitude

- possess a human body
- break something valuable
- whisper poisonous words
- reveal a dark family secret

**Compendium Class:  
Haffun Jorsha**

When you **awaken your Jorsha gifts through ritual, prayer, study or some other means** you may immediately take the **Ghost Sense** move and are considered “Jorsha” henceforth.

**GHOST SENSE**

You are able to perceive ghosts, spectres and other spirits of the dead as though they were living creatures. You can, with a moment’s focus, sense such creatures within a few paces distance of you.

Whenever you gain a level, the following moves are treated as a part of your usual class advancement list.

**EXPULSION ENERGY**

When you **repel an undead spirit** roll + CON. On a 10+ the spirit is banished from this reality. On a 7-9, you may banish the spirit, but if you do, suffer a debility. If you possess the *fana* of a Haffun ghost, treat any result of 6 or less as a 7 when attempting to banish that ghost.

**ANCESTOR’S TOUCH**

When you **gaze into someone’s ancestral bloodlines** roll + WIS. On a 10+ you can ask the GM three questions about their family history. They will answer honestly. On a 7-9, one of the answers will be false, misleading or something you wish you hadn’t heard.

**Compendium Class:  
Haffun Butler**

When you **are a Haffun who has taken on a family to serve and forsworn your name in favour of one of the 20 sacred names**, whenever you gain a level, the following moves are treated as a part of your usual class advancement list.

**CONSIGLIERE**

When you **intimidate or frighten someone to get what you want** roll + CHA. On a 10+ they give you what you want and keep their mouth shut about. On a 7-9 they give you what you want, but go running home to tell their boss all about how you threatened them.

**THE WORLD IS YOURS**

When you **carouse** in a city where your family has influence, you never have to

spend coin. Always roll +3. No matter the result, things *always* get out of hand.

### THE BOUNCER

When you **deal damage** you may choose to deal 0 damage instead. If you do, your enemy suffers Stun damage.

### DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

When you **loudly and obviously invoke the power of your name**, roll + CHA. On a 10+ everyone who can hear and understand you is stunned for a moment, unable to do anything but tremble. On a 7-9, you get their attention, but they are free to act as normal. On a miss, you are the target of spite and ire, everyone's looking at you.

### SAY HELLO TO MY LITTLE FRIEND

When you **reveal a concealed weapon nobody knew you had**, roll + WIS. On a 10+ it can be any standard, non-magical weapon you choose, of any size. On a 7-9 it has to be something you could reasonably have hidden on your person (a dagger, etc).

# Orks

You are an Ork, so you have this move

## READING THE VA

When you **read the scars of honor on the body of an Ork**, roll + WIS. On a 10+ they will tell you their proudest triumph and their most shameful defeat. On a 7-9, you learn only what they want you to. On a miss, you misinterpret or misunderstand - the GM will tell you something false. If you act as though it were true, mark XP.

You belong to one of the six tribes, or wander away from your people, spreading their stories. Choose one of the following race moves;

## Ughash

When you tell the old tales of your tribe to outsiders, take +1 forward to Parley with them thereafter.

## Shield Breaker

Your scars tell the story of your many battles. Describe them as part of your Look during character creation. Name a type of

creature (humans, the undead, other orks) you have fought before. Take +1 damage ongoing against that type of creature.

## Iron Bender

No matter your class or profession, with time, you may craft and repair any arms or armor. The GM will tell you how long it will take, and how the item will be better for it (stronger, lighter, or otherwise).

## Keeper of Secrets

Your tribe knows much and remembers even more. When you Spout Lore the GM will always tell you whom in your tribe would know even more on the topic, and what might make them talk.

## Guile of Khusmet

You may be both male and female at once, or neither, if you choose. Your character is beautiful to all who look upon them, no matter their predilection, preference or species. You may be respected, loved or feared for this.

## Khavu's Children

You do not tire. You do not sleep. You need not rest, such is your undying endurance.

## Shadow Steppers

You speak the language of the dark, and understand the whispers of shadow.

You may communicate with any creature composed of such things.

## Compendium Class: Gathrak

When you **are and Ork who has undergone the Gathrak ritual** you immediately gain the **My Blood is My Weapon** move.

### My Blood is My Weapon

When you **draw on the strength of your blood** roll + CON. On a hit, take +1 damage ongoing for the rest of the current battle as you are empowered by ancestral energy. On a 10+ you don't have to sacrifice anything afterward to pay the ancestors back.

Whenever you gain a level, the following moves are treated as a part of your usual class advancement list.

### Duel of Champions

When you **champion a cause in a duel between equals**, the outcome is binding among the tribes. Whichever cause the winner championed is accepted as the chosen path for all those affected.

### Leading the Horde

When you **command the Tribe's warriors in battle**, roll + CHA. On a 10+, hold 3. On a 7-9, hold 1. During the battle, you can spend your hold 1-for-1 on the following;

- they spare a defeated enemy

- they resist the urge to scatter when assaulted
- they attack an obviously more-powerful or intimidating foe
- they remain focused, resisting the urge to loot and pillage

## Bard Change: Fala

An Ork bard is known as a Fala, the Voice & Memory of their tribe. The Fala watches and remembers. The following changes apply to an Ork Bard.

*Arcane Art is replaced with "Memory Recitation"*

### Memory Recitation

When you **recite aloud the memories of your tribe**, choose an ally and an effect:

- Heal 1d8 damage
- +1d4 forward to damage
- Their mind is shaken clear of one enchantment
- The next time someone successfully assists the target with aid, they get +2 instead of +1

Then roll+Cha. On a 10+, the ally gets the selected effect. On a 7-9, your recitation still works, but you draw unwanted attention or your magic reverberates to other targets affecting them as well, GM's choice.

*Add the following options to the Bardic Lore list*

- Tribal Grudges Unfulfilled
- Lords and Masters of the Horde
- Exiles and Forbidden Taboo

*Port in the Storm is replaced with "A Visitor Among the Tribes"*



## A Visitor Among the Tribes

When you **visit the encampment of an Ork tribe**, tell the GM when you were last here. They'll tell you how the tribe has changed since then.

*The "Good" alignment option is replaced with "Lawful"*

## Lawful

Enforce adherence to the customs of your people.

*Equipment: The fala carries no instrument, instead, they have a 0 weight symbol of their authority. Additionally, replace "duelling rapier" with "tribal weapon". The fala may choose any weapon appropriate to their tribe.*

*Bonds: replace all Bard bonds with the following*

This is not my first adventure with \_\_\_\_.

The ancestors whisper of the deeds of \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_ does not respect the past as they should.

I am chronicling the story of \_\_\_\_  
so it shall not be forgotten.

\_\_\_\_ trusted me with a secret.

\_\_\_\_ does not trust me, and for good reason.

*Healing Song is replaced with Tale of Weal*

## Tale of Weal

When you heal with Memory Recitation, you heal +1d8 damage.

*Vicious Cacophony is replaced with Parable Told in Blood*

## Parable Told in Blood

When you grant bonus damage with Memory Recitation, you grant an extra +1d4 damage.

*It Goes to Eleven is modified as follows;*

## It Goes To Eleven

When you **sing the songs of rage and pain**, choose a target who can hear you and roll+Cha. On a 10+ the target attacks their nearest ally in range. On a 7–9 they attack their nearest ally, but you also draw their attention and ire.

*Metal Hurlant is modified as follows;*

## Metal Hurlant

When you **shout with all your might**, choose a target and roll+Con. On a 10+ the target takes 1d10 damage and is deafened for a few minutes. On a 7–9 you still damage your target, but it's out of control: the GM will choose an additional target nearby.

*Eldritch Tones is replaced with Long History*

## Long History

Your Memory Recitation taps into a broad stream of traditions, allowing you to choose two effects instead of one.

*Healing Chorus is replaced with Tale of Bounty*

## Tale of Bounty

Replaces: Tale of Weal

When you heal with Memory Recitation, you heal +2d8 damage.

*Vicious Blast is replaced with Parable Writ in Pain*

## Parable Writ in Pain

Replaces: Parable Told in Blood

When you grant bonus damage with Memory Recitation, you grant an extra +2d4 damage.

*Eldritch Chord is replaced with Longer History*

## **Longer History**

Replaces: Long History

When you use Memory Recitation, you choose two effects. You also get to choose one of those effects to double.

## **Ranger Changes: The Feth'ork Bond**

Natural animals fear and distrust the Ork people. An Ork ranger has overcome this and bonded powerfully with his companion animal. The Ork Ranger gains an additional move.

### **Feth'ork Bond**

You are bonded to your Companion by the Feth'ork bonding ritual. Animals bonded this way become more Ork-like, and have +1 Ferocity and +1 Instinct, no matter their base, as well, they always have the Strength: *Fearless* and the weakness: *Bloodthirsty*.

## **Cleric Change: Shathula, The Cult of Pain**

Ork Clerics do not follow Gods, they revere suffering. Orks revere this grim herald as a divine force. As such, an Orc Cleric's Deity is as follows;

### **Shathula, the Grim Herald**

Domain: Pain and Suffering

Precept: Values stoicism in the face of pain.

Petition: Suffer without showing weakness.

# Elves

Choose one of the following moves to represent your Elven heritage. If you are tree-bound, you lose access to this move if your Great Tree dies.

## Human-raised

Choose a hometown and the accompanying move from the Human list.

## Oak-bound

You are an expert at single combat. When you face only one enemy without interference, treat any **Hack and Slash** roll that is a 6 or less as a 7.

## Birch-bound

When you lock eyes with someone, so long as you maintain that contact, they cannot look away. If this move is made against a PC, they may be able to Defy Danger to look away, especially if they know of this ability.

## Elm-bound

Anyone who carries a branch from your Great Tree is connected to you. You may communicate with them over any distance so long as they carry the branch.

## Ash-bound

Ready for anything, you cannot be startled or surprised.

## Blackthorn-bound

When you **Defy Danger** to avoid being caught in a lie, take +1 to that roll.

## Soil-bound

Against bludgeoning attacks (fists, sticks, hammers, etc) you are always considered to have +1 armor. Your Load is increased by 4.

## Iron-bound

You are a living ghost, a slave bound to another. If it is a PC, write a bond representing your curse. If it is an NPC, describe them. Take +1 ongoing when rolling to Aid or Interfere with them.

## Custom Move: The Iron Binding

When you are **bound by iron** replace your race move with *Iron-bound*.

## Compendium Class: Durzhah

When you surrender to the *khuzu* replace your existing race move with **Dark Elf**.

### Dark Elf

You have abandoned your heritage for darkness. When you **seek the advice of the khuzu** roll + WIS. On a 10+ the darkness imparts some clear, helpful information about your situation. On a 7-9 the visions are strange or tainted. Remember, the darkness has its own agenda. The GM will ask you some questions, too...

Whenever you gain a level, the following moves are treated as a part of your usual class advancement list.

### Szhaszh

When you **call upon darkness to attack your enemies**, describe how they answer and roll + CHA. On a 10+ choose 2, on a 7-9, choose one.

- you deal your damage, ignoring material armor
- you affect a handful of targets
- you do not expose yourself or your allies to danger

### Vezhma

You may summon a *shadow viper* to serve you. This creature obeys your commands, shares its senses with you and can attack your enemies with poisonous fangs. If it dies, you may summon it again after a full night of meditation.

### Oghzan

When you **conjure the spirits of darkness** choose a newly-dead body for them to inhabit and roll + WIS. On a 10+ choose three, on a 7-9 choose two.

- the summoning lasts more than a few moments
- the spirits are willing to follow your commands without struggle
- the spirits empower the body with unusual strength or qualities (the GM will tell you what they are)

## Compendium Class: Heart-Bound

When you **undergo the bonding rituals** discard your race move and replace it with the following;

### Heart Bound

You are tied to another through bonds of transcendent love. If it is a PC, write a bond representing your blessing. If it is an NPC, describe them. You are always aware of their condition and where they are in relation to yourself.

Whenever you gain a level, the following moves are treated as a part of your usual class advancement list. If your bond with them is ever broken, you lose access to any Heart-Bound class moves you may have.

### In Sickness and In Health

You may suffer wounds or debilities for your true love. If wounds, tell them the number of HP to heal. You take that much damage. If a debility, tell them to erase it and mark that debility on your character sheet.

### Expel All Fear

While you are able to see each other, you and your true love are immune to the effects of fear. You still feel the emotion, but it will never overcome you.

## **Empath**

You may, with concentration, sense the emotions of those around you as colored auras.

## **Until Death**

When you draw your Last Breath and roll a 7-9, your true love may make the bargain with death in your stead. If they do, they are bound by it and you are restored to life at 1 HP as though you had never visited Death's Kingdom.

## **Do Us Part**

Requires: Until Death

So long as your true love lives, you cannot die. The inverse is true as well. Suffering a wound that would force either of you to draw your Last Breath instead reduces you to 0 hp and puts you into a deep sleep that only the other can awaken you from. If the living partner is reduced to 0 hp while this sleep is in effect, you both visit Death together. Roll your Last Breath individually, but treat any result of 10+ as a 9.

Compendium Class: Cyllawellan

When you **join the ranks of the Cyllawellan**, gain the following move immediately;

## **Aspect of the Trees**

Whenever you have a few hours to meditate, you may change your race move to any other tree-bound Elf race move.

Whenever you gain a level, the following moves are treated as a part of your usual class advancement list.

## **Gorddluydeae**

You may declare another character your Guardian. If you do, you are able to sense their presence at all times and for the purposes of magic (yours or anyone else's) you and your Guardian are the same person. You and your Guardian take +1 ongoing to Aid or Interfere with each other.

# Dach'youn

You were born under a *moon sign*. Choose one;

## Cha'ppa

Whenever the target of your **Discern Realities** is a person, take +1 forward to that roll.

## Gu'rgha

Whenever you **Defy Danger** with your CON, take +1 forward to that roll.

## Gu'Sha

Choose a stat. When an ally is forced to **Defy Danger** with that stat, they may use your bonus instead. If they do, you are exposed to the results as well.

## Hav'ha

You are adept at using your claws and teeth as a weapon - take +2 damage forward when you do.

## Or'gha

When you have plenty of time to reflect and are in no hurry, take +1 to any **Spout Lore** roll.

## Sh'va

You radiate an aura of trustworthiness. This can provide an excellent first impression or a moment of nervous hesitation, depending on how you leverage it.

## Vax

When your leverage is violence, you may always **Parley** with STR instead of CHA.

## Thief Changes: Eecha

*Add the following move to the Advanced Moves (2-5) list for a Dach'youn Thief.*

### Scent Tracking

When you **follow the scent trail left behind by passing creatures**, roll+WIS. On a 7+, you follow the creature's trail until there's a significant change in its direction or mode of travel. On a 10+, you also choose 1:

- Gain a useful bit of information about your quarry, the GM will tell you what
- Determine what caused the trail to end

## **Fighter Changes: Grrkhun**

*Add the following move to the Advanced Moves (2-5) list for a Dach'youn Fighter.*

### **Gnash and Rend**

In your hands, any weapon gains the *messy* tag.

### **Thunderous Howl**

When you **intimidate your enemies with a terrifying howl**, roll+CHA.

On a 7+, they choose one:

- Freeze in terror, dropping their weapons
- Back away cautiously, then flee
- Panic and attack you

On a 10+, you also take +1 forward against them. On a miss, they do as they please and you take -1 forward against them.

## **Ranger Changes: Shu'sha**

*Add the following move to the starting moves list for a Dach'youn Ranger.*

### **Scent of Home**

If you are out in the open, and can smell the air, you can always find your way home, wherever that might be.

*Add the following move to the Advanced Moves (2-5) list for a Dach'youn Ranger.*

### **Jerry-Rigger**

When you **improvise a tool from whatever you have on hand**, roll + INT. On a 10+ you get what you're after. On a 7-9 it's either fragile, not quite right, or dangerous to use. The GM will describe how.

## **Wizard Changes: Owoun**

*Add the following move to the Advanced Moves (2-5) list for a Dach'youn Wizard.*

### **Moonsinger**

When you **howl the ritual songs to the full moon**, ask one yes or no question and roll + INT. On a 10+ you get your answer. On a 7-9, that, but you cannot perform this ritual again until you have made an appropriate sacrifice.

# Gnomes

No matter where they come from, Gnomes are of two general sorts;

## Homesteader

You come from a solid, dependable family and understand the ways of hearth and home. Whenever you spend time in a gnomish community, the GM will tell you someone who's had dealings with a relative of yours and something they know or own that might be useful to you.

## Hunter

You stalk the world of men and beasts, and know their weaknesses well. Whenever you **Discern Realities** about someone or something that means to do you harm, you may add "How can I do the most damage?" to the list.

## Compendium Class: Brazen Fox

When you have **sworn yourself to the Order of the Brazen Fox**, at your next level, you may take the move **Clan Tattoo** instead of your normally selected move.

## Clan Tattoo

When you **display your tattoos and cheer on your allies**, roll + CHA. On a hit, rally around you, ready to act. On a 10+ they

also gain immunity to the effects of fear and ensorcellment so long as you lead them.

Whenever you gain a level, the following moves are treated as a part of your usual class advancement list.

## No Small Bravery

When you **challenge a foe to single combat**, roll + CHA. On a 10+ they single you out as their only target of interest, ignoring all others. On a 7-9, that, and they take +1 damage against you, ongoing so long as you engage them.

## Victorious Call

When you **deal a blow that kills an enemy** your allies who witness your victory recover 1d4 hp.

## Druid Changes: Forsterken

*Add the following move to the Advanced Moves (2-5) list for a Gnome Druid*

## Scrying Pool

When you **stare into a pool of clear water and focus on a faraway place**, roll + WIS. On a hit, you are granted a vision by the spirits. On a 10+ it is the place you intended to scry. On a 7-9, it is a place of importance the spirits want to show you, the GM will give you details, either way.



# Gobowins

You are a gobowin, so you may change from male to female as the seasons change, if you like. In addition, you have the following moves.

## **Buwuk**

When you **bestow misfortune on someone**, roll + CHA. On a hit, something bad will happen to them in the next few seconds (they'll stumble, drop what they're holding, their cloak will entangle their sword-arm, etc). On a 10+ the GM holds one Misfortune. On a 7-9, they hold two. The GM can spend that hold, one-for-one, to downgrade a 10+ result to 7-9 or a 7-9 to a failure on any player roll. They'll describe how your bad luck made it happen.

## **Guda**

When you **spend a few days' time to craft a Guda**, spend between 100 and 300 coins and roll +1 for each 100 spent. On a hit, the Guda will protect any ally who carries it from GM hold gained due to **Buwuk**. On a 10+ it'll work more than once.

Wizard Changes: Sheesa

*Add the following move to the starting moves list for a Gobowin Wizard.*

## **For Better or Wursa**

Any time you **Cast a Spell**, after you roll you may give the GM one Misfortune, as per the Buwuk move. If you do, upgrade a 7-9 roll to a 10+ or a miss to a 7-9.

## **Compendium Class: Buk**

When you **take leadership of a Goblin Caravan** you may immediately take the **Where Did My Whatsit Go?** move.

## **Where Did My Whatsit Go?**

When you **ask around the caravan for something you want (that could reasonably be found amidst your caravan)** roll + CHA. On a 10+ it turns up, more or less in the shape you'd hoped for. On a 7-9 you get what you want, but something of similar value goes missing in its stead.

Whenever you gain a level, the following moves are treated as a part of your usual class advancement list.

### **Like A Mule**

Your **Load** is doubled. Gods only know how you manage to carry it all.

### **Sticky Fingers**

You can magically conceal any item small enough to fit in your hand. The item remains hidden until you call on it again. You can only hide one such item at a time. If you die, any item you have hidden appears nearby, as if it had fallen out of your pocket.

### **Flim-Flam**

When you **misdirect, confuse or confound someone to get what you want**, roll + CHA. On a hit, they do what you asked. On a 10+ they won't be able to figure out they were bamboozled until well after you've left. On a 7-9, you've got a few minutes, tops.

### **Ditch**

Replaces: Sticky Fingers

You can magically conceal any item small enough to carry in your arms. The item remains hidden until you call on it again. You can only hide one such item at a time. If you die, any item you have hidden appears nearby, as if it had fallen out of your pocket.

### **Switcheroo**

When you **swap an item you're holding with one someone else is holding** roll + DEX. On a 10+ the items switch - you've got what they had and vice versa. On a 7-9, the switch goes haywire - you get what they had and they get some random thing on your person, in your bag or pockets, instead. The GM will tell you which items got switched.

# Uvandir

You are Uvandir, so you have these moves:

## **Uvandir Race Move: Uvonghest**

Choose something that drives you to obsession: something you must do, build or have. Write it down. **At the start of each session**, roll + WIS. On a 10+ hold 3, on a 7-9 hold 1. Spend hold, one-for-one to convert a failed roll made in pursuit of your obsession into a 7-9 result. On a miss, your obsession eats at you, driving you to distraction, frustration and pain unless you pursue it single mindedly.

## **Uvandir Race Move: Uvanshuvan**

When you **realize your obsession is impossible** (the item you seek is lost forever, that which you sought to build is irrevocably broken, the one you sought to befriend has died) roll + WIS. On a 10+ you're able to move past it, the waves of sorrow do not drag you under. Choose another obsession and describe how you come

to shift your focus. On a 7-9 you are haunted by your failure. Doing anything but slipping into a catatonic state is Defying Danger. This will pass in time - discuss with your fellow players how it might happen. On a miss, your body turns to stone over the course of a day, a week, a month, perhaps. When it does, take your Last Breath.

Maybe there is a way to overcome this curse? Play to find out.

## **Wizards Change: Jeweler's Magic**

Uvandir Wizards learn their spells from a collection of specially-prepared gemstones, not a spellbook. Replace any reference to a spellbook with gem-spells. These spells can be traded with other Uvandir Wizards with ease, making their spell collection much more portable. In addition, Uvandir Wizards have the following move;

### **Sacrificial Stones**

When you **crush two spell-stones together** roll + INT. The resulting explosion deals 2d6

+ 1 damage per combined level of the two spells to all those within a few feet and; on a 10+ choose two, on a 7-9, choose one:

- you only permanently lose the ability to cast one of the two spells
- you don't take any damage yourself
- the spells deal an extra d6 damage

### **Druid Change: Woodcutter**

Unlike many others of your tradition, you respect the woodland not for what it is, but for the use that could be gained from making its wood into tools and shelter. You are a creature of stone and metal. Add the following move to the Uvandar Druid 2-5 Advanced Move list:

### **Territorial**

You may declare all the land within a few miles of a place you call home (a safe grove, a hidden cave, etc) your territory. From then on, you know immediately when someone or something new enters your territory and can monitor their actions while they are within it. You may take this move more than once, declaring new territory to supplement what you already call your own.

### **Hands of Stone**

Your hands are weapons with the tags +forceful and +close. You are never considered unarmed.

# Roddun

You are a Roddun, so natural disease and filth has no effect on your health. You also get this move:

## **Roddun Race Move: Scavenging**

When you **dig through junk, trash or other garbage looking for goodies**, roll + WIS.

On a 10+ you find something useful or valuable.

On a 7-9 you find something interesting. On a miss, something or something finds you, and I promise you won't like how it turns out.

## **Compendium Class: King Rat**

When you **climb to the top of the pile and become the King Rat** you immediately gain **I Run This Place**.

### **I Run This Place**

You're the boss, boss. Choose two of the following tags to describe your barrio.

*Decadent, well-equipped, hidden, politically connected, magically influential, spiritually influential, martially strong, rich, under control, diverse business interests.*

The GM will choose one of the following;

*Cursed by a dark fate, going hungry, desperate to expand, deep in debt, powerful enemies, beholden to an old grudge, haunted, chaotic, seen as weak.*

Tell the group about your barrio and the other Roddun who work for you. Talk about your trusted Lieutenant, who wants your job most and the one Roddun you trust over anyone else.

Whenever you gain a level, the following moves are treated as a part of your usual class advancement list.

### **Business Is Good**

When you **collect your due from those under you** roll + CHA. On a 10+ they pay up without a fuss, giving you coin equal

to your CHA x 100. On a 7-9, it's more complicated than all that - there's a delay, a hitch, or they need more time. On a miss, you come up short and worse, maybe you need to remind them who's the boss around here.

### **Calling in Favors**

When you **call in a favor, real or perceived**, roll + CHA. On a 10+ they remember it like you remember it, and are willing to give you what you want. On a 7-9 you've forgotten some major detail or something has seriously changed.

### **Acceptable Sacrifices**

When you **draw your last breath and fail** you can, instead, choose to end the life of some major Roddun in your operation. To almost everyone, it looks like a natural death, but someone in your organization *knows* what you did to come back from the brink.

## **Wizard Change: Junk Wizard**

Roddun Wizard training is shaky at best and dangerous at worst. Replace **Prepare Spells** and **Cast a Spell** with the following;

### **"Prepare" Spells**

When you spend uninterrupted time (an hour or so) in quiet contemplation of whatever you can remember from your training, you:

- Lose any conditional penalties from casting spells

### **Cast a Spell?! (Int)**

When you **cast a half-remembered spell**, pick a spell of no higher level than yourself and roll+Int. On a 10+, the spell is successfully cast and nothing else goes wrong, this time. On a 7-9, the spell is cast, but the GM will choose one:

- Something explodes. The GM will tell you what and how much it hurts.
- The spell disturbs the fabric of reality as it is cast—take -1 ongoing to cast a spell until the next time you Prepare Spells.
- The spell affects a target or targets you didn't intend it to.

On a miss, you cast the wrong spell or the spell you did cast comes out weird, dangerous or both. Note that maintaining spells with ongoing effects will sometimes cause a penalty to your roll to cast a spell.

# Kuba-Chubisi

You are a Kuba-Chubisi, and so have these moves.

## Hidden Amongst the Flock

Choose a hometown, as though you were a human, and gain the benefit of the corresponding move.

## Free-dienun

Before committing an act of physical violence against a sentient being, you must first Defy Danger. The Danger is your own shame at violating the innate value of life.

## Submission Before Blood

When you **deal damage** you may choose to deal 0 damage instead. If you do, your enemy suffers Stun damage.

If you ever **commit murder** you immediately lose both **Free-dienun** and **Submission Before Blood**.

## Compendium Class: Savu-Kaven

When you **knowingly commit murder**, reflect on your transgression against the Free-dienun. When you gain a level, you may embrace your new path of blood and take the **Deepest Shame** move. If you do, you lose access to **Free-dienun** and **Submission Before Blood** forever. Henceforth, whenever you gain a level, treat the following list of moves as class moves. If you return to the fold and swear penitence, regain your ability to use those moves.

## Deepest Shame

All who look upon you know instinctively the dark path you walk. When you **threaten someone with violence or death to get what you want**, roll + STR. On a 7-9, choose one of the following options;

- you get what you want
- they do not spread word of the murderer in their midst
- they are too afraid to plot revenge

On a 10+, two of these are true. On a miss, they might attack you outright, or flee in terror, depending on their mental fortitude.

### **Murder-Challenge**

When you **look into the eyes of one you seek to kill** roll + CHA. On a hit, they meet your challenge. They will do whatever they can to engage you in single combat, alone. Take +1 against them. On a 7-9, they focus their attention on you, but will seek outside aid, fight dirty or seek some other unfair advantage. On a miss, your challenge goes unanswered.

### **Deadly Strike**

When you **deal damage**, you may embrace your shame like a familiar sword and roll twice, taking the best result. If you do, mark a debility as your body and soul suffer for this affront. If you have no more debilities to mark, you cannot use this ability.

## **Compendium Class: Mahsh-Ahtahd**

When you **bind with the spirits of a place of human civilization** you may immediately take the move **Urban Shaman**.

### **Urban Shaman**

You are bound to the spirits and magic of a specific city. When you **speak to the city**, roll + CHA. On a 10+ hold three. On a 7-9, hold one. Spend your hold at any time while you are in the city, one-for-one, to ask the following questions;

- where is [a specific item]
- where is [a specific person]
- what is the greatest threat to your safety?
- what do you wish that I would do?

Whenever you gain a level, the following moves are treated as a part of your usual class advancement list. These moves *only* function while in your chosen city.

### **Around the Back Way**

When you **use a secret route**, roll + DEX. On a 7-9, choose one. On a 10+, all three.

- you get where you're going quicker than you'd hoped
- nobody follows you
- the route remains a secret

On a miss, you're waylaid, ambushed or end up in a bad spot. The GM will give you details.

### **City Swarm**

When you summon a swarm of **rats, pigeons or other vermin** roll + CHA. On a 10+ choose two, on a 7-9 choose one.

- you may deal your damage to whoever they attack
- they stick around for more than a moment, harraying your enemies
- there's no collateral damage

### **Crowded Streets**

When you **enter a crowd** you may disappear, losing anyone who might be following you.

### **Gossip**

When you **walk the marketplace and listen to gossip** roll + WIS. On a 10+ you gain some insight or secret knowledge pertinent to your interests. On a 7-9, you'll learn something interesting, but it's up to you to make it valuable. On a miss, you're caught eavesdropping by someone who doesn't want to be overheard.



## **Mercy of the City**

While in your city, you cannot draw your **Last Breath**. If you lose your last hit point, you are knocked unconscious, but cannot be killed. Instead, you lose 2 point from a stat of your choosing. Even if you are burned, dissolved or obliterated, your body will reform in a secret place sacred to the city. Your bonds to this place are stickier than Death's skeletal fingers.

## **Skeleton Key**

In your city, no door, chest or gate is locked to you. You may open any lock with but a touch.

## **Not In My Backyard**

When you **declare someone exile**, roll + CHA. On a 10+ by bad luck, force or stranger circumstance, they will leave the city, unable to return for at least a few days. On a 7-9, they take someone or something valuable with them. On a miss, the spirits need them for something. They'll tell you why your banishment is an affront.

## **Witch Hunt**

**Requires: Not in My Backyard**

When you **perform the ritual of anathema**, declare a target of your ire and roll + CHA. On a 10+ for a fortnight you will always know where they are. Take +1 ongoing to hinder, harry or hurt them. On a 7-9, they have some protection against your magic. You can always find them, but the spirits offer no help to end their miserable existence. On a miss, you spring a counter-curse - the GM will tell you what happens, next.





# Profanity

# cursing in the Reign

While I was writing *The Courage of Tamyn Taval*, I came across a problem. Tamyn was angry at something (I forget what at the moment) and I wrote the word “damn.”

So, what’s the problem? Well, the people in the world of *Wicked Fantasy* would never say, “damn.”

Not “damn you,” not “damn it,” not “damn him.” They wouldn’t say it. They have *no reason* to say it. Why?

Because they don’t believe in Hell.

The whole point of “damning” something is wishing it would go to Hell. Likewise, they wouldn’t say “go to Hell.” I mean... well, you get the point.

So, I took a few minutes and thought, “How would the people curse? I mean, what kind of profanity would they use?”

I know this sounds trivial, but think about it. Every day, you and I use profane and vulgar slang.

## **Curses**

Cursing is a serious business in the Reign of Men. When you say, “Curse him!” it is no small affair, especially considering the number of people walking around who can *actually* curse you. (See *Curse* spell and its many variations.)

Thus, saying, “Curse his eyes!” or “Curse the day he was born!” or “Curse your mother!” is not a trivial thing and it should not be taken lightly. When men curse, it is because they are *mad* and not thinking about the consequences of what they are saying.

An especially potent curse is what men call “the *malik*.” The curse involves calling out the word “malik!” and spitting on the ground. To men, this means, “I will kill the next person who speaks!” It is a call for silence. An angry call.

Scholars are uncertain exactly where this curse comes from, but there are some anecdotes, amusing and otherwise. The most popular says the curse comes from an incident involving a man named Malik who refused to keep his mouth shut.

Then, one day, a companion of his spit on the ground and shouted his name, implying violence would follow if he didn't find the will to be quiet. Malik continued speaking and a moment later, he was dead. The story spread and the curse became popular among mercenaries, brigands, thieves and adventurers.

## Fortune

Perhaps it is a hold-over from the old days, but men love to give thanks to Fortune. Men are in love with Fortune. They praise her when she blesses them and they weep to her when she faults them. Men typically anthropomorphize her in flowing robes holding a wheel. She is also sometimes seen with dice or coins under her feet.

Men call upon her for good luck, but never curse her for bad. Well, I say "never," but we all know how these things go. Cursing Fortune for bad luck is seen as calling for *worse* luck, so take your chances as you may.

## Swearing

By swearing, we don't mean simple profanity (that's later), but instead, the act of taking a verbal oath. "I swear I shall do this thing!"

Men take oaths very seriously, avoiding them if possible. If a man or woman swears to do a thing, he or she is expected to do it. Men who do not keep their oaths are *waerloga*, which means "traitor" or "oath breaker."

In the Reign, an oath is a sacred thing. Use it at your own risk.

## "OK" is not OK

"OK" sounds modern. Sure, it started in the 1800's (probably 1839), but it still jerks you right out of your fantasy world mindset and straight into our own. If you are going to say "OK," try this instead.

"OK" is a remnant of a verbal slang fad that started in Boston. Like Cockney's rhyming slang, Bostonians were using initials for popular phrases. Examples included "N.C." for "nuff said."

"OK" came from the phrase "oll korrekt" or "all correct."  
In other words, "everything is as you said."

So, instead of using "OK," say, "oll korrekt." It sounds ancient, foreign and keeps you from using that pesky little modern phrase in a far off fantasy world.

Yes, this is a pet peeve of mine. Don't push it.

## A Tip of the Vulgar Hat

I've been studying vulgarity and slang for years, but I must admit that my curiosity turned into obsession after reading a small pamphlet called *Cat's Dictionary of Foul Phrases and Nasty Nomenclature*.

It was given to me by a woman named Cat Howell at the Southern California Renaissance Faire. Don't go looking for this on Amazon. It's a private collection, given only to a chosen few.

I must admit, some of the terminology comes from that invaluable book.

I only took a smidgeon, but a smidgeon was enough.

Thank you, Cat.

## A Load of Cobblers

A more polite way to say “bull’s excrement,” as in “that story he told is nothing more than a load of cobblers.”

You can also say “cobbler’s awls,” which rhymes with a certain part of the male genitalia which also indicates a general disregard for the veracity of the current subject at hand. You can also say, *bibble babble*, *bull’s wool*, *clish clash*, *cobbler’s awls*, *filly fable* (which is another say of saying “silly fable”), *flummydiddle* or *piss and wind* (as in, “that’s just...”).

## By the... !

Exclamations are sudden cries or remarks made to indicate surprise or pleasure or other emotions. In the Reign, we have all sorts of choices to pull from.

“By the... (X)!” is a common phrase in the Reign. You can replace (X) with all sorts of things. “By the stars!” or “By the moons!” or “By the Justice of the Reign!” These indicate surprise, outrage or delight, depending on their use.

If you want to get particularly... anatomical, men can say, “By my prides!” and women can say, “By my spice nest!” Best keep those in the proper company, though.

## Insults

If you want to tell someone off, throw one of these colorful epithets at them.

cowson, gutterpup, snolly goster, son of a thousand fathers/daughter of a brothel, yellow dog, hullock (a small sail at the top of the mast, indicating a “small head”), oaf, clod, rum dumb, whiskeyhead, beer bottle, rotten brained, goik (someone so dull, they bore themselves to death), naught noggin (“nothing in the

head”), pettyfogger (a lawyer who argues over trifles for his own profit), shirk wit, wet goose, and—one of my favorites—“You nickninny!”

## “Yes.”

It’s one of the most uttered words in the English language (probably any language), but it’s just so boring. Don’t we have other, more colorful, ways to indicate the same thing?

Forsooth! To be sure, we do!

The next time you find yourself nodding in agreement, try saying “With certitude,” or “With good work and time.” Or, how about “For certain, my man.” and “With surety, my good woman.”

## “No.”

The best part of “No” is that if you say it multiple times in multiple ways in the same sentence, you’re just adding exclamation points to the end.

For example, doesn’t “No and never!” sound so much better?

Then there’s, “No, nay and never!” (clap! clap! clap! clap!)

Just keep throwing them on to show your disagreement.

## Bastard

There’s a lot of them running around, and in the Reign, there are few insults as dire as this one. Calling someone a bastard questions their mother’s fidelity, their father’s faithfulness... it’s essentially an insult at your whole family.

But instead of just calling everyone a bastard, you can call them *baseborn*, *blanket-kid*, *stable-born*, *whore’s knitting*, *backyard child*, or my favorite, a *bye-blow*.

All of these mean the same thing: you're an illegitimate child. Just don't expect to walk away from saying it without a fight.

## Making Feet for Children's Shoes

Euphemisms for the process of making children are not only ubiquitous, they're also fun. Here's a few to get you started.

Bawdy banquet, bed-time story, belly-to-belly, bit of snug, blow off on the grounsills, break a lance, change my luck, crack a Judy's teacup, dance the pillow jig, dirty work at the crossroads, do a dive in the dark, do a kindness, get Jack in the orchard, get my leather stretched, give hard for soft, go star gazing, honest work, introduce Jack and Judy, nock and ro, making an honest woman/man, pickling the dill, ride below the cupper, shift work, secret sport (or just a bit of sport), take a turn in the stubble, tickle the pickle, tie the true lover's knot, and finally, uptails all.

### Egad!

One of the most famous exclamations, "Blimey!" comes from the phrase, "God blind me!" Likewise, "Egad!" comes from "Oh God!" "Gadzooks" comes from "God's Wounds" and "Zounds!" comes from the same source.

Of course, the Reign of Men wouldn't use these, but they give you an idea of how one phrase can turn into another as society looks for ways to cuss without getting into trouble.

### "sockdolager!"

A particularly devastating punch or blow during a fight—the final punch or blow—is called a "sock." (Yes, as in, "Sock it to me.") So, to give someone a "finishing blow" is to "sock it to them." A doxology is a motivational song meant to raise the audience to its feet. Thus, *sockdolager* is an unexpected climax or finish.

Thus, instead of shouting "Critical hit!" (which honestly sounds as clinical and boring as rectal exam), one could shout, "Sockdolager!" At least, that's what I do.

### "kasskiss!"

Another popular phrase in the Reign is "kasskiss!" which comes from "cat's kiss." It's considered lucky if a cat rubs against you in the Reign and considered even luckier if he bumps his head against you. But the luckiest of all is when a cat puts its lips right up to yours—a "cat's kiss."

Men and women of the Reign say *kasskiss* when something particularly lucky happens to someone, especially when they avoid injury, dismemberment or death.

### "slife."

The phrase "It's life," is popular in the Reign. It is a phrase that communicates, "Life is not fair, nor should you expect it to be." Of course, in the barrios of the Cities, the phrase has slipped to "slife."







# "Broken Bonds"

A Wicked Fantasy story

By Matt Forbeck

“What’s with the dwarf?” The skinny drunk said as he slid his empty mug along the bar to the innkeeper. The mug’s earthenware bottom caught on a rough patch in the wood and toppled over, cracking off the handle.

The innkeeper stared down at the broken mug as if it had crawled up out of the sewer with its last bit of strength and expired there before him. When he brought his gaze up to the drunk before him, his expression didn’t change at all.

“From Ashcolmb, are you?” the innkeeper said.

The drunk righted himself at the implied slight. “Don’t get all high and lordly on me. My coins spend just the same in Nevarnare as they do back home.”

He tossed a bit of silver on the bar with a defiant sneer. The innkeeper scooped up the cash and cleared away the broken mug before he pulled another draft for the drunk.

The drunk snatched up the fresh mug and took a long pull from it. He wiped the foam from his lips with the back of his arm and chortled to himself.

“No offense meant,” the innkeeper said. “If you were from around here, though, you wouldn’t have to ask about our favorite fixture.”

He nodded toward the rough-hewn figure sitting by itself at a table in the corner of the common room. It looked like a statue carved by a blind sculptor, one who’d once known about human features and proportions but who couldn’t see a cursed thing he created. Its skin was the mottled color and texture of pitted limestone, and its beard looked like the stub of a bush that

had grown out of that stone before being burnt back. The layer of dust that covered every inch of its clothes cast them in the same gray hue.

The drunk slid off his stool at the bar and stumbled toward the statue to get a closer look. The innkeeper shook his head at the man’s backside. Most of the rest of the thin evening crowd enjoyed a private chuckle as they watched the drunk totter toward the table.

The statue sat squatter than any human, as if the sculptor had taken a tall, strong man and then squished him down to half his height. It held an empty mug of its own in a hard-knuckled fist, like a warrior might hold the grip of a sword. It stared into an unknown point far beyond the inn’s walls, closer than infinity perhaps, but only just.

The drunk slipped into the chair across from the statue and peered into its rough and weathered face. From here, he could pick out more details, like the black color of the eyes and the twinned streaks below them that tracked down the cheeks. The statue might have been the kind of ugly even a loving parent would find impossible to ignore, but the drunk still marveled at the sculptor’s craftsmanship.

“Give him a bit of your beer,” a dumpy woman said from the next table over.

The drunk started at her voice, surprised to discover she was talking to him. He scowled at her. “The drink in this place may be vile, but I paid good money for it.”

“Trust me,” she said with a devilish smile.

The drunk gave her a hard look, sizing her up. Then he spat his concerns on the inn's floor. He raised his half-empty mug to the woman as a toast, and he hesitated a moment when the men sitting behind her laughed along with her.

Unwilling to back down now, the drunk held his mug over the statue's and held it there for a moment before tipping it over and pouring out everything inside it. The beer splashed about, spilling on the table, but most of it wound up safe inside the statue's mug. The drunk peered at the statue and waited, expecting to shrug his shoulders at how the woman had tricked him into wasting the rest of the last beer he planned to have in this hole.

The statue blinked.

The drunk sprang back as if a hornet had stung him. He knocked over his chair as he found his feet and gaped at the statue.

The statue's arm curled up and brought the mug to its mouth. It drank deep from the mug until it was drained, then set it back down on the table with a thud. Then the statue resumed staring off into the distance. New tears ran down the tracks on his cheeks.

"He's alive?" The drunk gaped at the statue. "A real live dwarf?"

"Uvandar," a young woman said as she walked in the door. She stood out in the inn like a beacon in the night, a diamond sparkling in the mud. She cast nervous glances about the place, but she forced a determined set into her chin.

"What did you call me?" the drunk said as he focused on the woman.

"He's not a dwarf. He's one of the uvandar."

The drunk goggled at her for a moment, then fell back in his chair, laughing. "It's not funny," the young woman said as she crossed her arms across her chest and held her ground. "You should have some respect."

The drunk stopped himself in the middle of a guffaw. "Are you serious? For this thing? It's no dwarf. It's just some kind of enchanted statue the innkeeper's using as a toy to get you yokels to buy more of his weak beer."

"That can't be true." The young woman paled at the thought. "Can it?" she said in a thin voice.

All eyes in the room turned to the innkeeper, who blinked at the attention like a rat who'd been hauled out into the light. "Of course not!" He scowled at the drunk with an indignant bluster. "Rocky's been for years. He came in one night to drown out the fires burning in a broken heart, and he hasn't left since."

"Years ago?" The drunk scoffed. "Years?"

The woman who'd told the drunk to supply the statue with beer nodded her head hard enough to set her skin bouncing. "He just sits there and drinks whatever we put in his mug. Sometimes he sheds a tear."

"One Midwinter's Night, I heard him sigh," a pale youth from the back put forth. The other patrons nodded along in agreement.

“Bullshit,” the drunk said. “No one loves that much. Not anyone over nothing.” He paused to paw the young woman with his eyes. “Not even over sweet young tarts like you.”

The woman’s cheeks pinked at the drunk’s attention, but she held her ground. “You don’t know a thing about the uvandir.”

“And you know them well, do you?” The drunk leered at her, and the woman’s cheeks grew pinker.

“I’ve read a lot about them,” the woman said. “They don’t form many attachments, but those they do are for life. Love’s as good a word for that as any.”

“And you believe in fairy tales like that?”

“I’ve been here every night for the past week, trying to talk to him.”

The drunk snorted. “I meant fairy tales like love, Tarty.”

The woman stabbed a finger at the uvandir. “Once again, sir, your proof is right there!”

“Right,” the drunk said with a lazy wink. Then he hocked up as much phlegm as he could muster, leaned over and spit straight into the uvandir’s mug.

Everyone else in the room gasped at the drunk’s audacity. The drunk smirked at them all.

“See?” he said. “Drink anything put in front of him, eh, Tarty? So much for that.”

“Of course he won’t drink your spit!” the young woman said. “And my name is Romanda.”

“But why won’t he, Romy?” the drunk said. “He’s supposed to drink anything put in front of him, right?”

“Within reason.” Romanda glared at the man’s meanness.

“Ah!” The drunk held up a finger. “I have an idea. Perhaps the trouble’s not in the kind of liquid provided, but the amount.”

“Not even someone as disgusting as you can fill that mug with spit.”

The drunk stood up and began to undo his belt. “Who said anything about spit?”

Romanda strode forward and slapped the drunk across the face with an open hand as he fumbled with his pants. The blow left a bright red mark on his cheek, and his eyes flew wide in astonishment. The man’s pants dropped around his ankles, exposing his unwashed undergarments, as he snatched Romanda’s wrist before she could pull away.

The entire room plummeted into stunned silence.

“You big city girls need to learn your place.” The drunk gave the woman’s arm a vicious twist, forcing her toward her knees. “It’s getting so a man can’t have a little fun any—“

A granite-colored fist lashed out, and a spit-coated mug smashed into the drunk’s head, shattering into countless pieces. The man let go of Romanda, who’d been trying to pull free from his grasp. She tumbled backward and landed on her rump, her eyes flung wide and unblinking.

The drunk balled up his fists and threw a savage punch at the uvandir, who stood there before him like the stump of a petrified tree. The blow crunched into the creature's beard and smacked a layer of dust off it, but the uvandir didn't blink at it, much less flinch.

The blow broke three of the drunk's knuckles, and he hauled back his injured hand and howled in shock and agony. He stared at the creature as if it were a demon crawled up from the pits to claim his already blackened soul.

The uvandir snarled then, the first sound any human in the room had ever heard from him. "Toy with me if you like," the creature said in a voice that could only be called gravelly, "but leave the soft ones alone."

The drunk inched back from the uvandir, terrified, seeking for some way to lash out. His eyes landed on Romanda and blazed with fury. "You set me up for this, didn't you? I'll find you, later, when he's not—"

The uvandir punched the drunk in the throat with a fist like a stone hammer. The man fell over without another sound except for the sickening smack his skull made when it slammed into the floor.

Romanda yelped in surprise, and the uvandir glanced at her. "You all right?" he said with some gruff semblance of concern.

Romanda nodded as she stared at the drunk's body. "Is he dead?"

"Good point," the uvandir said. He took a step forward and stomped on the drunk's head, which gave with a wet crack.

The older woman screamed in horror. The uvandir ignored her as he went back to his table and righted his toppled chair. "Best to be sure," he said.

It wasn't until the uvandir sat down that he remembered that he'd destroyed his mug. He signaled toward the innkeeper with an open hand. "Can I get me another?"

The man opened his mouth, but no words emerged. His gaze flickered from the uvandir to the corpse and back. "It's not free," he said, falling back on his sense of business as the only light to guide him through this.

"I've just done you a service." The uvandir scowled. "You can't spot me a bit of drink?"

"I'll cover that," Romanda said before the innkeeper could respond. "It's on me."

She pushed herself to her feet and slipped into an open chair next to the uvandir. "It's the least I can do. And bring one for me too."

"What about him?" a burly man said from another corner of the room. He was pointing at the drunk's corpse.

The innkeeper licked his lips and measured up the uvandir. "It's a damn shame," he said. "Man slipping in his own beer and breaking his neck like that."

"Right," said the dumpy woman who'd urged the drunk to give the uvandir some of his

beer. “But it does happen.” She signaled to the burly man and a pair of his friends, and they set to work clearing the corpse away.

Romanda ignored them and focused on the uvandir. “Thank you,” she said. “You may have saved my life.”

The uvandir shrugged. He tapped at the table with a thick, heavy finger, waiting for his drink to arrive.

Romanda reached out and held the uvandir’s hand to steady it. He didn’t pull away.

She swallowed hard and steeled herself. She’d come here with a purpose, and she wasn’t going to let an evil man’s death divert her from that course.

“As grateful as I am for your intervention, I have something else I need to discuss with you.”

The uvandir shook his head. It sounded like stone grating against stone when he moved. “Right. Whatever it is you’ve been going on about all week.”

“Haven’t you heard anything I’ve said?”

“Lots of humans try to talk to me. I gave up listening a long time ago.”

Romanda sighed at the many hours she’d wasted whispering to the uvandir. She might as well have been chatting with a boulder. “Is your name Gutter?”

The uvandir grunted. “I’ve answered to that.”

The innkeeper strode up and slid a tall mug of beer in front of each of them. The

uvandir put his mug to his lips and began to drink. Romanda ignored hers.

“Then I have a message for you,” she said.

Gutter kept drinking without stopping for a breath. Romanda waited until he drained his mug dry. It didn’t take long.

He set the empty mug down before him with a hollow thump, and he wiped the foam from his beard. “Fill that up again, and I’ll listen.”

Romanda shoved her untouched mug over to Gutter and signaled the innkeeper to bring more.

“There’s a man who lives on the edge of the city,” she said. “A powerful man. A senator by the name of Lucrum.”

Gutter shrugged. He started in on the next mug of beer, but he gestured for Romanda to keep talking.

“Like most senators, he was born to his position, and I can’t hold that against him. But he’s done some horrible things to keep others from wrenching his power from him. He’s as ruthless as they come — even to members of his own family — and he’s become a blight upon our fair city.”

Gutter snorted so hard at this he had to pause in his drinking or choke on his beer. “There’s nothing fair about this city. It’s a cesspool. I only hope to be here to watch when it fall into the darkest part of the bog.”

“It doesn’t have to be that way,” Romanda said. “Bad things happen because we let them happen.”

Gutter slurped the last bit from his mug and set it down before him. The innkeeper hadn't arrived with the next round yet, but the young woman had gotten his attention, something no one else had managed to do in years.

"This is a human problem. Humans can deal with it."

"Like we dealt with that drunk who just attacked me? How many humans came to my aid?"

"Someone would have. Eventually."

Romanda gave the uvandir a grim shake of her head. "Even if that had happened, could anyone here have taken out that jackass as fast as you did? Could anyone have taken a blow from him as well as you?"

"The senator is a long way from here. This man was about to piss in my mug."

Romanda sat back in her chair. "You weren't going to do a thing to stop him. Not until he attacked me."

"Maybe I just wanted to see if he'd actually go through with it."

"You have a streak of chivalry in you. Don't deny it."

Gutter stared at the table. A pair of mugs appeared in front of him before he could fall back into his deep and distant silence. "Maybe I did once. A long time ago."

"I know what happened to you," Romanda said, her voice soft and mournful. "I heard."

Gutter threw back another beer. She waited for him to pound it back down on the table.

"You don't know anything."

"I know her name."

Gutter had been reaching for the next mug before him. He froze.

"Venifer, right?"

Gutter splayed his hands out on the table as if to steady himself. "That's a name I haven't heard for a long time."

Romanda waited for him to continue. It took every last bit of patience she had.

The entire room had fallen silent. Everyone in the place had stopped pretending that they hadn't been listening in on Romanda's conversation with the uvandir.

Romanda ignored them. They didn't matter. Not now. Not to her.

She cracked before Gutter did. He was untold decades old, maybe centuries. He'd been sitting here at this table since Romanda had been in diapers. He didn't need to eat or drink or sleep.

He could outlast her in every way, and she didn't have any more time to wait. She took a deep breath and told uvandir what she'd been trying to say to him every day for the past week.

"I know where she is."

Gutter's gaze snapped around and drilled straight through Romanda. He stared at her with his

black-irised eyes, taking in every bit of her. Word was that the uvandir could see in the dark, using light invisible to the humans. Romanda wondered what she looked like in those unfathomable colors, and what they told Gutter's questing eyes.

Gutter sized up the young woman in every dimension. She sat there and let him. After what felt like a full slice of eternity, he blinked at her. Then he said the words she'd been hoping to hear from the moment she'd first met him, something she'd almost given up even hoping for.

"Then take me to her. Now."

For the first time in countless years, the uvandir known as Gutter pushed himself back from the table in that inn, stood up, and made for the door.

Romanda sat there stunned, staring after the dwarf with the rest of the people in the inn's common room.

The frumpy woman snickered aloud, which earned her a scowl from the innkeeper. She laughed even harder. "There goes your place's only attraction!"

The innkeeper gasped in horror as he realized she was right. "Wait!" he called after the uvandir. "Come back! I can cut you a deal on your drink!"

The man's words spurred Romanda from her chair. She bolted from the place, fearful that Gutter might have already disappeared into the night. She found him standing there, waiting for her.

"What took you so long?" he said.

"I'm not sure I'm prepared for this. I've been trying to talk with you for a week."

"And you still not ready?"

"Are you?"

"Always. I've just been waiting for the right thing to do."

Romanda acknowledged this supposed logic with a nod. Then she oriented herself on the night-shrouded street and set off toward the Lucrum estate.

Romanda had always liked Nevarnare better by night. In the harsh light of day, you could see the way the city strained under the burden of the two million souls that called it home. Parts of it stank like an open sewer. Buildings were cracked and crumbling. Roads were falling apart, sometimes disappearing into monstrous sinkholes rumored to lead straight into an underworld riddled with hidden passages and teeming with unspeakable horrors.

Under the shroud of darkness, though, you could ignore all that. The shifting winds brought fresh breezes from the countryside. The smoke that smudged and stained the day's blue sky blended in with the night. The cacophony of voices and noises that thrummed through the place fell off from a dull roar to a distant whisper. The lights spilling out of the windows seemed like beacons of hope, each one of them signaling where her fellow citizens had hunkered down for the night while she explored the open seas.

You could almost love the place.

"You'd better not be lying about this," Gutter said as he strode a half step behind Romanda, letting her lead the way.



“Why would I do that?”

“You’d be surprised what people try to get me to do for them. At what they tell me.”

She glanced back to see if she could tell if the uvandir was teasing her. His stony face showed her no signs. “And what do you do with that information?”

“Just what they want me to.” He shrugged. “Nothing.”

“Even the ones that ask you for something?”

“Especially them. Most humans just want to vent. If they really wanted something done, they’d just go do it themselves. Pisses me off.”

“So why did you come with me?”

“You gave me Venifer’s name.”

“That’s all it takes?”

“Humans like to try to trick me. They think they’re clever like gobowins that way.”

Romanda’s breath caught in her chest for a moment. “What makes you think I’m not trying to trick you too?”

“Course you are,” Gutter said in the same way he might comment on the fact that the moon was rising in the horizon.

“And that doesn’t bother you?”

“Do you really know where Venifer is?”

“I’ve seen her in Lucrum’s home.”

“Then nothing else matters.”

“What if I’m lying to you?”

“What’s that human saying? ‘Only a fool interrupts a dwarf,’ right?”

“I thought you didn’t like the word dwarf.”

“It’s not my word, is it? Point is I hope you’re smarter than that. I was grieving in that asshole of a place. That’s serious work.”

They strode out to the edge of the city, and then a little ways beyond. Dawn hinted at the eastern edge of the sky before they stopped. Romanda wanted to stop to rest several times, but Gutter never showed any sign of flagging. She refused to allow any stops she’d have to blame on herself, so she forced herself to keep going, long past the point of breaking the blisters that formed in her shoes.

They came to the edge of a massive estate that seemed like it had to range for miles in any direction. They stopped just outside of bowshot, and Gutter tugged at his beard as he appraised it.

The size of the place spoke of the owner’s wealth, while the state of it cut against it. In the center of it, high on a hill that overlooked the city below, stood a building that might have been a glorious castle in an earlier age, but large sections of it had fallen into disrepair over the ensuing years. Still, its high walls had been reinforced, and armed men with torches strode along the parapets on patrol.

“That’s not a home,” Gutter said. “It’s a fortress.”

"You're more right than you know," Romanda said. "Lucrum's family once ruled over this section of the city, but they fell on hard times over the generations. He decided to make up for that by rallying a force of mercenaries around him and selling their services to the highest bidders."

"The other senators don't object to that?"

"Many of them hire him. Others pay him a stipend to ensure that he won't take on any jobs that might pit him against them."

"So they don't ever fight?"

"They used to — a lot — but they haven't had to much more than show up to frighten off their foes for a long while."

The uvandir grunted at that, his gaze still roving over the full of the estate, or as much of it as he could see. "Soft as that might make them, he must have hundreds of soldiers in that place. They might only be human, but those are hard numbers to face down."

"So what?" Romanda said, an edge in her voice. "Don't tell me you're afraid of them."

"Fear's got nothing to do with it. It's down to simple math. The numbers don't add up for us."

Romanda peered down at him. "Then maybe I came to the wrong dwarf."

Gutter didn't bother to correct her, ignoring her attempt to offend him. "You sure Venifer's in there?"

Romanda nodded. He gave her a look hard and sharp enough to cut glass. She wondered what he might do if he decided she was lying. Would he kill her for dragging him all the way out here from his squalid but safe little inn?

"All right," he said as he came to a decision of some kind. "Then tell me how you got in."

"You first," she said.

Gutter cocked his head at her, confused by the demand.

"Tell me why this elf means so much to you."

"You've seen her, and you don't know?"

"Maybe she doesn't seem so wonderful now as she did when you knew her."

Gutter narrowed his eyes at the woman. "This Lucrum of yours, he's put iron bracelets on her, hasn't he?"

Romanda nodded. "She is his — his property in every way."

Gutter jaw clenched so tight that Romanda wondered if his teeth might shatter. He threw back his head and bellowed into the night.

The sound was so pained and mournful that to hear it broke Romanda's heart. She felt tears welling in her eyes. She reached out to put a comforting hand on her shoulder, but he grabbed her by the wrist instead.

"Ow!" she said. "You're hurting me!"

Gutter shoved her behind him, and she went sprawling into the small woods from which they'd emerged. She opened her mouth to protest, but she froze when she saw the brace of flaming arrows arcing down from the sky at them.

Gutter dove toward her, shielding her with his body. Most of the arrows flew wide, but one slammed into the uvandir's back, where it lodged with a horrible thunk.

Romanda scrambled backward, still on the ground, and Gutter followed after her, continuing to keep her safe from the next barrage of arrows sent their way. When she saw these all fall far short of her, she leaped to her feet and went to help Gutter to safety too. He waved off her efforts.

"How are you not dead?" she asked in awe.

"You're worried about me?" he said with a shake of his head. "It's my fault they spotted us."

"But the arrow!"

Gutter fixed her with a quizzical glance, then peered over his shoulder and spotted the arrow still burning there. He tried to brush it away, but he couldn't quite reach it with his stubby arms. He frowned and turned around, putting his back to Romanda.

"Could you?" he asked.

"Could I what?" Romanda knew what he meant, but she was no doctor. She'd never had to deal with someone shot through with an arrow before, and she feared what might happen to the uvandir if she plucked it out.

"I can't reach it."

Romanda groaned but steeled herself to the task. She wanted to reach up and grab the arrow by the shaft, but it was still burning.

"That'll be me on fire if you don't move fast."

"I don't want to hurt you."

Gutter grunted at her. With an incredible effort, he swung his arm back over his shoulder and got his fingers on the burning arrow. Ignoring the fire, he yanked the arrow from his back and flung it back toward the Lucrum estate. Another round of blazing arrows answered his effort, but they all fell shy of them once again.

Gutter spit on his blackened fingers and rubbed them against his chest, cursing as he went. Romanda examined the fresh hole in the uvandir's jacket, stunned to not see a fountain of red erupting from it.

"Don't uvandir bleed?"

Gutter spun around and scowled at her. "Course we do. It just takes a bit more than a flimsy dart like that to do it."

Romanda gaped at Gutter in awe. "And you're afraid to storm that place? You could just walk in there and kill them all!"

He grimaced at her. "You're a bit young to be so bloodthirsty, aren't you?"

"Isn't that what you want to do?"

He guided her deeper into the trees. The sun had broken over the horizon now, but

the long shadows still hid them from the watchers on the walls of the estate.

“Perhaps, but it’s not that simple, is it?”

“Perhaps you make it out to be more complicated than it is.”

“Perhaps you’re awfully eager to trade my life for theirs rather than risk your own skin.”

“Perhaps you’re a coward and that’s why you sat in that damned inn taking abuse for so many years rather than go out and find this Venifer of yours!”

The uvandir’s skin flushed with color for the first time since Romanda had known him. He shouted at her so loud that a flock of birds that had been sleeping in a nearby tree burst into flight, flapping away as fast as they could to escape the impending doom.

“I thought she was dead!”

Romanda stood tall in the face of Gutter’s rage, refusing to back down. When she spoke, her words came in a whisper, but they seemed to carry as far as the uvandir’s outburst. “You were wrong.”

Gutter collapsed, those three simple words felling him in a way that no arrow could. He fell into a heap and stayed there. His shoulder shook so hard that Romanda wondered if he might trigger a sympathetic earthquake.

She stared down at him for a long moment, unsure of what to do. The soldiers inside the estate showed no appetite for leaving behind the safety of their walls to figure out who or what had made such a horrible sound. They

were safe at the moment, but she feared she’d destroyed the only person who could help her.

Romanda reached out to comfort the uvandir. “I’m sorry,” she said. “Don’t cry.”

“I’m not weeping,” Gutter said in a voice rubbed raw with emotion. “I’m trying to keep myself from killing you.”

Romanda froze, her hand an inch from Gutter’s shoulder. She brought it back as if she’d gotten too near to a glowing-hot stove, and she retreated to what she hoped was a safe distance.

“I’m sorry,” she said again. “I didn’t mean it. Please don’t be angry at me.”

“You meant it, and you were right,” he said. “I’m not angry at you. I’m angry at me. But that doesn’t mean I don’t want to rip your head off.”

Romanda closed her mouth and waited. She wondered how long it would take for the uvandir to calm down. Then she remembered that he’d sat in that inn for uncounted years, grieving for someone not even dead.

She couldn’t afford to wait forever.

“I know how we can get in there,” she said, knowing she would regret it.

Gutter stopped shaking. He rose to his knees and looked up at her. “This better not involve a lunatic plan in which I charge through the front gate with you tucked behind me.”

Romanda shook her head, her mouth a thin, grim line. “There’s a secret way,

a tunnel that runs underneath the wall and comes out inside the castle.”

Gutter stood up and glared at her with suspicious eyes that seemed to peer straight through her. “And how would someone like you know something like that?”

“I made it my business.”

Gutter grunted at her. “What kind of game are you playing with me?”

“Were you in love with Venifer?”

“What?”

“I mean, are you? In love with her?”

Gutter took a step back, nonplussed at the question. “Not in the way you’re thinking. She was — is! — my friend. My best friend.”

“Uvandir and elves can’t mate?”

Gutter shook his head in amazement at the question. “Did you ever see a female uvandir?”

Romanda squinted at him. “Can’t say that I have.”

“Well, you’ve never seen a male one either.”

“I’m looking right at you. Right now.”

Gutter laughed, a sound without bitterness or humor. “Uvandir don’t come in two flavors like humans and elves and the rest of you rutting fools.”

“You don’t have..?” she let her eyes wander toward his crotch.

“I’m not dropping my pants to prove it.”

“Then how do you, ah, make new uvandir?”

Gutter raised his shoulders in a broad shrug. “We don’t. We came into this world as we were made, and we’ll exit it the same way.”

Romanda’s face fell. “That’s so — sad.”

“It’s not sad, it’s simple. You people with your sexes and your babies, it’s messy — sometimes fatal — and it makes you do stupid things.”

“But there won’t ever be any more of you?”

“We’re enough.”

“And you won’t ever be in love?”

“That’s what got you into this mess here, isn’t it?”

Romanda looked away. “It’s more complicated than that.”

“Like I said.”

“Do you want me to lead you into the estate or not?”

“Is Venifer really in there?”

Romanda nodded.

“Then you couldn’t stop me. One way or the other, I’m getting into that place, and I’m breaking her free. But remember, I’m patient. I can wait as long as it takes for the right chance to arrive.”

“And in the meantime your friend could die. I can lead you in there. Safely. Now.”

He stared her up and down. She refused to crack.

"Fine," he said. "Let's go."

Romanda led Gutter deeper into the stand of trees. As she did, she removed small velvet bag from her pocket and from it produced a fist-sized crystal that glowed with a cold light. She held it in front of her to help light her way. "Will this bother you?" she asked Gutter.

"It's wasted on me." He waved for her to proceed.

In the center of the trees, where it was darkest, she lowered herself down into a short gully that ran under the roots of a massive oak. The dark space under the tree turned out to be hollow and went back for a few feet before a wall of rock blocked the way.

Gutter stepped up to the wall and examined it. He ran his hands over it as if he were massaging a lover's back. Then he gave the rock an approving nod.

"Secret door, well made, magical lock."  
He glanced back at her. "Open it."

"Can't you?"

"I called it 'well made.' I don't do that lightly."

Romanda stepped around the uvandir and made a quick but deliberate series of light taps on the rough wall. When she finished, she put a hand on the right side of the wall and pushed. A door appeared there and swung back into the darkness on a set of silent hinges.

She ushered Gutter before her, and he strode into the blackness beyond without hesitation. She followed after him, holding her crystal high, and shut the door behind them. She tried to give herself a moment for her eyes to adjust to the dimness, but Gutter gave up on waiting for her to take the lead and plunged ahead without her.

"Wait!" Romanda said in a harsh whisper as she scrambled to catch up with the uvandir. "You can't just charge into the castle without me."

"This leads into the castle then?" Gutter didn't break stride. "Perfect."

"You don't know where you're going!"

"Into the castle, you said. I'm not deaf."

"And when you get there?"

"I think I can figure it out."

Romanda put a hand on Gutter's shoulder. He ignored her, not even bothering to shrug it off. "What are you planning to do?"

"Avenge Venifer."

That stopped Romanda cold.

"What do you mean?"

Gutter kept walking. "What do you think?"

Romanda hustled after the uvandir, already making his way through the twisting tunnel. "You can't kill everyone in there."

"Actually, I can."

“But you shouldn’t. Most of them didn’t have anything to do with Venifer’s capture.”

“Slavery, you mean. You put iron on an elf, and that’s what you get: a slave.”

“But only one man did that: Lucrum. The rest are innocent.”

“They watched that man enslave Venifer. They live in that home with her in that state. They’re as much to blame.”

Gutter spit on the ground. Romanda wove her way around it as she pursued him. She’d brought this murderous uvandir here and pointed him at Lucrum. She had to talk him out of slaughtering everyone in the castle before he reached the tunnel’s end.

“I knew about it too, didn’t I? Does that mean you plan to kill me too?”

Gutter stopped as if he’d come to the edge of a pit, and Romanda stumbled right into him. He spun around and grabbed her arms with fingers as unyielding as stone. She stifled an impulse to scream.

“You told me about her.” He held her steady on her feet. “You get to live.”

“No,” Romanda said as the uvandir released her. She grabbed him by the collar of his shirt. “You can’t!”

“I will — or I’ll die trying.”

“You weren’t ready to sacrifice your life at the wall.”

He snorted. “A pointless death is nothing. Taking as many of these bastards with me as I can, that’s the way to go.”

Romanda glared at him. “I thought you’d want to free her!”

“Can’t be done. Once an elf’s been bound to someone, it’s forever. Only true love can set her free.”

“That’s just a myth.”

“So are dwarves, I hear.” He whipped about on his heel and set off down the tunnel again.

“I mean, you can’t trust myths,” Romanda said. “Who tells you that captured elves can’t be freed? The people who control them? That’s what they want you to believe!”

Gutter slowed his pace. “And what do you want me to believe?”

“Take it up with Senator Lucrum. Maybe he can just declare her to be free.”

“Right.” Gutter stroked his beard. “And if it doesn’t work, then I kill him.”

“Why?”

“Maybe that will break the bond.”

Romanda grimaced. It wasn’t the concession she wanted from Gutter, but it would have to do — at least for now.

“All right,” she said. “I’ll take you right to him.”

She strode in front of the uvandir now, and he let her. The passageway began to split off in different directions, but Romanda didn't hesitate as she picked their path through choices the intersecting tunnels provided. Soon enough they reached a dead end in which a ladder had been fixed to the wall.

Romanda put a finger to her lips and pointed upward. Gutter nodded at her and reached for the ladder. He waited for her to object to him going up first, but when she didn't stop him, he hauled himself toward the hatch far above. She gave him a bit of room before she followed.

The wooden hatch gave with a gentle push, and Gutter pressed his head under it so that he could see where he was going after only raising it a couple quiet inches. He peered around for a moment and cocked one ear toward the crack so he could listen through it as well.

"Someone's snoring," Gutter said with a whisper as he lowered the hatch again.

"It should be the senator," Romanda said. "It's his bedroom. And he's not an early riser."

"Should anyone else be in there with him?"

Romanda shrugged. "Venifer perhaps. That's why our best bet is to start here."

Gutter's jaw cracked so loud it sounded like a snapping blade. "He's not married?"

"His wife has her own suite."

"Guards?"

"Well outside the door. He likes his privacy."

"Time to get to work." With no more ceremony than that, Gutter shoved the hatch wide open above him and hauled himself into the room.

Romanda clambered up after him. The uvandir moved faster than she would have guessed possible, and she could not keep up. She found herself in the screened-off corner of the room that served as the senator's dressing area. Gutter had already disappeared.

She emerged from behind the screen and spotted Gutter diving toward the canopy bed set in the middle of the large, stonewalled chamber. She wouldn't have guessed that someone so short could jump so high, but he arced down onto the sleeping figure in the bed with his arms spread like the wings of a dragon. He landed with his full weight on that figure, and it let out a short yip of surprise and pain.

Romanda glanced at the room's ironbound door. It stood closed but not barred. Satisfied, she rushed to the side of the bed and found Gutter straddling the chest of Senator Lucrum, a thick and weathered hand half crushing the man's throat.

Lucrum's eyes bulged in terror, and he beat at Gutter's arms and face with his fists. These fell like rain on stone and did a similar amount of harm — nothing. Gutter's only concession to the senator's efforts to defend himself was to dodge the man's attacks at his eyes.

"Stop it!" Romanda her voice rising toward a screech. "You're killing him!"



She glanced around. That was the cue, but nothing happened.

Lucrum reached out and grabbed her by the wrist. She tried to yank her hand away, but the man's desperate grip proved too much. She raised her hand to knock him off of her, but Gutter blocked her way. She threw her punch at the uvandir instead.

"Get off him!" she said. "Now!"

Gutter turned and snarled at her with such ferocity that it stole her breath. She tried to bolt from him, but she couldn't break free from the senator's grip. Lucrum would be dead in a moment, and the fury in Gutter's eyes told her that despite any promises he might have made while they were in the tunnels below the castle she would be next.

She let loose with the loudest scream of her life. She didn't know if it would do any good. Could she scare off such a determined killer? Would anyone else even hear her? And if they did, would they suspect the senator was indulging his darker side once again and leave him be?

Gutter snapped one of his hands from the senator's throat to Romanda's and cut her short. "Enough of that," he said.

Romanda clawed at Gutter's arm with her free hand, but his muscles felt like they'd been sculpted from iron. From the way he handled her like a tantrum-throwing child, he could have snapped her neck in an instant, she knew, but he hadn't — not yet. But was that because he didn't want to harm her or because he was too busy watching Lucrum squirm?

Gutter stared down at the senator, a horrible smile creeping across his face. Lucrum's face had gone bright red already and had started to shift toward purple. He only had seconds left, and then perhaps Romanda would learn her fate.

A gentle hand wearing an iron bracelet appeared on Gutter's other side, and a musical voice spoke to the uvandir. "Let him go."

Gutter shoved himself back in shock, letting both Romanda and the senator go. Romanda stepped back, out of the range of the uvandir's stubby arms, and coughed air into her lungs. As she did, she saw the creature who'd stopped Gutter's rage cold with quiet words, and the vision transfixed her.

The elf — it had to be Venifer — had skin so pale it seemed almost translucent. Her wide eyes the color of leaves glowing in the summer sun stared at Gutter not with triumph or dismay but concern. Her rosebud lips parted, and she spoke again.

"There's nothing you can do." She called Gutter something — or said something to him — in a language that Romanda did not understand. The anger sagged out of the uvandir then, and he slumped out of the bed to wrap the elf in his arms.

Lucrum sucked a long and labored breath through his half-crushed throat. His face was still purple, but his eyes had stopped bulging from his head. Romanda reached toward him but stopped herself halfway, unsure of what to do next.

The door burst open, and a young man in a noble's clothes stormed in, a blue-glowing blade in his hand. "Stand down!" he said with

as much authority as he could muster. He pointed the blade straight at Gutter's heart.

"Jule! Where have you been?"  
Romanda said to the newcomer.

The young man glanced toward Romanda, a sheepish blush rising on his cheeks. Gutter took advantage of that lapse in attention to slap the blade out of Jule's hand. It spiraled across the room and sliced through the dressing screen before it disappeared behind it.

Romanda threw herself between Gutter and Jule as the uvandir advanced on the man. "You just interrupted me at the worst possible time, soft man," Gutter said, his anger growing once more.

"Leave him alone," Romanda said. "I didn't bring you here to kill him."

"I can handle this," Jule said, starting toward the screen to recover his enchanted blade.

"You lay your hand on that steel, and I'll kill you both," Gutter said.

Romanda froze. "Both?"

The uvandir sneered at her. "You don't think I know when I'm being played for a fool? You're in on something with this boy here."

Romanda face flushed pink right down to the whitened marks Gutter's fingers had left on her skin.

"There's only one thing I can't figure out. If you didn't bring me here to kill him

— or to kill his father for you — then who's the victim supposed to be?"

"You," Venifer said as she took Gutter by the end.

The uvandir gaped at her. "Explain."

The elf gestured toward Romanda and Jule, cupping them together with her delicate hands. "These two have been seeing each other for months, but the senator here does not approve. He thinks the girl is not good enough for his son."

"He wants me to marry Senator Warten's daughter." Jule shuddered as he mentioned his betrothed. Then he glanced at his father, still struggling to breathe, and winced at the sight.

"So you brought me so you could prove your manhood by stopping me from executing your father for his crimes?"

Jule couldn't bring himself to answer.

"Where were you then?" Romanda said to Jules, who refused to meet her fiery eyes. "You were supposed to burst in and stop him!"

Jule's face twisted up in anguish. "I sent the guards away, just like we'd planned, but you know, you asked me to do that a week ago, and I haven't heard from you since. I've had to come up with new excuses to get them out of here every night. I'd just about given up!"

"You fell asleep, didn't you?"

Jule kicked at the floor. "It's been a long week."

Romanda groaned and rubbed her eyes. "I had the worst time finding someone for the job, and

once I did..." She glared at the uvandir. "Well, the gobowins didn't tell me it would be that hard."

"Which gobowin?" Venifer said, narrowing her eyes at Romanda. "Was it Rustah?"

The way Romanda shivered told Venifer all she needed to know. "That runt has been lobbying Lucrum for a government contract for weeks, but he's refused to pay the necessary bribes."

Jule regarded Venifer with newfound respect. "You've been paying attention."

"I keep the points of my ears sharp," she said.

Gutter tugged at his beard. "So this gobowin merchant sets you after me, knowing I'd kill your lover's father."

Jule frowned. "And maybe me too, if I hadn't been so late coming in."

Romanda reached out to take Jule's hand and squeeze it tight.

Lucrum sat up then and tried to call out for the guards. As loud as he meant to bellow for them, though, all he could muster was a hoarse whisper. The other people in the room all stared at him furious and horrified in turn.

When Lucrum realized that the people in the room with him had to strain to hear him, he snarled at them instead. Without another word, he shoved himself from the bed and dove toward the dressing screen.

Gutter darted after the senator and snagged him by the back collar of his bedclothes. With

a yank, he hauled the man from his feet and slammed his body to the floor. The air knocked out of Lucrum's lungs, Gutter pulled him back up to his knees by the front of his nightshirt and held him there at his stubby arm's length.

"Now," Gutter said with a fierce growl in the senator's face. "Give me a good reason not to snap your neck."

"Whatever you want." Lucrum didn't raise his hands to attempt to defend himself this time. He'd already seen how doomed such an effort would be. "If it's within my power, it's yours."

Gutter nodded over at Venifer. "That's my friend there. I've known her since before your grandfather was born. There's no one in the world who means more to me."

As he spoke, he drew the man's face close enough to him that he could have bitten off his nose with a single snap of his bared teeth. Lucrum grew paler with every word. Venifer stood back from her master and her friend and stared in despairing silence at the floor. Romanda squeezed Jule's hand harder, and he replied in kind until their knuckles turned white.

Gutter hurled his next three words at the man like knives. "Set. Her. Free."

Everyone in the room leaned in to hear the senator's response. He struggled against his injuries and his interests to give voice to an honest answer. "I can't do it."

Gutter shook the man like he was a rat in a terrier's jaws. "You mean you won't!"

"No." Venifer held up her arms. An iron shackle dangled from each, although the chain that had once held them together was missing. "He can't."

Gutter dropped Lucrum, who pooled into his bedclothes on the floor, and went to the elf. He held her hands high and examined the bracelets she wore, looking for a way to tear them off without hurting her.

"It's all right," she said, pulling away. "I've wasted a bit since I was bound."

She slipped her arms out of the shackles herself by squeezing her hands together tight, and she dropped them to clatter on the ground. She held up her arms to show livid red marks where the iron had laid against her skin. Gutter brushed his fingers against them with tender care, and she did not flinch at his touch.

"They don't hurt," Venifer said. "But they won't come off either. The binding goes deeper than the iron, deeper than my skin."

"There has to be a way," Romanda said. "We live in a world of magic. Wizards, sorcerers, spells, scrolls, staves, wands, potions."

"Right," said Jule. "We make the most amazing and unimaginable things happen every day. There must be a way."

The elf shook her head. "In all my years, all the people of the wood that I've known, I've seen many of us be taken and put in irons. I've never known any of us to return free."

Gutter cradled Venifer's arms in his hands and fought back tears. "I'm sorry," he said. "I thought you were dead."

The elf reached up and brushed the hair out of the uvandir's shining eyes with her long fingers. "It's not your fault. I almost was."

"We should never have taken a stand against those loggers. It wasn't worth it."

"They were destroying our home. We elves have given over too much of the woods already. It was time."

"When I saw you fall, that arrow through your chest, I — I went into a rage. A red veil dropped over my eyes. I slaughtered every one of them, to a man. I watered the forest's roots with their blood."

The memory of that day carried him away. His eyes grew distant, but then they snapped back into focus on Venifer again. "I placed you beneath your favorite oak. You were dead."

A hint of a melancholy smile curled the elf's lips. "I was, or close enough to it. But as you say, this is a world full of magic. The soldiers who'd been guarding the loggers from our attacks sent up another squad to see why their fellows hadn't reported back. They found me and brought me here."

Gutter's eyes expanded. "Those were Lucrum's men?"

"I'm afraid so," Jule said. "I'm told my father went to great expense to pay for the spells that brought her back to health."

“And then he put the irons on her to bind her to him,” Romanda said.

Jule bowed his head in shame at his father’s actions. “If I had a way to free her, I would.”

“Traitor.” Romanda, Jule, Gutter, and Venifer turned to see Lucrum standing by the dressing screen, the young man’s glowing sword in his hand.

“Put down the blade,” Romanda said to the furious senator, who still couldn’t raise his voice to more than a tortured croak.

“Like I would take orders from the low-born bitch who’s bewitched my boy?”

“I was trying to save your life.”

“By bringing a murderous dwarf into my home?”

Romanda shook her head. “From him killing you right now.”

Gutter stormed toward the senator, his fists like war hammers at the end of his arms. “On the way here,” he said to the senator, “my young guide tried to convince me that we shouldn’t accept myths at face value. That we should look for new ways to test their truths.”

Lucrum stood his ground and swished his blade through the air before him, testing its balance and threatening the uvandir at the same time. “Guards!” He shouted for help as loud as he could, but the word emerged from him as little more than a whisper.

Gutter swept up the blanket from the senator’s bed as he passed it. He wrapped it around his left arm with a few sweeps of the limb and thrust it before him as he stalked toward the man.

Lucrum glanced at the open hatch behind him. The escape tunnel beyond it beckoned. Rather than make for it, though, and chance Gutter knocking him down from behind, he raised his glowing sword high and charged the uvandir instead.

Gutter bolted forward, using the wrapped blanket as a shield against the senator’s attack. The blade bit deep into the bedclothes and the flesh of the uvandir’s arm, but Gutter ignored the pain and drove a single bone-crunching punch into Lucrum’s face instead.

Lucrum fell over, out before he hit the floor. His blade fell from his limp fingers and remained embedded in Gutter’s arm as if it had been nailed against it with a spike.

Gutter worked his arm around until he could grab the sword by its hilt. Then he pulled the blade free with a wet sound. He hefted it in his good arm and watched his own blood run down its edge.

Jule spoke first, breaking the silence.

“My father? Is he dead?”

Gutter leaned over the fallen senator and screwed up his face in disgust. Then he brought the sword down on the man’s neck, and Lucrum’s head tumbled away.

“He is now.”

Romanda clung to Jule's arm. The young man looked like he was turning green, and his skin had gone clammy.

Gutter turned toward Jule as he began to unwrap his arm. "I suppose you'll want a go at me now too."

"Why?" Jule's voice sounded distant, like he was speaking through a dream.

Gutter peeled the blanket away, exposing a deep gash on his arm. Blood dripped from it but did not gush. He gave it a close appraisal. "Avenge your father, recover your family's honor. Human fool stuff like that?"

"He was an evil man." Jule looked to Venifer. "He did horrible things."

Romanda peered at the elf's arms. They still bore their livid marks. "But his death did nothing to help you," she said to Venifer. "You're just as bound as before."

"Vengeance is its own reward," Gutter said. "And I'm not ready to give up on it yet." He eyed Jule as he hefted the glowing blade in his meaty hand, testing its weight.

Romanda stepped between Jule and the uvandir. "You can't."

"Again, I can. I don't know much about fathers and sons, but I understand human laws. He's the heir to his father's estate, right? The bond passes on to him."

"And when he's dead, the bond will pass on to his brother. And then his uncle. And to

his cousins from there." Romanda scowled at Gutter. "How many will you kill? When will you decide it's been enough?"

"When I'm done," the uvandir said. "When she's free."

"It will never end."

"It will, or I will."

"I'll scream for help," Romanda said. "I'll bring Lucrum's entire army down on your head."

Gutter frowned. "I'll cut you down before you finish your first note."

"You can't!" Jule said, stepping next to Romanda, forming a united front with her.

Gutter let loose an exasperated sigh. "Do I have to go through this with you too?"

"I renounce the bond," Jule said. "I hereby set the elf known to us as Venifer free."

"It's not as simple as that," Gutter said. "If it was, I'd have tortured it out of your father."

Jule shook his head. "You're right. You never could have. You can't break the bond of iron with fear. Or anger. It can't be shattered by violence or for money."

"Right," Romanda said, gazing at Jule, their fingers interlaced. "Only by love."

Jule turned to Romanda and took her by both her hands and looked deep into her eyes. "Only by true love. And as a wedding gift to my bride, I hereby renounce my family's

hold over Venifer — and over any other elves that may somehow be in our service — and release them from such bonds.”

Romanda threw her arms around Jule in a grateful embrace, and he reciprocated. She found herself shaking with emotion, unable to speak until he whispered something soft in her ear.

“Well?” he said. “Will you do me the honor?”

“Of?” She didn’t understand him for a moment. Her heart beat far too fast, and her head spun even faster.

“Being my bride?”

Her breath caught in her throat and held there until it burst. “Yes,” she said, erupting in joy. “Of course, yes!”

They parted then and saw Gutter standing right next to them, close enough Romanda could smell the beer still on his breath. “You’re fools,” he said.

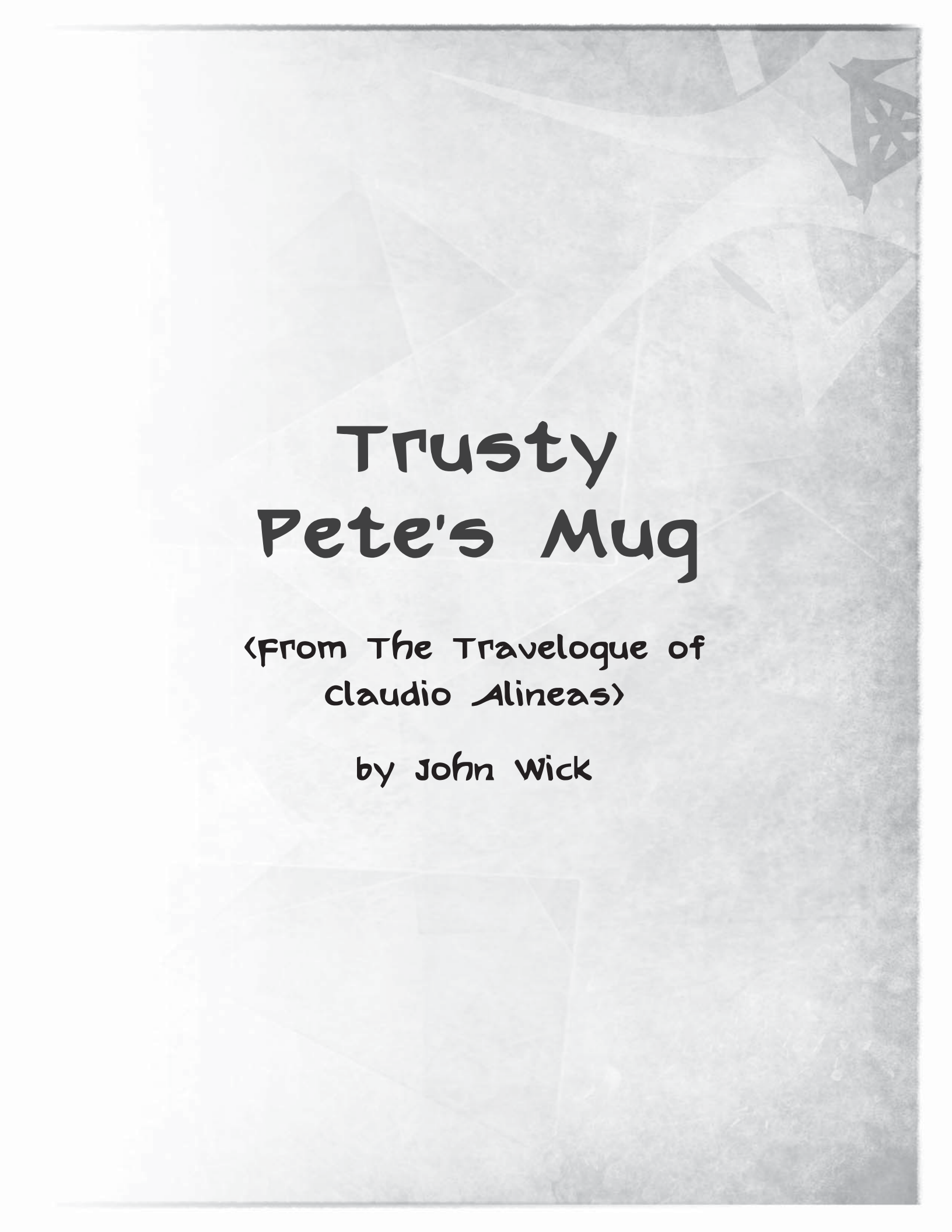
He pointed to Venifer, who stood on the other side of them. They snapped their heads around to find her standing before them, her arms raised before her.

They were as clean and unmarked as fresh snow.

“Fools,” Gutter said. “But lucky ones.”







# Trusty Pete's Mug

<From The Travelogue of  
Claudio Alineas>

by John Wick

It was in Bloomsburghe, a small town just south of Jinix, that I met Trusty Pete. Not the man, mind you, but his mug.

The tavern has no name, just a wooden sign with a frothy mug hanging over the door. The locals call it "Pip's Place." You'll find it. The town isn't big enough to lose a dog.

My feet ached inside my boots and my throat was as dry as my coat. The tavern sign caught my eye and I limped in.

As soon as I entered, I knew I was in the right place. Three men with instruments played in the corner. The smell of roasted meat filled my nostrils. I saw every hand in the room holding a tankard. Yes, this was the place for me. The place where I was born wasn't much different.

I stepped up to the bar and a slender man with a mustache as big as his head nodded at me. "Been walking a time?" he asked. But he asked it with a thick Jinix accent, so it sounded more like, "Bin wawkeen ferah loong tieemeh?" The folks of Jinix end nearly every question with that famous, "eh." Made me smile.

I nodded. When I spoke, I knew the right dialect. "Aye, I have."

"Here," he said, handing me a mug. "Dunna start heavy or you'll be falling down before I bring you the good stuff."

I took the mug and lifted it to his honor. "On the tab, eh?"

He shook his head. "First mug is free," he said. Then, he winked. "But I charge double for the rest."

I laughed and he laughed with me. Yes, I was going to like this place.

An hour later, I had four mugs in my stomach and some roasted pig as well. The steamed vegetables were buttery and the folks here had salt... for an extra copper. I paid up for the luxury. Made all the difference.

Around then, I noticed the mug on the wall behind the bar. It was placed upside down so dust wouldn't fall in and I saw something engraved on the side. I got up from my chair and peered closer. The side of the mug had the name "Pete" carved into the side.

"What's that for?" I asked Pip.

The slender man smiled. "Ah, that's Pete's mug," he told me. "Sits there in a place of honor. When he walks through the door, it's ready for him."

I had seen the tradition elsewhere. "A good man to deserve such a distinction," I said.

Pip nodded. "Aye. Trusty Pete. Saved everyone in here one time or another."

That caught my attention. "Saved, eh?" I asked.

Pip picked up my empty mug and filled it again. "Right. Saved this place from a nasty pack of bandits." Nawstee packa bandits.

"Tell me the story," I said.

Pip put my mug back in front of me. "They came in here, threatenin' me and the missus," he said. "Taking the ale from the kegs, eatin' meat out of the smoker. Matter of chance Pete came by. Walked in like he owned the place. Sat right down..." Pip pointed at one of the chairs. "Sat down right there, in fact."

I looked at the table currently inhabited by two men and an uvandir. The men were watching the bards and the uvandir was drinking. Just drinking.

“Pete sat right down and said to the lot of ‘em that he was the head of a Courage sent from Jinix and that this place was the Baron’s favorite drinking stop. And that they should walk away now, because if they didn’t, they wouldn’t be able to.”

“What did the bandits say, eh?” I asked, feeling the smile creep up on my lips.

“They said they wasn’t leavin’ for nobody, let alone no one man sayin’ he was from a Courage. They said that if he was from a Courage, why was he the only one there.”

I saw the scene in my mind. One man sitting alone at a table and the bandits all staring. I already had a picture of him.

I saw the man sitting there, his feet up on the table, not even looking at the bandits. The head bandit was a big man. “Big as an ork,” Pip told me. His black beard all but hiding his lips, a great sword strapped to his side.

The big bandit walks up and looks down at little Pete. “If you’ve got yourself a Courage,” he says, “Why are you the only one here?”

Pete doesn’t look up. He’s whittling with a piece of wood with a small knife. “Who says I’m the only one here?” he says.

Then, without warning, the back door slams shut. So do all the windows.

The bandits jump. Even the head bandit. He puts his hand on his sword.

“We left the front door open,” Pete says. “So you can walk out the way you came.”

The head bandit considers his options. He looks at Trusty Pete. Pete isn’t even sweating. Just whittling away.

Then, Pete says, “Ten...”

And the bandits are gone before he reaches eight.

I laugh when Pip tells me that part, so hard my gut hurts. Pip’s laughing, too.

“You shoulda seen ‘em,” he says between gasps of laughter. “They ran so fast, I thought they’d run straight to Ashcolmb before they stopped!”

Another man, a bigger man than both of us combined, steps up to the bar. “You talking about Trusty Pete, eh?” he asks.

Pip nods and introduces us. “This is Yrl,” he tells me. “Yrl, this here young man is writing a travel book. Like the ones your wife reads.”

Yrl smiles big and wide. “For true, eh?” he asks me.

I nod. “For true.”

“What’s your name?” Yrl says. “My wife reads all of them things.”

“Claudio Alineas,” I tell him, extending my hand.

Yrl’s eyes widen up. “For true, eh? My wife reads all your books!”

I smile and nod. “Thank you,” I say.

“If she was here,” Yrl tells me. “But she’s away in Jinix, trading eggs and such.”

I reach into my pack and pull out a copy of my latest journal. “Does she have this one?”

He shakes his head, eyeing the book like it was a lost treasure. “No!” he said. “We don’t get much here. She buys em in Jinix.”

I give him the book. “Give her this one, then,” I tell him. “Tell her it was from me.”

There’s a long pause while he looks at it in his hands, then Pip says, “Tell the story, Yrl.”

Yrl looks up at him. “What story?”

“Your Trusty Pete story, luddard!”

Yrl nods. “Oh, yeah.” He still holds on to the book. “Hey, if I tell you the story, can you mention me and my wife in your book?”

I nod. “Of course I can,” I tell him.

Yrl smiles again. “Right then. My wife’s name is Sarah. Got that? S-A-R-A-H.” He puts his hand on my shoulder. “It’s important to remember the H at the end, eh?”

“I’ll remember, Yrl,” I tell him.

“Right then,” he says again. So, when we meet Trusty Pete, we’ve got a witch in our well.”

“A witch?” I ask him.

He nods and Pip puts a drink in his hand. “A real one, too. Not a fake pretend one that’s cursing you fake so you pay her money. No, the real kind. You know, eh?”

I nod, a certain light in my eyes.

“Oh yes,” I tell him. “I know.”

He tells me that the chickens went dry and the cows gave curdled milk and all the things you hear about witches. And he says Sarah went to the well one day and heard a singing down at the bottom of it.

“A kind of singing that makes you wake up screaming,” he told me, “except she wasn’t asleep.”

Sarah runs back into the house and tells him all about it. Yrl comes down to town looking for advice. And who should happen to be in Pip’s Place but Trusty Pete.

Pete hears the story and puts down his ale. “I’ll take care of it,” he says. Then, he walks up to Yrl’s farm with Yrl in tow. He reaches the farm and Sarah is there, crying. Pete tells Sarah that

everything’s going to be all right and he walks over to the well. He looks over the side and hears the singing. Then, he looks at Yrl and Sarah.

“Then, he smiles,” Yrl tells me, “and he jumps right down into the well. Like he was jumping into a swimming hole.”

Sarah screams and Yrl holds on to her. The singing stops and Yrl wonders if he’s just killed Trusty Pete. But a few moments later, a thin, white-skinned woman with black hair comes crawling out of the well, screaming.

“Screaming like... well, a witch was chasin’ her,” he tells me.

She runs off the farm, still screaming the whole way. Then, a few moments later, Pete crawls out of the well. He’s soaking wet and covered in mud.

“That should take care of it,” he says. “She won’t be coming back.” Then, Pete walks back to Pip’s Place and finishes his ale, just like he came back from the privy.

Yrl finishes his story and I shake my head. “Did you find out what he did to frighten the witch?” I asked.

Yrl looks at Pip and they both smile. “He did,” Pip tells me. “He said, ‘I told her my name.’”

All three of us laugh. I’m getting dizzy from laughing so much, breathing so little and drinking so much ale.

Then, another man shouts at us from a table. “Pete’s got a curse!” he says.

We, all three of us, look his way. Pip asks, “A curse you say, eh?”

The man nods. “Aye, a curse! They say his hair can’t get combed right.”

“What kind of curse is that, eh?” I ask.

The man smiled. “This witch—maybe the same one from Yrl’s story—she tried throwin’ curses on him. A thousand of ‘em.” He paused and tipped his hat at Pete’s mug on the wall. “And after a thousand curses, that was the only one that stuck.”

A woman stepped up to the bar. She was dressed in clothing a bit too expensive for the place I was drinking and her face was painted. “Tell him about the twenty goblins,” she said, giving me a glance up and down. “Go on, Pip,” she said. “Tell him.”

Pip shook his head. “That, Darcie,” he said, “is a long, long story.”

“Tell him the quick version, then,” she said. “And get me two more ales while you’re at it.”

Pip filled two tankards and slid them to her. She thanked him, then walked back to her table where a farmhand in muddy boots and dungarees sat. He never took his eyes off her.

“Darcie’s making her rent tonight,” Pip said.

“Everybody’s got to,” I told him.

Pip nodded. “I suppose so.” Then, he turned to look at me. “Like I said,” he told me, “its a long story.”

He told me the quick version. Pete meets up with a caravan of goblins. They offer him a place to sleep for the night and they spend the whole night gambling.

“Long story short,” Pip said, “in the morning, the goblins are in the hole, and they owe everything to Pete.”

The ale caught in my throat and Yrl patted me on the back. “Don’t die!” he said. “My wife would never forgive me!”

I nodded and caught my breath. “I’m all right,” I tell Yrl. Then, I looked at Pip. “I don’t believe it.”

Pip opened his hands like he was offering me something. “It’s a true story.”

“An entire goblin caravan?” I asked. I forgot to add the “eh” at the end.

Pip nodded and handed me another ale. “Won the whole thing. Every pot, every spoon, every trinket. The whole cursed thing.”

I blinked my eyes and shook my head. “I’ll believe the bandits and the witch and even the curse. But not the goblins.”

Pip smiled at me. “Believe what you want,” he said. Then, he pointed at the mug on the wall. “But that there is Pete’s mug. And whenever he comes in, he gets it. And he don’t pay nothing for anything that goes in it.”

Then, Pip raised a glass and shouted, “For Trusty Pete!”

And the whole tavern raised their cups. “Trusty Pete!” they all shout. And Pip looked at me like that’s all the evidence he needed.





# QM chapter

# Game Mastering Wicked Fantasy

## **Introduction: The GM as Magician**

As you may have gathered from the title, this chapter is for the Game Master. Players can read it if they wish—there are no metaplot secrets or spoilers—but reading this chapter is a lot like learning how a magic trick works. And trust me, learning how a trick works is a lot less sexy than watching the trick as a sucker sitting in the audience. In the audience, everything appears effortless. Magic. Once you know about the trap door in the floor or the marked cards or the slight hand gesture that hides the bird from plain sight... trust me, knowing how the trick works isn't as cool as it sounds.

There is a special kind of person for whom the secret of the trick is more compelling than the trick itself. We call those people, “magicians.” Or, in this case, “Game Masters.”

After all, a GM is a kind of magician. Magicians create something out of nothing. Pulling rabbits out of hats, making beautiful assistants appear and disappear, pulling your card out

of a deck of 52. Creating something from nothing. Making the impossible look ordinary.

The characters the players own are creations of fiction, but if the Game Master does his job, he'll convince you that your character *does* exist. To pull emotions out of you from pure fiction.

When you feel your enemy's sword pierce your flesh.

When you feel the passion of revenge bursting your heart.

When you wake in an adventuring camp, in the middle of the woods, feeling the cool mist of the morning.

That is the work of the Magician. Making something from nothing.

In a dark theater, watching the hero on the screen, and you feel his pain as your own.

Watching the TV, feeling the heroine's heartbreak, the pain as real as your own.



Reading the novel, the suspense in the detective's chest, pounding as hard as your own.

This is the Game Master's primary goal. To make the players feel what the characters feel. What they see. What they smell. A hint of danger. That whiff of scented hair. The taste of the wine. The bliss of new love. The cut of steel against flesh.

All of these things are possible. Something from nothing.

Magic.

I can help you. I wrote this chapter to help you. But if you're a player, reading any further will ruin the trick. So, stop now.

### **How This Chapter Works**

Okay, now that we've gotten rid of the players, you and I can talk in earnest. And yeah, I know, you've got that one player who's gonna read this chapter anyway. Don't worry about him. I've got a trick for him, too.

This chapter is sort of a mish-mash of advice. Storytelling is more of an Art than a Science, so I've decided to take a less formal approach here. A conversation between you and me.

### **The GM Toolbox**

Every auto mechanic has a toolbox.

You don't need to use everything. Just the right tool for the right job. Some tools, you never use. Some, you think you'll never use... until it just so happens to be the exact right tool at the exact right time.

Every GM should have a toolbox.

You don't need to use everything. Just the right tool for the right job. Some tools, you never use. Some you use so often, you need to replace them from wear and tear. Some, you think you'll never use... until it just so happens to be the exact right tool at the exact right time.

Consider this chapter a kind of hardware store. Full of tools. You don't have to use all of them. You don't even have to use some of them. Go ahead and browse through the aisles, try things out, give them a good look, and figure out which you want to add to your toolbox.

By the way, you should get yourself a notebook. Write "GM Toolbox" on the cover. Start writing things down. Writing ideas that come to

### **Deja Vu**

Faithful Readers (those who have been through previous games of mine) may recognize some of this material. Yes, I've cribbed from myself. Good advice is good advice—and I think the things I've said before bear repeating, especially in a product like this. As a Pathfinder product, many readers will not have read previous GM advice chapters I've written. Also, I've had an opportunity to tweak little bits here and there.

But fear not, Faithful Reader! I've provided a whole ton of new material for you as well. There's stuff you've never seen before (most of it Wicked Fantasy specific).

So, if you see something you've seen before, don't just skim over it. Everyone needs a little reminder here and there. And, you may miss a new morsel I've stuck in that you've never seen before.

you out of the blue. Ideas from other people's books, blogs and podcasts. Ideas from this book. Write them down. Keep them for that every other Friday when you run your game. When one of your players presents an opportunity to use one of those tools, use it. The purpose of this chapter is to fill that toolbox. Give you as many tricks and techniques as we can. To keep your players on their toes, to make them feel that magic. As we go along, you may bump into a tool you don't want to use. Don't feel compelled to use it. Read through each section, decide if anything is appropriate for your group, then either write them in your book or leave them alone.

Jill and I ran *Wicked Fantasy* for many different groups, and for each group, we ran it a little differently. Different rules for different groups, but the same game. I listened to what each group wanted and modified the game to suit that group. That meant I emphasized some rules, de-emphasized others. I even dropped a few rules and added others.

Listen to your group. I'll be saying that a lot this chapter.

## Technique

When I go to conventions or game stores, I see a lot of GMs sitting at tables, hiding behind a screen, a monotone drawl oozing from their lips as they chew on potato chips and suck down soda.

Now, I don't use this kind of language a lot, so pay attention. This is **bad**. This is **wrong**. This is not how you **engage your players**. Instead, I suggest the following.

## Mood & Atmosphere

One of the most important things to establish right up front is the mood and atmosphere of the Known World. Now, some groups

may not be comfortable with music in the background, candles lit, costumes, or other things I've got listed here. Pick the ones you think your players will like.

To begin, think of your favorite fantasy novels and films. The way they look. *Conan the Barbarian* does not look like *Lord of the Rings* does not look like *Game of Thrones* does not look like *Legend*. How your world looks says a lot about the mood and atmosphere of the world.

When I was writing about *Wicked Fantasy*, I pictured a distinct place. But your Known World may be different than mine. Sure, the trappings are still there—elves, haffuns, the Reign, etc.—but how you *show* that world can change.

When I was writing about the Reign, I was thinking, "What would the Greeks or the Roman Empire look like if either survived well into the Middle Ages?" I saw the Greeks as the way the Reign started, but as it fell into decadence, Rome came into the picture. I pictured the Greeks and Romans when I wrote about the Reign, but that doesn't mean you have to. However, if you want to keep with the theme, go watch HBO's *Rome* for visual references.

But don't stop with the way the Known World *looks*. Think of the smells. Fresh bread on the morning streets, tinged with the smell of urine from the dark alleyway. Think of leather. The way it smells, the sound it makes when it bends. Scent is a powerful and underestimated sense. Perfume the room with scented candles. Go to the used bookstore, get some old books and leave them open around the room. Old bibles and those Reader's Digest books are the best: they're big and smell great. Nothing beats the smell of old books.

Dim the lights, but not too much: people have to see their character sheets. Give the table a

single source of light. You can get those antique lamps in any specialty store these days. Get one and use it as your light source on the table.

You can also influence the way your room feels by baking bread. This is really pretty easy and goes a long way to making a room feel different. Freshly baked bread has a distinct smell that invokes specific emotions. It just feels old.

(That's the second time I mentioned bread. Bread makers are fun, cheap and easy to use. And they change the entire atmosphere of a room. Try it out!)

Also provide exotic foods for your players. Finger foods are generally very affordable, but don't get chips and salsa. No, no. Get cheese and those crackers that look home-baked. Cheese and crackers are generally just as cheap as chips and soda—sometimes even cheaper, depending on where you shop. Same thing, completely different feel.

You can also get cheap glass or plastic goblets. And put a pitcher of something that looks like wine on the table. Or, if you're into that sort of thing, just put wine on the table.

As for music, there's a soundtrack of Wicked Fantasy music out there. Just sayin'. But you can find all kinds of background music to invoke the mood. Just don't play it too loud; music can intrude as much as it compliments the mood.

As for maintaining the delicate mood you've set, I recommend using a story candle. Here's how it works.

The story candle sits in a special place in the gaming room. Always in sight. When my friends get together, we chat about all the things we've seen and done since we saw each

other last. I give them about forty-five minutes or so. Then, I take down the story candle.

Everyone knows that as soon as I light the candle, the game starts. I turn down the lights, take out the matches—don't use a lighter; there's nothing like the smell of sulfur—and light the candle. I usually also play a song appropriate to the theme of the night. If the players pay attention, they may even get a heaping helping of foreshadowing. As soon as the song is over, I give a brief reminder of what's happened so far. Then, the game starts.

As long as the candle remains lit, the game is on. Monty Python quotes, questions about this week's episode of your favorite TV show are all bad form. As long as the candle remains lit, we focus on the game. Then, when the game closes, I blow out the candle, leaving everyone in darkness for a few moments. Then, we turn on the light. I like that last few moments of darkness. Everyone sits quietly and thinks about the game. Well worth the silence.

## Get Up

Now that you've got the room looking and feeling right, let's get *you* into order.

First, get rid of your chair.

Stand. Walk around. Talk to the players. Get over their shoulders. Sit on the ground. Invite them to do the same thing.

Get up. Move. Get your blood pumping.

When you fill the role of an NPC, take on that role. If he has a limp, then limp. If he's missing an eye, shut one of your eyes. If he lisps, then lisp.

Every NPC you play should have a distinct and unique voice. Lighter and sweeter. Darker and angrier. Moody. Elated. Seductive. Heart-broken. When you create an NPC, write down

three things that are true about the NPC. Make them physical characteristics, vocal patterns, mannerisms... something the players can see.

Give them favorite phrases and gestures. Things that identify each NPC. As soon as you do it, your players know *exactly* who they are talking to.

Let's take two NPCs in particular as examples: Senator Alexander Voir and his bodyguard, Marca Valetrex. (These two can be found in *Loyalty*, the short story following *The Reign of Men*.)

Senator Alexander Voir not only has a limp, but a voice that comes from a cut across his throat that almost killed him. He's not only small, but he hunches over. When he speaks louder than a whisper, it's obviously painful.

Marca, on the other hand, is almost always standing at attention. She says very little, except when you get her angry, and then, she goes into a monologue so epic, Aaron Sorkin starts taking notes. Her voice is deep but feminine and full of confidence. She never looks at you eye-to-eye unless she wants to make a point.

Just these little details are enough to distinguish between these two NPCs. In fact, you could play *both*, in the same room, and with just a little physical change, your players would never be confused about who is speaking to them.

So, get up. Move. Show the players something. If they don't see it, then it doesn't exist.

### **Don't Look Down**

Not just in a metaphorical sense, either.

When you talk to your players as an NPC, engage them. Look them in the eye. Don't look at their shoes or their chins. Look them square in the face.

Talk to them like they actually exist. Talk to them like they are their characters. And when an NPC

gets shot down or humiliated or embraced or forgiven... show them that emotion in your eyes.

Don't look at your shoes. Don't look at your dice. Look at me.

Show it in your lips, in your voice, in every part of your body.

Pay attention to the way you move.

Pay attention to the words you choose.

Pay attention to everything.

And look at them while you're plotting their demise. Let them see that in your gaze.

Don't look down.

Look at them. Show the players something. If they don't see it, then it doesn't exist.

(My editor suggested this cheat. If looking someone else in the eyes makes you uncomfortable, watch the space right below his eyebrows. Don't be too obvious, but just make sure you are staring at that little patch of flesh. Makes it a bit easier for those of us who are nervous about such things.)

### **Show Me, Don't Tell Me**

If the first two didn't get you, this one should.

I can't tell you how many GMs I meet who show me huge notebooks full of "world notes."

"How much of this have your players seen?" I ask them. "Almost none of it," they tell me.

My response is always the same.

"Then what good is it?"

A GM's primary job is to entertain the players.

You do this by showing them the world.

Not telling them about it. *Showing it.*

Don't tell them about a super cool and obscure fact you've written about in your world. *Show* it to them. Write it into the adventure. More than that, let *them* do it.

Let them *feel* the wind on their cheeks. The cool, cool wind on a hot, hot day. The sun beating down, making your breath burn the inside of your nose. But there's the wind, smelling like the sea, cooling your skin.

Let them *feel* the dungeon. The smell of stale dust. Is that the corpse of a dead animal, just inside the entrance? Worms feeding on its flesh? Do you hear the wind echoing through the corridors, making you feel you are surrounded by invisible enemies? The walls are dusty and sticky. What is that? And the sounds are amplified by the tiny space, making even whispers sound like booming shouts.

Let them *feel* the winter. The winter so cold, it makes your teeth ache. The painful numbness of your ears and your nose. Blinking to keep your eyes moist. Your bones aching. The wind sneaking through your winter clothes, scratching your skin. Your toes burning. So cold, it burns. *So cold, it burns.*

"The little things make the soup," my mother tells me. And I can still taste it. The beef she sautéed all night. The fresh vegetables she just picked up from the store, crunching between my teeth. The broth, so hot it burns, but so sweet you don't care.

Show me.

## Spotlight

One concept I've been toying with myself is the idea of "the spotlight." I didn't think of this one; I've been hearing a lot of people talk about it, but I've been toying with it for a while, trying to give it my own twist.

Every session, pick one player. That player has the Spotlight. (Capitalizing it makes it a rule.) This means that player is the focus of the game. The GM and the other players work toward making that player's character the center of that session.

Using the Spotlight allows you to focus all your powers on a single player. Ask the other players to take the roles of significant NPCs

One character has the spotlight. Other players assist the GM in making that moment special. You'll get your own. You play an important NPC in that player's background. Set your Spotlight on one character per Year. Let the players switch around the focus, helping each other tell their characters' stories.

## Mix Backgrounds

If you find a common element in two different characters' backgrounds, find a way to link those elements.

For example, one character has a favorite uncle and another character is looking for the man who murdered her mother. Turns out both of those NPCs are the same NPC.

One character is having a secret affair with a married woman and another character suspects his wife is having an affair... Guess who the common element is?

Read your players' background write-ups carefully. If you look hard enough, you'll find all sorts of ways to make your players love you. Or hate you. Same difference, really.

## The Awesome Pool

Get yourself a bowl and a bunch of d6's. You'll need a big bowl, like a punch bowl. I also suggest making it either plastic or glass so players can see inside it. That makes a difference.

This bowl is the “Awesome Pool.” During the game, whenever your players do something awesome, throw a d6 into the bowl. If they roleplay their race well, throw in a d6. If they banter together in an entertaining way, throw in a d6. If they come up with a clever plan you never counted on, throw a d6 into the pool.

Now, during the game, whenever any player wants, he can pull a token out of the pool to gain 1d6 to his current roll. So, if he’s making an attack roll and he rolls less than he needs, he can spend a token from the pool, get himself a die, roll it, and add the result to his roll.

Anyone can do this at any time... before or after their rolls. Also, players can draw as many tokens as they need, but they can only draw tokens one at a time. That is, if an important roll falls short, you can spend a token and roll a bonus die, then spend a token and roll a bonus die, then spend a token and roll a bonus die. As many as you want, but only one at a time.

### **Option: Scaling Down and Scaling Up**

If you like, you can reduce that d6 to a d4 or even increase it to a d8. (I don’t suggest going any higher than that). This all depends on how much bonus you want to give your players. Generally, I make it a d6 because I like big, epic actions, but I even I feel you can cross a line, so d6 feels right to me. You may want to scale that back a bit, especially considering players can continue to pull dice from the pool whenever they want. Or, you may want to go for broke and let your players add d8s to their rolls. It’s up to you.

### **Option: Token Rewards**

Instead of each token representing a d6, try this option out. Try to get tokens of three different colors. Red, blue and green, for example. Assign a

“dice type” to each color. For example, red is d4s, blue is d6s and green is d8s. Whichever you like.

This way, you can scale rewards based on the players’ actions. Little, cool things get a d4, while bigger and more awesome things get a d8.

### **Option: Bonus XP**

At the end of each game session, the number of dice left in the pool count as bonus XP. Each d6 counts as 10 bonus XP for the party. Of course, they divide it up between themselves.

If you’re using the scalable rewards option, d4 tokens count as 5 bonus XP, d6 tokens count as 10 bonus XP and d8 tokens count as 20 bonus XP.

### **Option: The Black Die**

You may also want to try this one out. It’s a bit cruel, but it’s also effective.

Whenever a player isn’t paying attention because he’s on his cell phone, or he starts talking about the latest episode of his favorite TV show, or he starts telling an elaborate anecdote that he feels is important but distracts from the game, or he starts quoting Monty Python...

You know what I’m talking about.

Whenever this kind of nonsense happens, throw a *black d6* in the pool. What does that mean? Well, the black die sits in the pool, waiting for someone to use it. And when they use it, they roll it instead of a d20. And it can’t be something inconsequential. “I jump up and down! Give me the black die!” Nope. It has to be a significantly important roll, otherwise, the black token stays where it is.

And here’s the trick: nobody can draw any dice from the pool until someone draws the black die. That means, someone has

to roll the black die before anyone else can pull dice from the Awesome Pool.

## Writing Adventures: The Revenge of Lady Va

*(This was originally a Houses of the Blooded adventure that I converted to a Blood & Honor adventure which is now being converted into a Wicked Fantasy adventure. When playtesting Blood & Honor, I simply converted the details over from “ven” to “samurai.” And now, I’m changing “samurai” to “heroes.”)*

Writing adventures is easy. I mean, *easy*.

I’ve got a trick for you. It’s a dirty trick, but I’m known for such things. In fact, you may recognize it. You may even think, “John, that may work in other games, but there is no way this is gonna work here.

Ah, but it will. Trust me, it will.

If you let them, the players will design the adventure *for you*.

Take for example a particular game I ran for one playtest group. I’d forgotten I was supposed to show up and was in a rush. I had no idea what to do. So, when the game began, I turned to one of the players...

So, your players have taken the roles of heroes in a Lord’s Courage. The Lord seems like a pleasant enough fellow, but there’s something... wrong.

One early morning, hours before the sun comes up, as one of your heroes does his nightly patrol through the castle, he comes across a figure cloaked all in black. Quick chase, quick fight.

When our hero captures this ruffian and takes off the mask, he discovers the ruffian

is a woman. A noblewoman, in fact. Her name is Lady Va, and she’s a neighbor.

At this point, the player asks me, “What do I know about her?”

I tell him, “Make a Wisdom roll.” I let him add his Knowledge (nobility) if he’s got it. The target number is 15. If he makes it, I tell him...

“Okay, you can say a number of things are true about her equal to your Wisdom bonus.”

That’s right. I let *him* tell me what’s true about Lady Va. He gets to say a number of “truths” to help define the NPC.

Now, there is a real opportunity here for a player to get silly and make up silly things. Discourage this.

In other words: “This is your opportunity to *define the world*. I’m giving you this opportunity. Don’t be silly with it, okay?”

In fact, have *everybody* make a Wisdom roll to see what they know about Lady Va. Everyone gets an opportunity to say things are true about her—if they make their Wisdom checks, that is.

Now, given this opportunity, the “story” can take a lot of different turns. Your player can really set up a whole ton of options. For example, with that Wisdom check, he can say...

- She is my cousin.
- She is my close friend.
- She is sympathetic to our patron.
- She hates our patron.
- She hates me.
- She is a fighter with levels of thief.
- She is land rich, but money poor.
- She has a cursed sword.

- She is in the castle to gain revenge for her sister.
- She is in the castle to gain revenge for herself.
- A baby is involved.
- A bastard child is involved.
- We're secret lovers.
- We were secret lovers, but not anymore.
- She's in the castle to steal back something that was stolen from her.
- She's in the castle to poison our lord.

See what I mean? You give the players a chance to say something is true about the world—and make sure they don't take it as an opportunity to be silly—they will make the adventure *for you*.

For example, let's say Lady Va is in the castle to gain revenge on the lord of the castle. He wronged her in some way. He stole something from her, he broke her sister's heart, he killed her sister... Lots of options.

But if we make Lady Va's story believable—and sympathetic—we put the players in a dangerous situation. They have sworn loyalty to the lord, but Lady Va tells a story of betrayal and deceit and murder. Now, what do they do? She's obviously out to get this guy, but you've all sworn to protect him.

In fact, let's get really juicy. Lady Va's sister became pregnant after a secret liaison with the lord. When he discovered this, he pushed her down some stairs. She lost the baby.

What a villain! What a scoundrel! He deserves everything Lady Va has in store for him! In fact, the heroes can give her access to the house to wreck her revenge on him!

The entire "adventure" wrote itself. Actually, to be correct, the adventure was written by

the players. And when they helped Lady Va get her revenge... well, they gained a new patron. Of course, there's always the devil you know versus the devil you don't...

## Awesome Points

If you use Awesome Points, your players can spend them to create facts about the world, just as they do with Wisdom rolls. Just spend a point from the Awesome Pool and you can say one thing that's true about the world. Granted, the bigger the thing is, the more points it takes.

## Contradictions

Now, sometimes, players will say things are true, but they contradict things that are already true (even if the players don't know it). This can cause a problem.

Here's a Golden Rule about making truths: You can't use a truth to contradict another truth.

In other words, if I say, "Lady Va is my wife," you can't spend another truth to say, "No, she's *my* wife!"

Also, if a player uses a truth and contradicts something you've got planned that they don't know, you can say, "I'm sorry. That contradicts something that's already true."

Although, as a GM, you may want to weigh the player's suggestion against your own. Sometimes, players come up with ideas that are just better than your own. If a player makes a suggestion and you like it more than your original idea... go with it!

## The Dirty Dungeon

I suggested something similar to this in one of my Play Dirty Youtube videos. It's really simple. In fact, you can use this technique for a dungeon crawl. Really!



If your players want to go running around in a dungeon, take out that Awesome Pool and tell them this:

*Your characters have been doing research on the dungeon. You've gone through musty libraries, tracked down other adventurers who tried and failed and otherwise discovered things about the dungeon.*

*Now, for every fact you tell me about the dungeon, I'll throw one Awesome Point into the Pool. The more dangerous the fact, the more points I'll throw in.*

Now, your players will start coming up with things they've heard about the dungeon. If you really goad them, they might even make a *map* for you. (It's happened to me on numerous occasions, so don't think it can't happen to you.)

Give some time to come up with good stuff for the dungeon. Write it all down. However, for every five minutes (or so) of *real time* they plan, you get a black die. This black die counts as a Complication Point. The GM (that's you) gets to use a Complication Point to throw a wrench in their plan.

Their map says there's a passage here that leads to the lich's tomb? Hah. Complication Point: that passage is not there. Your map must be wrong.

You can watch the entire video on Youtube (my channel's address is in the front of the book) for more information, but that's just another example of how to use player input and the Awesome Pool.

### **Give them What They Want**

The other benefit of letting the players define the world is something you might not notice at first, but it's important.

It lets the players *tell you* what kind of story they want.

You throw an NPC at them and let them define the NPC, they'll throw plots on that character until the cows come home. And those plots are *exactly* what they want.

One player wants romance? She'll turn an NPC into a romantic interest.

Another player wants mystery? He'll make that NPC a keystone to a world-wide conspiracy.

Another player wants a mentor? You know what truth's she'll throw at the NPC.

It's just that simple. A little trick—giving the players a little bit of control—makes your job that much easier. No more shooting shotgun plots into the dark. No more coming up with intricate, complicated NPCs your players ignore. No, sir. No, ma'am. You just throw in someone who looks even a little intriguing and they'll do all the work for you.

### **Conclusion**

Just give your players the opportunity to help you write the adventure and they will. Reign in the silly—if you do it right the first time, you won't have to do it again—and your players will become your co-conspirators.

Also, if you do this right, you *never* need to write another adventure again. Your players will do it *for you*.

### **The Rights and Duties of the Reign**

In the Wicked Fantasy adventure, I've included a hand-out for "The Rights and Duties of the Reign." This document clearly delineates what the Citizens of the Reign expect from each other and from their government. I've included them here, as well, because you

### **Are children citizens?**

Yes, and no.

Children have rights but they do not have duties. Not until they reach the age of 12. At that time, the Reign considers them adults and they must undertake the duties as well.

and I are going to talk about them. We're going to talk about what they say, what they mean and how you can use them to make adventures.

The Reign gives men rights, but it also demands duties. Listed below are the five rights and five duties.

### **The Five Rights**

- The Right of Liberty - Men have the right to act as they will so long as their action does not injure, harm or impede the rights of others.
- The Right of Property - Men have the right to own what is rightfully theirs through trade, negotiation or commerce.
- The Right of Protest - Men have the right to speak and have their words heard.
- The Right of Surety - Men have the right to protect themselves from danger, injury and peril.
- The Right of Justice - Men have the right to be treated fairly and equitably before the Law.

### **The Five Duties**

- The Duty of Taxation - Men have a duty to pay taxes to support the dutiful actions of the Reign.
- The Duty of Service - Men have a duty to serve the Reign for at least four years after coming of age.
- The Duty of Dissent - Men have a duty to speak against tyranny and the wrongful use of authority.
- The Duty of Aid - Men have a duty to come to the aid of other citizens when in danger or peril if it does not place themselves in peril as well.
- The Duty of Diligence - Men have a duty to improve the Reign and not allow it to fall to neglect.

If your heroes are part of a Courage, they'll be tasked to protect these rights and enforce the duties. That's part of their job. And that's what's going to help us make stories.

### **The Right of Liberty**

Men may act as they wish so long as they don't harm another. Sounds pretty simple, doesn't it? Citizens of the Reign have the right to do as they like, but that's often not as open-ended as they believe.

But how do you define "harm?" Does "economic harm" count? The basis for many Home Owner Associations thinks so. If you don't keep up

your lawn, you drag down the price of *all* our homes, and that means you are causing us harm. Therefore, we can sue you to maintain your lawn the way *we* want.

This also means the heroes (and we do call your player characters “heroes” in this game) can’t go around being bullies. They can’t beat up whoever they want. Everyone has the right to not only be left alone, but to protect themselves to the best of their ability (something we’ll talk about in a moment or two). And remember, most Citizens of the Reign are not common shlubs: they’ve gone to University and learned a thing or two. They know their rights and many of them even have a basic understanding of self-defense. (I’m getting ahead of myself again. Sorry.)

### **The Right of Property**

Note one key word missing from this one. I’ll emphasize it for you: “rightfully theirs through *fair* trade, negotiation or commerce.”

This word has been missing from the second right since the rights were first created. Many Senators have fought to put it in there, but it keeps getting struck down. The reason? Because it’s easier to make money if the word isn’t there.

The Reign has a different attitude toward grifters than modern America. (At least, it’s the attitude America *claims* it has.) If you get suckered in a deal, the Citizens of the Reign figure you must have deserved it. Get quick rich schemes are for the foolish, the gullible and the greedy. If someone was clever enough to trick you, so be it.

Now, not *everyone* has this attitude. As I said above, that’s the current zeitgeist of the Reign. But many disagree and want to amend the second right to include the word “fair,” thus making con games and swindles illegal in the Reign.

But it isn’t just street swindlers who are getting away with the gold. Oh, no. You didn’t think a bunch of copper coin hustlers are going to influence the Senate, do you? It’s the *big money* that wants that right to stay exactly where it is. The merchants, the nobility, the guild houses... these are

### **Can the Rights change?**

Yes, if the Senate votes for them to change.

To amend a right (or a duty), the Senate must vote 75% in favor of doing so. In the entire history of the Reign, this has occurred only four times.

The Senate cannot kill rights, but they can change them and interpret whether or not they apply to specific cases. For example, in the famous “Vaxnomin Argument,” the Senate voted that noble lords and ladies were bound by the second right. If they were going to govern the land, those who lived on their land had the right to bring grievances, have those grievances heard and addressed.

Likewise, the “Bithrough Argument” brought the Senate to vote that the Right to Protest included published speech, both directed at the government and to private Citizens. The counterargument was for censorship of “certain materials too vulgar or distasteful for the general public.” Janus Birthrough—a publisher—argued that no single Citizen could agree upon what was “vulgar” or “distasteful,” and therefore, no law could fairly adjudicate the disagreement. The Senate found in favor of the publisher.

the ones who keep that one little word from every being spoken on the Senate floor.

### **The Right of Protest**

This right specifically applies to protest against the government of the Reign. It has also extended Citizens the right to speak in general, and to print controversial speech.

An opposite problem from the second right, the third right contains a phrase that some have tried to murder for a long time. That phrase is, "... and have their words heard."

The right to speak is bad enough, but the right to *be heard* is even worse. Once a week, the Senate must hear the voice of the people. The people march right in like they own the place, stand on the floor, and address the Senate proper. Not even the most powerful Senator can do that: he must petition for the right to be heard. This is called "the People's Quorum," and if they could kill it, many Senators would. Attendance is mandatory. You can't just skip out because you don't want to hear them. What's worse, each Citizen has the right to hear what the Senate has to say. Often, this is a quick, "Thank you for coming, we will consider your questions," but there have been times when the people have organized what the Senate calls "marathon questions." A group of Citizens line up and ask a series of questions, all directed at the same goal. The Senate must answer. To pass over so many voices shows a contempt for the people and a likely ouster at the next election.

Even noble lords and ladies must perform the same ceremony: once a week, they must set aside time to hear the voice of those who are under their charge. (The landmark "Vaxnomin Argument" set this precedent.) While many nobles have fought to overturn this interpretation, the Senate knows better

than to remove rights granted to the people. At least, while the people are watching.

### **The Right of Surety**

More commonly known as "The Right of Protection," the Fourth Right clearly dictates that a Citizen can protect himself from injury. This is where things get really messy. Just where does one Citizen's right begin and another's end? If two men enter into a disagreement that turns physical, when does one man's right to protect himself overlap another man's right to do the same thing?

A Courage will run into this Right, perhaps, more than any other. They arrive at a village, there's a dead body, and another villager says, "I was protecting myself." The Reign takes murder (one Citizen deliberately taking the life of another) very seriously. A Citizen must prove he had to take the other man's life to protect his own. Some Courages are beginning to use a new charge: "reckless self-defense." In other words, "You had the right to defend yourself, but you did so without prudence." Some even consider this a worse crime than murder: the reckless abuse of a Right.

Other nobles encourage their Courages to ignore reckless self-defense. "If the man is dead, he deserved it." The message they send is easy to read: "Get out of line in my lands, threaten my Citizens, and they will kill you, and I will turn a blind eye."

### **The Right of Justice**

All Citizens of the Reign deserve to be treated fairly and justly. A nice sentiment, to be sure, but far from the actual truth of the matter.

The Reign's legal system is unlike modern systems because it relies on the wisdom of its Citizens rather than precedent. In other words, there are no strict guidelines for judgment.

“The rule of law” is not in place. Citizens trust judges to hear the evidence and rule fairly based on the circumstances of the case.

This means a judge is not forced to rule arbitrarily. In other words, if a hungry man is caught stealing bread, no legal precedent forces him to sentence the man of theft. He can, instead, determine the man acted out of need rather than criminal intent. On the other hand, this also opens up the door to corruption. A judge can rule favorably for a rich man and unfavorably for a poor man, just because of the favors he would receive.

Of course, this violates the heart of the Right of Justice, but many judges (and Citizens) are quite clever at covering up corruption. Some are less clever and they are punished severely. Violating the Fifth Right is seen by many as one of the most grievous violations in the Reign. The Senate does not stand for judges who use their position for personal gain rather than protection of the public.

### **The Duty of Taxation**

Unfortunately, this is the most common duty a Reign must enforce. Nobody likes paying taxes and everyone thinks they pay too much. When the taxes are low, nobles send their Courages to find out why.

That’s when your brave band of heroes shows up at a village to ask an old man in a broken down hovel why he hasn’t paid his taxes this year. And, depending on the character of their patron, what they must do to get the taxes from this poor man.

Not all Courages have the luxury of being under the patronage of a good lord or lady. And that’s a story. Good-hearted men and women (and elves and uvandir, etc.) who have the unfortunate responsibility of carrying out the law under a wicked patron. Of course, they can choose to leave

his patronage, but that means they lose out on the free armor, free weapons, magic items, horses, room and board and a steady paycheck. But in order to carry out your job, you have to dance around the fact that your patron is a bastard.

A clever Courage will find a way around that problem. (See the short story **A Little Chat** in the *Wicked Fantasy* main book.)

### **The Duty of Service**

The Reign insists that all Citizens spend at least four years serving the Reign. This implies military service, but that’s not the only service men can provide. They can teach at Universities, serve as City Watch, or even serve as Senators. A cook in the Army of the Republic still serves the Reign, as does a clerk or an accountant.

Not only can an adventurer serve in the Army, but can also serve as a bodyguard for important officials: Senators, Mayors and others. These positions put a Courage in all kinds of adventures: potential assassinations, counterespionage, uncovering corruption, dealing with terrorizing street gangs, wicked guild masters, roddun mischiefs, etc.

### **The Duty of Dissent**

This is the hardest Duty for a Courage because it demands they question the authority of their patron when he gives them what may be a less-than-moral order. The problem is, the Courage’s authority to act comes from their patron. Tricky, that.

Although, you could make the argument that a Courage’s Duty of Dissent comes from the Reign itself, and not from their patron. By dissenting, they are performing their Duty to the Reign, and if he punishes them for it, *he* is the one who is preventing them from performing the Third Duty.

### **Pennybooks**

“Pennybook” is both an accurate and dismissive term for the books sold in shops and stores throughout the Reign. They are often poorly written, poorly edited, contain fabulous stories that barely cling to believability, and incredibly popular. The books typically cost a penny (copper piece), are printed on cheap paper and are usually written under pseudonyms.

Most contain stories of Courages or adventuring parties, portraying them as perfect moral heroes who never make mistakes. This twists the public perception of Courages, of course, setting standards that no human (or elf or uvandir or ork) could ever match.

Courages also protect Citizens when they perform the Duty of Dissent. Speaking against power is always dangerous, especially when that power is corrupt. It’s a common pennybook plot that finds a Courage on the bloody end of an affair as a powerful Senator calls in the aid of the Assassin’s Guild...

### **The Duty of Aid**

This is the very definition of a Courage’s job: put yourself between others and harm. Of course, because it is a *Duty* and not a *Right*, that means failing to protect others is a crime. The penalty for this crime is typically a fee (usually a small one) or mandatory service to the Reign.

Recently, the Senate added the phrase, “if it does not place themselves in peril as well.” This phrase was previously implied but made specific after the Brighton Argument. Unfortunately, it has also given many permission to ignore the Duty. “I could not help him without endangering myself” is what the philosopher Stephan Sverner called, “the Coward’s Plea.”

### **The Duty of Diligence**

Men have a duty to improve the Reign and not allow it to fall to neglect. This covers a lot of sins. It covers the sin of corruption (which does not improve the Reign, but allows it to fall into neglect because it does not address a plain problem).

This last Duty gives your Courage all kinds of powers. It is the most obscure, and thus, the easiest to attribute to almost any kind of action. That also means this is the easiest Duty to abuse.

### **Magic in Wicked Fantasy**

We designed *Wicked Fantasy* to be a low magic setting. Not that wizards and magic swords don’t exist, but magic-using characters rare and magic items are even more so. The adventure we wrote demonstrates how difficult it should be to acquire a magic item. If you want it, you have to go look for it.

Magic items are legendary. Bards tell stories about them. Having a list of legendary magic items that exist in your world is a good idea. If they are named and numbered, they become more important.

Wizards, oracles and sorcerers are powerful and dangerous. They should also be rare. Becoming a wizard is a lifetime chore. Only a few are chosen to be oracles. The magic in the blood of sorcerers passes from generation to generation; one does not choose to be a sorcerer.

If your magic user has level 4 spells, he is a rock star. In the Wizard's Guild, the greatest masters have, at best, 5th to 6th level spells. Anything beyond that and you have lesser wizards throwing themselves on you, willing to do anything, to be your apprentice. This is mirrored in divine magic as well.

As for magic items, buying them from another is probably not an option. Unless the owner was starving to death, why would he sell a wondrous item? Of course, if he has a wondrous item, he's probably not starving to death.

As a general rule, in *Wicked Fantasy*, any Major Wondrous Item is one of a kind. In other words, there is only one *belt of dwarven*—I mean—*wandir kind* in all of existence. Only one *bracelet of friends*, only one *headband of mental prowess* and only one *holy avenger*—and the Grand Master of the Palatines has that thing. Good luck buying it from him.

We chose this option to make Major Wondrous Items incredibly rare and incredibly special. Of course, this is only a suggestion; if you don't like it, throw it out. We've also adjusted the "Available Magic Items" table from the *Pathfinder* rulebook to reflect just how rare these things are. Check it out...

**Table: Available Magic Items**

Community Size	Base Value	Minor	Medium	Major
Thorp	50 gp	—	—	—
Hamlet	200 gp	—	—	—
Village	500 gp	1d4 items - 1	—	—
Small town	1,000 gp	2d4 items - 1	—	—
Large town	2,000 gp	2d4 items	1d4 items - 1	—
Small city	4,000 gp	3d4 items	2d4 items - 1	—
Large city	8,000 gp	4d4 items	2d4 items	—
Metropolis	16,000 gp	5d4 items	3d4 items	1d4 items - 1

\* in a metropolis, nearly all minor magic items are available.

Likewise, the higher the level a spell, the more rare it becomes. It should be difficult to acquire 7th, 8th and 9th level spells. In fact, I'd consider them to be "lost relics." They may even be legendary. You want *storm of vengeance* or *wish*? They might not exist, but you heard about a guy who heard about a guy who knows a guy who saw a wizard use it once. Of course, that was twenty years ago. Who knows if that guy is still alive...

## Magical Metaphysics

"Arcane incantations draw energy from the elemental planes. Alchemical balance is required. Elemental purity. The elemental planes—earth, air, fire and water—form the base components for all spells. Summon fire and earth or air and water or water and fire. Everything in our world is made up of those four elements, even us. We are mostly water, but we have fire and earth and air. But metal is not one of the four. It is unique to our plane, and thus, alien to the elemental planes. Metal interferes with channeling, causing a kind of dissonance, like a piano key that isn't tuned properly, playing with the rest of the orchestra in perfect tune. It is anathema to channeling, causing impurity in the channel, making spellcasting dangerous. And that is why wizards do not use metal armor and try to carry as little metal as possible. Planar disconnect during channeling could result in arcane combustion or even eldritch incongruity."

—Salvenj, *The Courage of Tamyn Taval*

There are two kinds of magic in the world of *Wicked Fantasy*: arcane and divine. Let's take a look at both.

### Arcane

Wizards in the world of *Wicked Fantasy* are in tune with energies from the four elemental planes: air, earth, fire and water. These planes are in direct opposition to each other (fire vs water vs earth vs air vs fire, etc.) and the tension between these planes created the world of *Wicked Fantasy*.

What wizards do is rather complicated. They commune with these planes using a complicated language of symbols, gestures and words to indicate intent, draw energy, shape that energy

and release it. The gestures create geometric patterns that open a portal between our world and the plane. Then, the utterances and material components communicate to the spirits of the plane the wizard's desire. Elemental spirits are fickle and difficult to control, so commanding them requires an intense amount of concentration.

The wizard himself acts as a channel for that energy. All living creatures are made up of the four elements, and thus, able to serve as a focus between our world and the elemental planes. He summons the energy, contains it within himself, and then, finally, he releases that energy into our world.

All "spells" are just this: a ritual to contact the planes, channel their energy, and release that energy. Different spells call upon energy from different planes. Some only call upon one plane and others (more difficult spells) call upon the energy from multiple planes.

*Magic missile*, for example, is a combination of energy from the plane of fire and the plane of air. *Grasping hand* is a spell that summons power from the elemental planes of air and earth.

All arcane casters—wizards, bards, sorcerers—draw their power from these elemental planes. It is also why arcane magic does not work well with metal armor.

Metal is a material unique to our own world. It is the physical manifestation of the conflict between the planes. Metal is created by the conflict between fire, water, air and earth (which is why it requires all four materials to create it). Because metal symbolizes that conflict, it is anathema to the planes. Metal makes casting more difficult, and thus, arcane casters wear as little metal as possible to reduce difficulties in spell casting.



## Divine

In the world of *Wicked Fantasy*, “divine” is a misnomer. Instead, players and GMs should read “divine” as “willpower.”

Arcane magic relies on concentration and ritual to bind external spirits, but spells from this list are physical manifestations of inner strength.

Divine magic represents summoning power from within and releasing it into the world. Different races (and classes) call it different things, but in the end, it is sheer willpower.

For men, this power is the manifestation of inner strength. “The Will of Men.” Elves believe this power comes from their bond with the Great Trees. The gnolls believe their powers come from the Moons. Haffuns credit it to the ancestral spirits. But in the end, divine/willpower magic is the result of inner strength manifesting in the world.

## Co-GMing

When we playtested *Wicked Fantasy*, Jill and I tag teamed the role of GM. Generally, Jill would handle mechanics and I’d handle narration. That isn’t to say that she couldn’t handle narration—she’s a fine GM in her own right—but running *Pathfinder* can be a demanding task.

Like I said, I generally handled narration while Jill handled the rules, but it also worked the other way. Because there were two of us, Jill could handle narration for other players while I took care of a skill check and I could answer a rules question when Jill was playing an NPC. We shared the duties, but we had specific roles. Splitting up the duties that way freed both of us up, making GMing a whole lot easier.

It also meant we could easily have *two* NPCs talking to the players—and each other. That’s

a tricky juggling act for any GM, but having both of us there meant we could do it.

And combat became a *whole* lot easier with two of us there. Jill handled the main parts while I quietly answered players’ questions, helping them prepare for their next action.

It also meant Jill and I could improvise around each other’s weaknesses. I don’t know the rules at all, but Jill knows them like the back of her hand. Meanwhile, my improvisational skills are a bit more reliable, meaning if the players throw a wrench in our plans, I can jump in and throw it right back at them. And, of course, there were times when Jill pulled my bacon out of the fire, and vice versa. In other words, we worked together, coordinated our efforts and together, we made a stronger GM. Two heads working better than one.

Of course, you have to know each other. You have to be aware of the other and take cues when you see them. Jill and I both payed attention to the other and gave space when we needed it. If Jill had the spotlight, I sat back until I was needed. She did the same thing. Co-GMing requires patience, diligence and respect. But damn, if it ain’t worth the results.

Jill and I *highly* suggest you give it a try. It opens up the game for another player (two GMs can handle more) and made the game easier to run, and frankly, made it a lot more fun.

## Combat

Something else Jill and I did was a trick I learned in a game I wrote called *The Aegis Project*: we made each combat round a simultaneous action.

You know how in movies, the combat goes *so fast*? A bunch of guys pull out guns and

everyone seems to be acting at once? They don't wait for their turn. *Everyone acts at once.*

Well, we tried that out for combat. And we found out it sped up a fight a whole lot. We didn't do it for every fight (I'll explain that part later), but when we did, a fight scene became quick as lightning. Here's how it works.

## INITIATIVE

Before we do anything else, we're going to ditch initiative. Every action in a combat round occurs at the same moment. There are exceptions to this rule, but I'll get to them in a second.

## THE ROUND

First, have everybody announce what they're going to do this round. Tell them their DCs, if necessary.

Second, everyone rolls *at once*. That's right: everyone rolls at the same time.

Third, everyone (one-by-one) tells you whether or not they beat the DC, or if they are making an attack roll, tells you the result.

Fourth, you compare the rolls. Figure out who succeeded and who didn't.

Fifth, narrate the entire combat round with all actions happening at the same time. If two character try to hit each other and both beat their opponents' AC, that means both succeeded in getting a strike. They both roll damage—at the same time.

Finally, all effects of all rolls take place. If two opponents both go to zero hit points, they both fall down. If one opponent falls to zero and the other doesn't, the one who went to zero falls down and his opponent moves on to someone else with a fresh wound.

## A LITTLE WEIRD?

At first, this feels a little weird. After all, you're used to someone rolling to hit, rolling for damage, then someone else doing the same thing.

But this is how fights work. You don't wait for the other guy to hit you; you're trying to hit him, he's trying to hit you, and you spend most of the time hitting each other at the same time. The guy who can take the most damage (or avoid the most damage) generally wins the fight, but you both come out of it a little worse for wear.

This little method speeds up combat *a lot*. It also makes fighting a little more dangerous. But, we also threw in an exception to the rule...

## IMPROVED INITIATIVE

If characters have *improved initiative*, their actions resolve *first*. In other words, everyone who has *improved initiative* declares their actions, rolls and resolves their actions before anyone else can act.

At first, you may think this makes the feat less valuable. That is an incorrect perception, my friend. Essentially, it gives every character with that feat a surprise round. Play with this a few times and you'll see how valuable *improved initiative* really is.

## MOOKS

(First, give credit where it's due: I stole this from Robin Laws for *7th Sea*. There, we called them "brutes." I'm going back to Robin's original term.)

When our heroes encounter a group of enemies who are just below their skill, use the *mooks rule*. Imagine the scene during the climax of *The Princess Bride*. Count Rugen, the Six-Fingered Man says, "Kill the giant and the dark one. Leave the third alive for questioning." Inigo gets charged by four guards and he dispatches them all with one, fluid strike.

Those guys were *mooks*. They didn't have names. They weren't important. Their only real importance was to show off Inigo's prowess. To show he's a bad ass.

You should have mooks in your game. They'll do the same thing. They'll make the heroes feel like they are heroes.

A gang of mooks is really just a DC check. Make a standard attack against the gang of mooks. If you're successful, you dispatch them all. Done.

You can even keep them alive for questioning.

## BIG BATTLES

We also had an exception I'm going to call "big battles." This exception meant that if the players got involved in a big, important fight scene, we rolled initiative as usual. It made the fight feel more important.

## Scars

This is an alternative combat mechanic for GMs who like a little more bite and danger in their fight scenes.

Our heroes are men and women of action. They live in a violent world and make their living doing violent things. Their bodies should reflect those facts. How do characters earn scars when magical healing is always five seconds away?

I've got an answer for that. It's an optional rule. Take a look and see if it's right for your players.

Whenever a character loses a number of hit points in a single hit greater than his Fortitude Save, he gets a Scar. Now, what's a Scar? It's a physical description of the injury. The GM narrates how the character got injured and the player writes it down on his character

sheet. He should also write down how many hit points he lost taking the wound.

That's it. That's all. No new rules, no penalties, nothing. The player understands his character got hurt and knows how his character got hurt. And maybe, just maybe, if he roleplays that Scar, I'll throw some Awesome Points into the Pool. (Not maybe: *definitely*.)

If a character loses a finger or two, gets an eyepatch or gets his earlobe nicked off if a fight... there are no penalties. I mean, do you think Snake Plissken takes a penalty for his eyepatch? No! In fact, he gets *bonus dice* for his eye patch. Even if a character *lost a hand*, I wouldn't make him suffer a penalty for it. He's a hero; he'll make up for it some way.

Now, you may ask, "John, why is there no mechanical penalty for having a Scar or two?" That's a good question, Faithful Reader. Let me tell you why.

First, I think it goes against the basic philosophy of *Pathfinder*. Players generally don't handle *negatives*. That is, they either get a +1, +2 or they don't. The game is about *adding*, not subtracting.

Second, I think it goes against the idea of being a hero. Heroes overcome obstacles. Yes, sometimes they are overcome *by* their obstacles, but in general, they find the will to make it. The point of having a Scar is not to give the character penalties, but to show the wear and tear of adventuring. It makes hit points a little less abstract (something that annoys me to no end), and adds character to your character.

Yeah, I said that. To quote Tarantino, "Just because you are a character doesn't mean you *have* character."

## Fumbles

Conan never accidentally drops his sword and skewers his own toe.

Indiana Jones never loses his grip on his whip while swinging from a cliff to the top of a tank, falls under the treads and gets himself crippled.

Gandalf never miscasts a spell.

And Tyrion Lannister doesn't stutter.

If the purpose of a roleplaying game is to emulate the fiction we enjoy, then we should ditch the mechanic that makes our heroes look like jabronies.

In other words, get rid of fumbles.

They accomplish nothing other than making our super competent protagonists do incompetent things.

Just ditch 'em. That's all.

We're heroes after all. Maybe our characters should act like it.

By the way, I'd also throw a character a Scar if he hits zero hit points. After all, there's a reason he went down, and he should have something to show for it when he gets back up.

## Hidden Hit Points

I made this suggestion in *Play Dirty* (stolen from Jonathan Tweet) and I'm going to suggest it here as well. This makes combat much more a scary, bloody and messy affair and less of a math problem.

Hide the players' hit points. Roll them behind a screen and keep them behind the screen. The fighter knows he gets a d10 every level (and max at first level) plus his *constitution* bonus, but that's it. The wizard knows he gets a d6 plus his *con* bonus, but that's it. They can guess, but that's all they can do.

Now, your job as the GM is to give them indicators. You give them graphic descriptions of every hit. It isn't, "You take 15 hp," it's, "The troll's claws rip across your chest, pulling up skin and muscle. You can see your own bones and blood."

How hurt are they? Your narration tells them. They never know how close they are to falling down. They can guess based on their injuries, but... that's always an estimate. Just like a real fight, they have to trust the pain. How hurt are you? That's not the real question. The real question is, "How much more can you take?" Nobody knows that.

You can even pull tricks like this. An enemy makes a successful hit and your hero takes 10 hit points. You say, "He misses his strike, his sword going just over your head. But as you duck, you feel something in your knee twinge."

As their injuries grow worse, your descriptions become more vivid and more dangerous. I'd also give a player a "hey, you're damn close to zero," warning. "Your eyes are blurry. Dark edges around your vision. It's hard to breathe..."

Also make sure to roll all the damage *they* do behind the screen and give equally vivid descriptions for their enemies' injuries. They have no idea how much damage they are doing, but your descriptions give them an idea.

Also, if you pull this trick, you should give the players a way to keep their characters up after they reach zero hit points. I suggest a Fortitude check (15+negative hit points). Or, have them make a Fort check if

they are within the zero mark. Either way, you give them a mechanical way to know—for certain—that they are in the danger zone.

## Why Are You Here?

If you read *The Courage of Tamyn Taval*, you may notice that everyone has different reasons for being a part of the Courage.

Ask your players, “Why are you here? What drove you to be a part of the Courage?”

The most obvious answer is, “I want to make the world a better place.” Generally, that’s why people in our own world join the police force, become a fireman, become a soldier, etc. Yes, there are selfish reasons as well, but picking a low-paying job with high risks tells me that person wants to improve the world around them... and perhaps, improve themselves in the process.

(If only Isaac Newton knew... the key to alchemy is public service.)

Greed is a valid answer. Han Solo started off with that motivation. Eventually, he changed his mind (inspired by Luke’s belief in something greater than himself and a really cute Princess), but he started off just wanting the money.

Protection is another valid answer. If your character is a wanted man (or woman), a Courage can protect you against the law. Change your name (there is no “valid ID” in the Reign of Men), move to a new City, join a Courage and start over. You may get the impression that’s what Tamyn’s friend Shy has done... and you’d be right. Valera is in the same boat: the Courage can protect her from her past. At least, that’s what she believes.

(I’m also reminded of the scene from *The Untouchables* with Sean Connery asking Andy

Garcia, “Why do you want to join the Force?” If you don’t know what I’m talking about, stop reading, put this book down, get your keys, jump in the car, drive to your local media outlet and get a copy of the 1987 version written by David Mamet and directed by Brian De Palma. Do it now. *Right now*. Trust me on this one.)

We put this question in the *Wicked Fantasy Character Journal*, but you may want to ask it of your players yourself. “Why are you here?”

## Themes in Wicked Fantasy

PERSONS attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

BY ORDER OF THE AUTHOR,  
Per G.G., Chief of Ordnance.

The text above is the “opening matter” from Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. When in college, I had a Literature professor who assured us that this text was not ironic, but was meant to be read as sincere.

“*Huck Finn* is an adventure novel,” he told us. “Nothing more.” He told us that any attempt to find social commentary was foolish. It was a book for young boys. That’s it.

He also thought *Moby Dick* was a book about whaling.

A reader can finish *Wicked Fantasy* and see it as a guide for having adventures. There’s nothing wrong with that. But just under the surface, there’s a lot going on. Let’s take a look at some of that.

## Heroism

The chief theme running through *Wicked Fantasy* is a question: “What does it mean to be a hero?”

Each race has its own moral code, its own definition of what it means to be a hero. Just as a human Japanese samurai and a human English knight are both pretty much the same thing, they have different ideas about “honor.” Both of them believe in what they’ve been taught and understand what their position means in society.

An English knight follows a strict code of honor that dictates he be courageous, noble, gentle and humble. Most importantly, he must go out into the world and have adventures to prove his worth. He must “find the Holy Grail” on his own, without any help from anyone else. He blazes his own trail. “The knight in the wilderness” is a common phrase for a good man in a wicked world. He cannot listen to what others tell him; he must stand alone and do as his own heart commands.

A samurai also has a strict code of honor. He is courageous, noble, humble (and sometimes gentle), but more importantly, a samurai subdues his ego, making personal sacrifices for his family and his daimyo. He is not alone in the world, but rather, he carries all his family’s honor on his shoulders. His courage is not standing alone against the world, but swallowing his own pride and *doing what he is told*. What kind of knight could claim that kind of honor?

Both the knight and samurai are heroes, but both for different reasons. The knight is a hero because he goes against tradition and does as his heart demands. A samurai is a hero because he sacrifices himself for the greater good.

What is a hero? Each race has a different answer to this question.

*And all of them are right.*

The best way to get your players to banter (you know, “talk in character”) is to get them talking about this question. Get the ork talking to the uvandir. Get the human talking to the gnome. If you have to slip a note (and a few bonus xp) to a player reading, “Ask the ork what they think a hero is,” then *do it*. And watch what happens. You may have them talking for an hour.

PS: that’s not a bad thing.

## Race

Having a game with multiple races raises the question: “How do all these people get along?” The simple and plain answer is, “They don’t.”

In fact, using “race” to describe the differences between humans, elves, uvandir, gnomes and haffuns is probably incorrect. “Species” might be a more correct term. The peoples of *Wicked Fantasy* have such diverse differences—physical, social, spiritual etc.—that it’s amazing they get along as well as they do.

Take the Reign of Men as an example. The people of the Reign revere wisdom, logic, reason and science. They’re also xenophobic. That last part comes from their pride (some call it “hubris”), but it is an essential element to the Reign.

As I’ve said before, when I started out writing *Wicked Fantasy*, I wanted to take each race and yank up the volume. For men, that meant turning their own sense of exceptionalism up to 11. Men are the best at everything and they know it.

That doesn’t mean *all* men are bigots, but the Reign in general sees the other races as “lesser” people. Again, *Wicked Fantasy* is about playing heroes, not small-minded racists. So why did I make the Reign of Men like this?

*So your heroes can try to change it.*

Making a perfect society is about as exciting as making a perfect character. “Because one Mary Sue isn’t bad enough, let’s build a whole culture of them!” No, thank you.

Zorro isn’t half as interesting without the world he operates in. Neither is the Scarlet Pimpernel, rescuing nobles from the Reign of Terror. If Gotham City was perfect, there would be nothing for Bruce Wayne to do.

If a hero’s job is to save the world, you have to make the world a place that *needs saving*. You also need to make the world a place that *deserves* saving.

And there’s the Reign of Men. Dedicated to truth and science and logic and reason... and in dire need of someone to pull its own head out of its backside.

The Reign isn’t the only culture in trouble. Look again at the orks. Look at haffuns and gobowins. Look at the poor, doomed elves and kuba-chubisi. They’re all in trouble, each and every one of them. They need heroes. And they’re all worth saving.

## **Hypocrisy**

Men believe in democracy and equality, but are xenophobic to the point of racism. Haffuns were born to serve but keep secrets from their masters. The kobold race believes in justice, but has the death penalty. How can this be?

Well, the fact of the matter is every culture in the history of humanity has its own hypocrisies. In the USA, we’ve got tons of them. We say we value honesty, but movies, TV shows and books about con men are among our most popular literature. It’s okay for kids to view mindless, bloody violence, but get anywhere near a realistic portrayal of sexuality, and the censors pounce. We

have a “war on drugs” while alcohol and tobacco kill more of our citizens than anything else.

That doesn’t make Americans hypocrites, but we do live in a culture with a good, heaping share of hypocrisy.

Let’s transfer this to the Reign of Men. Are all humans racist bigots? No. Just because your character comes from the Reign, does she have to hate elves, uvandir, gnolls and the rest? Of course not. Your character is a *hero*. Your job is to fight against these things. To be an example for others. Socrates taught that good men must perform acts of justice in public so they can inspire others to follow. That’s what your hero should be doing.

This is hypocrisy. Your character doesn’t have to be a hypocrite, but your culture is. That gives you something to strive against. Something to fix.

## **Adventure Hooks**

Here’s a few adventure hooks. Not full adventures, just ideas you can flesh out for your own campaign.

### **The Lumber Party**

The Courage gains employment protecting lumberers. Going out into the wild wood, trying not to anger elves, dealing with trolls and giants and other dangers. During the night, the entire camp falls into a magical sleep. When they awaken, most of the workers are gone. Who took them and why? It’s the elves, of course. The local elven noble wants the Courage to handle an issue for him: a group of trolls who are bothering him and his people. He kidnapped the workers because he believed the humans wouldn’t help without... incentive.

## **Noble Murder**

The noble class in the Reign is full of wretched folks. Backstabbing, treacherous and debauched, their only goal is to gain more land, more wealth and more power. They bribe the Senate to pass laws in their favor and laws that scorn their neighbors. They'll kill each other over shoes. *Shoes*. So, a noble—let's call him "Lord Sorrow"—hires a Courage to investigate the murder of his beloved friend. Unfortunately, Lord Sorrow is the one who committed the murder and he's arranged for it to look like his sister did it. Can the Courage find the correct evidence to save Lady Sorrow's neck from the rope?

## **Mischief**

The Courage's patron sends them on a favor for the Mayor of the City. The Mayor is sick and tired of these cursed rats. "Can't anything be done? Get rid of them, once and for all!" Turns out the reason the Mayor wants the roddun taken out is they're breaking up his smuggling ring. He's smuggling black smoke into the City and selling it at incredible prices and avoiding taxes. If the Courage gets wind of what he's up to, the game is up. He has to get the Courage to take out the roddun without talking to them, discovering what they are doing. And just why are the roddun breaking up his smuggling ring? Because the Mayor is a corrupt, xenophobic, thoroughly detestable jerk who hires private guards to hunt down and kill roddun, that's why.

## **Crooked Coins**

The Courage's patron calls them in to his office, showing them a copper coin. "See anything wrong?" he asks. A quick check (TN 50) reveals nothing. "No," the Courage says. The patron nods his head. "That's the problem." The coin is legitimate, but it was found in an abandoned house along with 1,000 more just

like it. "Someone is making coins but not at the request of the Senate." Where are they getting the copper? And why are they minting coins?

## **The Thieving License**

A City Courage discovers a dead body. On the body is a small note that reads, "This man has my permission to walk unmolested." It is signed by Ashil Muav, the Master of the Thieves Guild. As it turns out, Muav hands these out to those who pay. You have one of these notes and the local members of the Guild won't touch you. Is it illegal? And who killed this man if he had a license to "walk unmolested?"

## **The Fisherman's Strike**

A band of young heroes shows up in your domain, killing orks and capturing bandits. They are commoners with cunning and prowess. Do you hire them or let them move on to another domain?

## **The Madman**

A peasant calling himself "the Arch Druid" comes to your patron's court. He says the land is in need. Dire peril. Drought, pestilence and disease will follow soon if the land is not satisfied. And what will satisfy the land? "Blood," the Arch Druid tells the patron. "Only virgin blood." Your patron dismisses him out of hand, but shortly thereafter, news of cattle dying in the masses, crops withering and the ground drying up reach the court. Could this madman be right? Has the land itself turned against us? What has happened?

## **The Assassin**

An assassin enters the castle of your patron, but fails. During questioning, he says he has been sent by a beloved friend of your patron. "He wants your lord dead," he tells you. "For an injury that cannot be healed." As it turns out, the beloved friend recently discovered he



is a bastard child, born of the same father as your lord. And your patron knew it and never told him. Why? What would he have to lose?

### **The Assassin (Alternate)**

An assassin shows up, asking permission to speak to the Captain of your Courage. He shows the Captain an order for his murder. Who purchased the order? That's a secret. But, he could be bribed to show you and even offers you the opportunity to outbid the order..

### **The Hunter**

Something is hunting your people. A terrible monster that even rangers cannot track. It disappears into the night, leaving no trail. No sign of passage. It seems intent on murdering your people.

### **Blood Makes the Soil Rich**

Local farmers report a boom in crops this season. Fruits and vegetables are coming in from the fields twice as big as usual. After a few weeks, a beaten and bloody villager arrives on the lord's stairs. Before he dies, he whispers, "Blood makes the soil rich." A week later, the fruits of the land begin to bleed. What is going on?

### **A Simple Fire**

A fire breaks out in your patron's castle. Was it an accident or something a bit more sinister and intentional? Before you can figure that out, you have to get everyone out while fighting the fire. And the fire acts like a creature, resisting magic and mundane means to put it out. Just rushing people out of the castle is an adventure, but fighting the fire should add some spice to the heroes' attempts.

### **The Explosion**

Villagers report an explosion at the top of a nearby mountain. Black smoke and

screams all night long. What happened? A deep, smoking hole rests on the side of the mountain and you can hear something... something... is that whispering?

### **You Will Die**

Your patron calls you into his throne room. There, written in blood, on his table are the words, "You will die and you know why." He swears he *doesn't* know why. Is he hiding something? A dark moment from his past perhaps? There's another detail: one of his rings is missing.

### **Last Words**

An aphorism I learned while writing *Legend of the Five Rings*: "Fix the problem, not the blame."

No roleplaying game will be fun for everyone. No game is perfect. No "generic" system will make everyone happy. It's an impossible task. That's why we have 31 flavors of ice cream, that's why your TV has fifty thousand channels, and that's why everyone has a different favorite roleplaying game.

If you aren't having fun with a mechanic or a world concept in the game, change it. If you aren't having fun, it isn't my fault, it isn't your fault. It's nobody's "fault." You and I just like different flavors of ice cream. Go ahead and change it. There is no "canon" here. You bought this book. It's yours. You can change whatever you want.

Change the mechanic to something you like more. If you love gnolls but hate gnomes, go ahead and change them. Don't worry; I don't care. And nobody is going to stop you from having fun with my game. Least of all, me.

Enjoy! (And make mine mint chocolate chip.)