THE ELDER SCROLLS TREASURY

A REPERTORY FOR MODDERS

NEW EDITION

PART I

CORPUS TAMRIELICUM

VOL. I
Corpus Tamrielicum
The Official Books, Scrolls, Journals, Letters, and Notes of The Elder Scrolls Games
Edited and annotated by
Zeph
Vol. I
Texts Occurring in More Than One The Elder Scrolls Game
Dortmund 2012
Dedicated to all devs of The Elder Scrolls series and all lore-friendly modders.
Preface

The basic concept of the *The Elder Scrolls Treasury* is that of an offline reference work, which hopefully will give the *Elder Scrolls* players and modders all original in-game information at hand they are looking for.

At present, the *Treasury* consists of the following parts:

- the *Corpus Tamrielicum*, which gives you all official in-game texts of the *Elder Scrolls* series, and
- The *New Encyclopedia Tamrielica*, a reference work, where you can alphabetically look up places, people(s), regions, phrases, events, etc., with nearly every bit of information directly derived from the original game files, manuals, and official hint books only, as far as they were available for me.

In the *Corpus* you will find all authentic ingame texts from *Arena* to *Oblivion*. It starts with a "critical" (annotated) edition of those texts, which occur in more than one *Elder Scrolls* game. The remaining texts are separated by the games, in which they occur. Within the games sections they are alphabetically ordered after their titles, as you will find them in the texts themselves, neither by their ingame names nor *Construction Set* IDs, because these may differ from game to game. Furthermore, each title and text has got its own reference number (ID) within its respective section to simplify notes and quotations. A star (*) after a title indicates that its full text is given in the first volume. So, if you quote from the *TES III: Morrowind* version of a text, you need only give the CT volume number (III), following its ID. E. g., if you want to refer to Morrowind's version of "Hearth Fire" of "2920", you need only note "CT III:287.9", i.e. the ninth text (*Hearth Fire*) of title 287 (2920, *The Last Year of the First Era*) of volume III of the *Corpus Tamrielicum*, which means the *Morrowind* version. If you have the *TES IV: Oblivion* version and quote from it, you note "CT IV:197.9". If there are textual changes within the versions, they are noted in the first volume edition at the end of each text.

While the IDs within the games sections (i.e. volume II ff.) will not change anymore, the IDs of the first volume will, namely if in a future game of the *Elder Scrolls* series a text will occur, which has until then occurred in one preceding *Elder Scrolls* chapter only. A novelty is the first supplementary volume, which consists of texts you may think you have never heard of. This is only partly true: Although their titles and arrangements are by no means official, the texts themselves are – well, at least in some way, since they are compiled from the games journal entries (and, in one case, dialogue) only. You will notice that these texts contain quite valuable information, too, at least for the lore-enthusiastic modders among us. – Obvious typos of the original texts have been silently corrected.

The *New Encyclopedia Tamrielica* finally is a reference work which covers all *The Elder Scrolls* chapters, at the present state i.e. *TES I: Arena* to *TES IV: Oblivion*. In the main volume you can alphabetically look up places, peoples, regions, phrases, factions, events, etc. etc., with each entry given the source where its information is taken from. The supplementary volume will collect essays etc., which cover single aspects of the *Elder Scrolls* universe and are too large or complex for the main volume. The *New Encyclopedia Tamrielica* basically is a complete and largely expanded revision of the third volume of the *Treasury's* first edition,

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1 The next edition will cover *TES V: Skyrim*, as well. The mobile phone games are not covered.
which at that time (2004) was entitled *TES3 Encyclopædia*, while the revision of its original second volume (*Common Names in Morrowind*) will be enclosed within the supplementary volume under its new title *Common Names in Tamriel*.

If you find any mistakes or missing texts etc., I would be pleased if you let me know so that I can correct or add them in the next edition. You can contact me either via the Imperial Library website (http://www.imperial-library.info) or by sending me a pm via Bethesda Softworks' Elder Scrolls Subforums (http://forums.bethsoft.com/index.php?/forum/13-the-elder-scrolls/).

C.F.

Dortmund, Germany
March 10, 2012
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"Sit quietly, Child, and listen, for the story I tell you is a story of the ages."

"But what is it, Grandfather? Is it a story of heroes and beasts?"

The Grandfather looked patiently at the Child. He was growing into a fine boy. Soon he would see the value in the stories, the lessons that were taught to each generation. "Just listen, Child. Let the story take root in your heart."

---

In a time before now, long before now, when the Skaal were new, there was peace in the Land. The sun was hot and the crops grew long, and the people were happy in the peace that the All-Maker provided. But, the Skaal grew complacent and lazy, and they took for granted the Lands and all the gifts the All-Maker had given them. They forgot, or chose not to remember, that the Adversary is always watching, and that he delights in tormenting the All-Maker and his chosen people. And so it was that the Adversary came to be among the Skaal.

The Adversary has many aspects. He appears in the unholy beasts and the incurable plague. At the End of Seasons, we will know him as Thartaag the World-Devourer. But in these ages he came to be known as the Greedy Man.

The Greedy Man (that is what we call him, for to speak his name would certainly bring ruin on the people) lived among the Skaal for many months. Perhaps he was once just a man, but when the Adversary entered into him, he became the Greedy Man, and that is how he is remembered.

It came to be one day that the powers of the Skaal left them. The strength left the arms of the warriors, and the shaman could no longer summon the beasts to their side. The elders thought that surely the All-Maker was displeased, and some suggested that the All-Maker had left them forever. It was then that the Greedy Man appeared to them and spoke.

"You of the Skaal have grown fat and lazy. I have stolen the gifts of your All-Maker. I have stolen the Oceans, so you will forever know thirst. I have stolen the Lands and the Trees and the Sun, so your crops will wither and die. I have stolen the Beasts, so you will go hungry. And I have stolen the Winds, so you will live without the Spirit of the All-Maker.

"And until one of you can reclaim these gifts, the Skaal will live in misery and despair. For I am the Greedy Man, and that is my nature."

And the Greedy Man disappeared.

The members of the Skaal spoke for many days and nights. They knew that one of them must retrieve the Gifts of the All-Maker, but they could not decide who it should be.

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ESM (The Story of Aevar Stone-Singer). ESO.
"I cannot go," said the Elder, "for I us must stay to lead the Skaal, and tell our people what is the law."

"I cannot go," said the Warrior, "for I must protect the Skaal. My sword will be needed in case the Greedy Man reappears."

"I cannot go," said the Shaman, "for the people need my wisdom. I must read the portents and offer my knowledge."

It was then that a young man called Aevar lifted his voice. He was strong of arm, and fleet of foot, though he was not yet a warrior of the Skaal.

"I will go," said Aevar, and the Skaal laughed.

"Hear me out," the boy continued. "I am not yet a warrior, so my sword will not be needed. I cannot read the portents, so the people will not seek my counsel. And I am young, and not yet wise in the ways of the law. I will retrieve the Gifts of the All-Maker from the Greedy Man. If I cannot, I will not be missed."

The Skaal thought on this briefly, and decided to let Aevar go. He left the village the next morning to retrieve the Gifts.

Aevar first set out to retrieve the Gift of Water, so he traveled to the Water Stone. It was there the All-Maker first spoke to him.

"Travel west to the sea and follow the Swimmer to the Waters of Life."

So Aevar walked to the edge of the ocean, and there was the Swimmer, a Black Horker, sent from the All-Maker. The Swimmer dove into the waters and swam very far, and far again. Aevar was strong, though, and he swam hard. He followed the Swimmer to a cave, swimming deeper and deeper, his lungs burning and his limbs exhausted. At last, he found a pocket of air, and there, in the dark, he found the Waters of Life. Gathering his strength, he took the Waters and swam back to the shore.

Upon returning to the Water Stone, the All-Maker spoke. "You have returned the Gift of Water to the Skaal. The Oceans again will bear fruit, and their thirst will be quenched."

Aevar then traveled to the Earth Stone, and there the All-Maker spoke to him again.

"Enter the Cave of the Hidden Music, and hear the Song of the Earth."

So Aevar traveled north and east to the Cave of the Hidden Music. He found himself in a large cavern, where the rocks hung from the ceiling and grew from the ground itself. He listened there, and heard the Song of the Earth, but it was faint. Grabbing up his mace, he struck the rocks of the floor in time with the Song, and the Song grew louder, until it filled the cavern and his heart. Then he returned to the Earth Stone.

"The Gift of the Earth is with the Skaal again," said the All-Maker. "The Lands are rich again, and will bear life."
Aevar was tired, as the Sun burned him, the trees offered no shade, and there was no wind to cool him. Still, he traveled on to the Beast Rock, and the All-Maker spoke.

"Find the Good Beast and ease his suffering."

Aevar traveled through the woods of the Isinfier for many hours until he heard the cries of a bear from over a hill. As he crested a hill, he saw the bear, a Falmer's arrow piercing its neck. He checked the woods for the Falmer (for that is what they were, though some say they are not), and finding none, approached the beast. He spoke soothing words and came upon it slowly, saying, "Good Beast, I mean you no harm. The All-Maker has sent me to ease your suffering."

Hearing these words, the bear ceased his struggles, and laid his head at Aevar's feet. Aevar grasped the arrow and pulled it from the bear's neck. Using the little nature magic he knew, Aevar tended the wound, though it took the last bit of his strength. As the bear's wound closed, Aevar slept.

When he awoke, the bear stood over him, and the remains of a number of the Falmer were strewn about. He knew that the Good Beast had protected him during the night. He traveled back to Beast Rock, the bear by his side, and the All-Maker spoke to him again.

"You have returned the Gift of the Beasts. Once again, the Good Beasts will feed the Skaal when they are hungry, clothe them when they are cold, and protect them in times of need."

Aevar's strength had returned, so he traveled on to the Tree Stone, though the Good Beast did not follow him. When he arrived, the All-Father spoke to him.

"The First Trees are gone, and must be replanted. Find the seed and plant the First Tree."

Aevar traveled again through the Hirstaang Forest, searching for the seeds of the First Tree, but he could find none. Then he spoke to the Tree Spirits, the living trees. They told him that the seeds had been stolen by one of the Falmer (for they are the servants of the Adversary), and this Falmer was hiding them deep in the forest, so that none would ever find them.

Aevar traveled to the deepest part of the forest, and there he found the evil Falmer, surrounded by the Lesser Tree Spirits. Aevar could see that the Spirits were in his thrall, that he had used the magic of the Seeds and spoken their secret name. Aevar knew he could not stand against such a force, and that he must retrieve the seeds in secret.

Aevar reached into his pouch and drew out his flint. Gathering leaves, he started a small fire outside the clearing where the Falmer and the ensorcelled Spirits milled. All the Skaal know the Spirits' hatred of fires, for the fires ravage the trees they serve. At once, the Nature of the Spirits took hold, and they rushed to quell the flames. During the commotion, Aevar snuck behind the Falmer and snatched the pouch of Seeds, stealing away before the evil being knew they were gone.

When Aevar returned to the Tree Stone, he planted the tree in the ground, and the All-Maker spoke to him.
"The Gift of Trees is restored. Once again, the Trees and Plants will bloom and grow, and provide nourishment and shade."

Aevar was tired, for the Sun would only burn, and the Winds would not yet cool him, but he rested briefly in the shade of the Trees. His legs were weary and his eyes heavy, but he continued on, traveling to the Sun Stone. Again, the All-Maker spoke.

"The gentle warmth of the Sun is stolen, so now it only burns. Free the Sun from the Halls of Penumbra."

And so Aevar walked west, over the frozen lands until he reached the Halls of Penumbra. The air inside was thick and heavy, and he could see no farther than the end of his arm. Still, he felt his way along the walls, though he heard the shuffling of feet and knew that this place held the Unholy Beasts who would tear his flesh and eat his bones. For hours he crept along, until he saw a faint glow far at the end of the hall.

There, from behind a sheet of perfect ice, came a glow so bright he had to shut his eyes, lest they be forever blinded. He plucked the flaming eye from one of the Unholy Beasts and threw it at the ice with all his might. A small crack appeared in the ice, then grew larger. Slowly, the light crept out between the cracks, widening them, splitting the ice wall into pieces. With a deafening crack, the wall crumbled, and the light rushed over Aevar and through the Halls. He heard the shrieks of the Unholy Beasts as they were blinded and burned. He ran out of the Halls, following the light, and collapsed on the ground outside.

When he was able to rise again, the Sun again warmed him, and he was glad for that. He traveled back to the Sun Stone, where the All-Maker spoke to him.

"The Gift of the Sun is the Skaal's once again. It will warm them and give them light."

Aevar had one final Gift he had to recover, the Gift of the Winds, so he traveled to the Wind Stone, far on the western coast of the island. When he arrived, the All-Maker spoke to him, giving him his final task.

"Find the Greedy Man and release the Wind from its captivity."

So, Aevar wandered the land in search of the Greedy Man. He looked in the trees, but the Greedy Man did not hide there. Nor did he hide near the oceans, or the deep caves, and the beasts had not seen him in the dark forests. Finally, Aevar came to a crooked house, and he knew that here he would find the Greedy Man.

"Who are you," shouted the Greedy Man, "that you would come to my house?"

"I am Aevar of the Skaal," said Aevar. "I am not warrior, shaman, or elder. If I do not return, I will not be missed. But I have returned the Oceans and the Earth, the Trees, the Beasts, and the Sun, and I will return the Winds to my people, that we may feel the spirit of the All-Maker in our souls again."

And with that, he grabbed up the Greedy Man's bag and tore it open. The Winds rushed out with gale force, sweeping the Greedy Man up and carrying him off, far from the island. Aevar
breathed in the Winds and was glad. He walked back to the Wind Stone, where the All-Maker spoke to him a final time.

"You have done well, Aevar. You, the least of the Skaal, have returned my gifts to them. The Greedy Man is gone for now, and should not trouble your people again in your lifetime. Your All-Maker is pleased. Go now, and live according to your Nature."

And Aevar started back to the Skaal village.

"And then what happened, Grandfather?"

"What do you mean, Child? He went home."

"No. When he returned to the village," the Child continued. "Was he made a warrior? Or taught the ways of the shaman? Did he lead the Skaal in battle?"

"I do not know. That is where the story ends," said the Grandfather.

"But that is not an ending! That is not how stories end!"

The old man laughed and got up from his chair.

"Is it not?"
The first ones were brothers: Anu and Padomay. They came into the Void, and Time began.

As Anu and Padomay wandered the Void, the interplay of Light and Darkness created Nir. Both Anu and Padomay were amazed and delighted with her appearance, but she loved Anu, and Padomay retreated from them in bitterness.

Nir became pregnant, but before she gave birth, Padomay returned, professing his love for Nir. She told him that she loved only Anu, and Padomay beat her in rage. Anu returned, fought Padomay, and cast him outside Time. Nir gave birth to Creation, but died from her injuries soon after. Anu, grieving, hid himself in the sun and slept.

Meanwhile, life sprang up on the twelve worlds of creation and flourished. After many ages, Padomay was able to return to Time. He saw Creation and hated it. He swung his sword, shattering the twelve worlds in their alignment. Anu awoke, and fought Padomay again. The long and furious battle ended with Anu the victor. He cast aside the body of his brother, who he believed was dead, and attempted to save Creation by forming the remnants of the 12 worlds into one -- Nirn, the world of Tamriel. As he was doing so, Padomay struck him through the chest with one last blow. Anu grappled with his brother and pulled them both outside of Time forever.

The blood of Padomay became the Daedra. The blood of Anu became the stars. The mingled blood of both became the Aedra (hence their capacity for good and evil, and their greater affinity for earthly affairs than the Daedra, who have no connection to Creation).

On the world of Nirn, all was chaos. The only survivors of the twelve worlds of Creation were the Ehlnofey and the Hist. The Ehlnofey are the ancestors of Mer and Men. The Hist are the trees of Argonia. Nirn originally was all land, with interspersed seas, but no oceans.

A large fragment of the Ehlnofey world landed on Nirn relatively intact, and the Ehlnofey living there were the ancestors of the Mer. These Ehlnofey fortified their borders from the chaos outside, hid their pocket of calm, and attempted to live on as before. Other Ehlnofey arrived on Nirn scattered amid the confused jumble of the shattered worlds, wandering and finding each other over the years. Eventually, the wandering Ehlnofey found the hidden land of Old Ehlnofey, and were amazed and joyful to find their kin living amid the splendor of ages past. The wandering Ehlnofey expected to be welcomed into the peaceful realm, but the Old Ehlnofey looked on them as degenerates, fallen from their former glory. For whatever reason, war broke out, and raged across the whole of Nirn. The Old Ehlnofey retained their ancient power and knowledge, but the Wanderers were more numerous, and toughened by their long struggle to survive on Nirn. This war reshaped the face of Nirn, sinking much of the land beneath new oceans, and leaving the lands as we know them (Tamriel, Akavir, Atmora,

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1 ESM (*The Annotated Anuad*). ESO (*A Children's Anuad*).
and Yokuda). The Old Ehlnofey realm, although ruined, became Tamriel. The remnants of the Wanderers were left divided on the other 3 continents.

Over many years, the Ehlnofey of Tamriel
{became:
  - the Mer (Elves),
  - the Dwemer (the Deep Ones, sometimes called Dwarves),
  - the Chimer (the Changed Ones, who later became the Dunmer),
  - the Dunmer (the Dark or Cursed Ones, the Dark Elves),
  - the Bosmer (the Green or Forest Ones, the Wood Elves), and
  - the Altmer (The Elder or High Ones, the High Elves).}¹

{became the Mer (Elves):
  - the Dwemer (the Deep Ones, sometimes called Dwarves)
  - the Chimer (the Changed Ones, who later became the Dunmer)
  - the Dunmer (the Dark or Cursed Ones, the Dark Elves)
  - the Bosmer (the Green or Forest Ones, the Wood Elves)
  - the Altmer (The Elder or High Ones, the High Elves).}²

On the other continents, the Wandering Ehlnofey became the Men -- the Nords of Atmora, the Redguards of Yokuda, and the Tsaesci of Akavir.

The Hist were bystanders in the Ehlnofey war, but most of their realm was destroyed as the war passed over it. A small corner of it survived to become Black Marsh in Tamriel, but most of their realm was sunk beneath the sea.

Eventually, Men returned to Tamriel. The Nords were the first, colonizing the northern coast of Tamriel before recorded history, led by the legendary Ysgramor. The thirteenth of his line, King Harald, was the first to appear in written history. And so the Mythic Era ended.

NOTES

¹ ESO.
² ESM.
[3] Arcana Restored*

{Arcana Restored
A Handbook}\(^1\)
By Wapna Neustra
{Praceptor Emeritus}\(^2\)

{[from ARCANA RESTORED: A HANDBOOK, by Wapna Neustra, Praceptor Emeritus of
the Imperial College]}\(^3\)

FORM THE FIRST: Makest thou the Mana Fountain to be Primed with Pure Gold, for from Pure Gold only may the Humors be rectified, and the Pure Principles coaxed from the chaos of Pure Power. Droppest thou then the Pure Gold upon the surface of the Mana Fountain. Takest thou exceeding great care to safeguard yourself from the insalubrious tempests of the Mana Fountain, for through such Assaults may one's health be utterly Blighted.

FORM THE SECOND: Make sure that thou havest with you this Excellent Manual, so that thou might speak the necessary Words straightaway, and without error, so that thou not in carelessness cause thyself and much else to discorporate and disorder the World with your component humors.

FORM THE THIRD: Take in hand the item to be Restored, and hold it forth within the Primed Fountain, murmuring all the while the appropriate phrases, which are to be learned most expeditiously and faultlessly from this Manual, and this Manual alone, notwithstanding the vile calumnies of Kharneson and Rattor, whose bowels are consumed by envy of my great learning, and who do falsely give testament to the efficacies of their own Manuals, which are in every way inferior and steeped in error.

FORM THE FOURTH: Proceed instantly to Heal thyself of all injuries, or to avail yourself of the Healing powers of the Temples and Healers, for though the agonies of manacaust must be borne by any who would Restore a prized Arcana to full Potency, yet it is not wise that suffering be endured unduly, nor does the suffering in any way render the Potency more Sublime, notwithstanding the foolish speculations of Kharneson and Rattor, whose faults and wickednesses are manifest even to the least learned of critics.

NOTES

\(^1\) ESM, ESO. ELSB reads "Arcana Restored: A Handbook".
\(^2\) ESM, ESO. Not in ESLB
\(^3\) ESLB only.
Three hundred years ago, when Katariah became Empress, the first and only Dunmer to rule all of Tamriel, she faced opposition from the Imperial Council. Even after she convinced them that she would be the best regent to rule the Empire while her husband Pelagius sought treatment for his madness, there was still conflict. In particular from the Duke of Vengheto, Thane Minglumire, who took a particular delight in exposing all of the Empress's lack of practical knowledge.

In this particular instance, Katariah and the Council were discussing the unrest in Black Marsh and the massacre of Imperial troops outside the village of Armanias. The sodden swampland and the sweltering climate, particular in summertide, would endanger the troops if they wore their usual armor.

"I know a very clever armorer," said Katariah, "His name is Hazadir, an Argonian who knows the environments our army will be facing. I knew him in Vivec where he was a slave to the master armorer there, before he moved to the Imperial City as a freedman. We should have him design armor and weaponry for the campaign."

Minglumire gave a short, barking laugh: "She wants a slave to design the armor and weaponry for our troops! Sirollus Saccus is the finest armorer in the Imperial City. Everyone knows that."

After much debate, it was finally decided to have both armurers contend for the commission. The Council also elected two champions of equal power and prowess, Nandor Beraid and Raphalas Eul, to battle using the arms and armaments of the real competitors in the struggle. Whichever champion won, the armorer who supplied him would earn the Imperial commission. It was decided that Beraid would be outfitted by Hazadir, and Eul by Saccus.

The fight was scheduled to commence in seven days.

Sirollus Saccus began work immediately. He would have preferred more time, but he recognized the nature of the test. The situation in Armanias was urgent. The Empire had to select their armorer quickly, and once selected, the preferred armorer had to act swiftly and produce the finest armor and weaponry for the Imperial army in Black Marsh. It wasn't just the best armorer they were looking for. It was the most efficient.

Saccus had only begun steaming the half-inch strips of black virgin oak to bend into bands for the flanges of the armor joints when there was a knock at his door. His assistant Phandius ushered in the visitor. It was a tall reptilian of common markings, a dull, green-fringed hood, bright black eyes, and a dull brown cloak. It was Hazadir, Katariah's preferred armorer.
"I wanted to wish you the best of luck on the -- is that ebony?"

It was indeed. Saccus had bought the finest quality ebony weave available in the Imperial City as soon as he heard of the competition and had begun the process of smelting it. Normally it was a six-month procedure refining the ore, but he hoped that a massive convection oven stoked by white flames born of magicka would shorten the operation to three days. Saccus proudly pointed out the other advancements in his armory. The acidic lime pools to sharpen the blade of the dai-katana to an unimaginable degree of sharpness. The Akaviri forge and tongs he would use to fold the ebony back and forth upon itself. Hazadir laughed.

"Have you been to my armory? It's two tiny smoke-filled rooms. The front is a shop. The back is filled with broken armor, some hammers, and a forge. That's it. That's your competition for the millions of gold pieces in Imperial commission."

"I'm sure the Empress has some reason to trust you to outfit her troops," said Sirollus Saccus, kindly. He had, after all, seen the shop and knew that what Hazadir said was true. It was a pathetic workshop in the slums, fit only for the lowliest of adventurers to get their iron daggers and cuirasses repaired. Saccus had decided to make the best quality regardless of the inferiority of his rival. It was his way and how he became the best armorer in the Imperial City.

Out of kindness, and more than a bit of pride, Saccus showed Hazadir how, by contrast, things should be done in a real professional armory. The Argonian acted as an apprentice to Saccus, helping him refine the ebony ore, and to pound it and fold it when it cooled. Over the next several days, they worked together to create a beautiful dai-katana with an edge honed sharp enough to trim a mosquito's eyebrows, enchanted with flames along its length by one of the Imperial Battlemages, as well as a suit of armor of bound wood, leather, silver, and ebony to resist the winds of Oblivion.

On the day of the battle, Saccus, Hazadir, and Phandius finished polishing the armor and brought in Raphalas Eul for the fitting. Hazadir left only then, realizing that Nandor Beraid would be at his shop shortly to be outfitted.

The two warriors met before the Empress and Imperial Council in the arena, which had been flooded slightly to simulate the swampy conditions of Black Marsh. From the moment Saccus saw Eul in his suit of heavy ebony and blazing dai-katana and Beraid in his collection of dusty, rusted lizard-scales and spear from Hazadir's shop, he knew who would win. And he was right.

The first blow from the dai-katana lodged in Beraid's soft shield, as there was no metal trim to deflect it. Before Eul could pull his sword back, Beraid let go of the now-flaming shield, still stuck on the sword, and poked at the joints of Eul's ebony armor with his spear. Eul finally retrieved his sword from the ruined shield and slashed at Beraid, but his light armor was scaled and angled, and the attacks rolled off into the water, extinguishing the dai-katana's flames. When Beraid struck at Eul's feet, he fell into the churned mud and was unable to move. The Empress, out of mercy, called a victor.

Hazadir received the commission and thanks to his knowledge of Argonian battle tactics and weaponry and how best to combat them, he designed implements of war that brought down the insurrection in Armanias. Katariah won the respect of Council, and even, grudgingly, that
of Thane Minglumire. Sirollus Saccus went to Morrowind to learn what Hazadir learned there, and was never heard from again.
Chapter 3: Dispositions

Master Arctus said:

1. The moment to prepare your offense is the moment the enemy becomes vulnerable to attack.

Leros Chael: Knowledge of the enemy mage's mind is of the foremost importance. Once you know his mind, you will know his weaknesses.

Sedd Mar: Master Arctus advised Tiber Septim before the battle of Five Bridges not to commit his reserves until the enemy was victorious. Tiber Septim said, "If the enemy is already victorious, what use committing the reserve?" To which Master Arctus replied, "Only in victory will the enemy be vulnerable to defeat." Tiber Septim went on to rout an enemy army twice the size of his.

2. The enemy's vulnerability may be his strongest point; your weakness may enable you to strike the decisive blow.

Marandro Ur: In the wars between the Nords and the Chimer, the Nord shamans invariably used their mastery of the winds to call down storms before battle to confuse and dismay the Chimer warriors. One day, a clever Chimer sorcerer conjured up an ice demon and commanded him to hide in the rocks near the rear of the Chimer army. When the Nords called down the storms as usual, the Chimer warriors began to waver. But the ice demon rose up as the storm struck, and the Chimer turned in fear from what they believed was a Nord demon and charged into the enemy line, less afraid of the storm than of the demon. The Nords, expecting the Chimer to flee as usual, were caught off guard when the Chimer attacked out of the midst of the storm. The Chimer were victorious that day.

3. When planning a campaign, take account of both the arcane and the mundane. The skillful battlemage ensures that they are in balance; a weight lifted by one hand is heavier than two weights lifted by both hands.

4. When the arcane and mundane are in balance, the army will move effortlessly, like a swinging door on well-oiled hinges. When they are out of balance, the army will be like a three-legged dog, with one leg always dragging in the dust.

5. Thus when the army strikes a blow, it will be like a thunderclap out of a cloudless sky. The best victories are those unforeseen by the enemy, but obvious to everyone afterwards.

* ESM. ESO.
6. The skillful battlemage ensures that the enemy is already defeated before the battle begins. A close-fought battle is to be avoided; the fortunes of war may turn aside the most powerful sorcery, and courage may undo the best-laid plans. Instead, win your victory ahead of time. When the enemy knows he is defeated before the battle begins, you may not need to fight.

7. Victory in battle is only the least kind of victory. Victory without battle is the acme of skill.

8. Conserving your power is another key to victory. Putting forth your strength to win a battle is no demonstration of skill. This is what we call tactics, the least form of the art of war magic.

Thulidden dir'Tharkun: By 'tactics', Master Arctus includes all the common battle magics. These are only the first steps in an understanding of war magic. Any hedge mage can burn up his enemies with fire. Destroying the enemy is the last resort of the skillful battlemage.

9. The battle is only a leaf on the tree; if a leaf falls, does the tree die? But when a branch is lopped off, the tree is weakened; when the trunk is girdled, the tree is doomed.

10. If you plan your dispositions well, your victories will seem easy and you will win no acclaim. If you plan your dispositions poorly, your victories will seem difficult, and your fame will be widespread.

Marandro Sul: Those commonly believed to be the greatest practitioners of war magic are almost always those with the least skill. The true masters are not known to the multitude.
Azura and the Box
Ancient Tales of the Dwemer, Part XI
By Marobar Sul

Nchylbar had enjoyed an adventurous youth, but had grown to be a very wise, very old Dwemer who spent his life searching for the truth and dispelling superstitions. He invented much and created many theorems and logic structures that bore his name. But much of the world still puzzled him, and nothing was a greater enigma to him that the nature of the Aedra and Daedra. Over the course of his research, he came to the conclusion that many of the Gods were entirely fabricated by man and mer.

Nothing, however, was a greater question to Nchylbar than the limits of divine power. Were the Greater Beings the masters of the entire world, or did the humbler creatures have the strength to forge their own destinies? As Nchylbar found himself nearing the end of his life, he felt he must understand this last basic truth.

Among the sage's acquaintances was a holy Chimer priest named Athynic. When the priest was visiting Bthalag-Zturamz, Nchylbar told him what he intended to do to find the nature of divine power. Athynic was terrified and pleaded with his friend not to break this great mystery, but Nchylbar was resolute. Finally, the priest agreed to assist out of love for his friend, though he feared the results of this blasphemy.

Athynic summoned Azura. After the usual rituals by which the priest declared his faith in her powers and Azura agreed to do no harm to him, Nchylbar and a dozen of his students entered the summoning chamber, carrying with them a large box.

"As we see you in our land, Azura, you are the Goddess of the Dusk and Dawn and all the mysteries therein," said Nchylbar, trying to appear as kindly and obsequious as he could be. "It is said that your knowledge is absolute."

"So it is," smiled the Daedra.

"You would know, for example, what is in this wooden box," said Nchylbar.

Azura turned to Athynic, her brow furrowed. The priest was quick to explain, "Goddess, this Dwemer is a very wise and respected man. Believe me, please, the intention is not to mock your greatness, but to demonstrate it to this scientist and to the rest of his skeptical race. I have tried to explain your power to him, but his philosophy is such that he must see it demonstrated."

"If I am to demonstrate my might in a way to bring the Dwemer race to understanding, it might have been a more impressive feat you would have me do," growled Azura, and turned to look Nchylbar in the eyes. "There is a red-petalled flower in the box."

* ESM. ESO.
Nchylbar did not smile or frown. He simply opened the box and revealed to all that it was empty.

When the students turned to look to Azura, she was gone. Only Athync had seen the Goddess's expression before she vanished, and he could not speak, he was trembling so. A curse had fallen, he knew that truly, but even crueler was the knowledge of divine power that had been demonstrated. Nchylbar also looked pale, uncertain on his feet, but his face shone with not fear, but bliss. The smile of a Dwemer finding evidence for a truth only suspected.

Two of his students supported him, and two more supported the priest as they left the chamber.

"I have studied very much over the years, performed countless experiments, taught myself a thousand languages, and yet the skill that has taught me the finally truth is the one that I learned when I was but a poor, young man, trying only to have enough gold to eat," whispered the sage.

As he was escorted up the stairs to his bed, a red flower petal fell from the sleeve of his voluminous robe. Nchylbar died that night, a portrait of peace that comes from contented knowledge.

Publisher's Note:

This is another tale whose origin is unmistakably Dwemer. Again, the words of some Aldmeris translations are quite different, but the essence of the story is the same. The Dunmer have a similar tale about Nchylbar, but in the Dunmer version, Azura recognizes the trick and refuses to answer the question. She slays the Dwemer present for their skepticism and curses the Dunmer for blasphemy.

In the Aldmeris versions, Azura is tricked not by an empty box, but by a box containing a sphere which somehow becomes a flat square. Of course the Aldmeris versions, being a few steps closer to the original Dwemer, are much more difficult to understand. Perhaps this "stage magic" explanation was added by Gor Felim because of Felim's own experience with such tricks in his plays when a mage was not available.

"Marobar Sul" left even the character of Nchylbar alone, and he represents many "Dwemer" virtues. His skepticism, while not nearly as absolute as in the Aldmeris version, is celebrated even though it brings a curse upon the Dwemer and the unnamed House of the poor priest.

Whatever the true nature of the Gods, and how right or wrong the Dwemer were about them, this tale might explain why the dwarves vanished from the face of Tamriel. Though Nchylbar and his kind may not have intended to mock the Aedra and Daedra, their skepticism certainly offended the Divine Orders.
Late in the Second Era, a girl-child, Barenziah, was born to the rulers of Mournhold in what is now the Imperial Province of Morrowind. She was reared in all the luxury and security befitting a royal Dark Elven child until she reached five years of age. At that time, His Excellency Tiber Septim I, the first Emperor of Tamriel, demanded that the decadent rulers of Morrowind yield to him and institute imperial reforms. Trusting to their vaunted magic, the Dark Elves impudently refused until Tiber Septim's army was on the borders. An Armistice was hastily signed by the now-eager Dunmer, but not before there were several battles, one of which laid waste to Mournhold, now called Almalexia.

Little Princess Barenziah and her nurse were found among the wreckage. General Symmachus, himself a Dark Elf and born in Mournhold, suggested to Tiber Septim that the child might someday be valuable, and she was placed with a loyal supporter who had recently retired from the Imperial Army.

Sven Advensen had been granted the title of Count upon his retirement; his fiefdom, Darkmoor, was a small town in central Skyrim. Sven and his wife reared the princess as their own daughter, seeing to it that she was educated appropriately - and more importantly, that the imperial virtues of obedience, discretion, loyalty, and piety were instilled in the child. In short, she was made fit to take her place as a member of the new ruling class of Morrowind.

The girl Barenziah grew in beauty, grace, and intelligence. She was sweet-tempered, a joy to her adoptive parents and their five young sons, who loved her as their elder sister. Other than her appearance, she differed from young girls of her class only in that she had a strong empathy for the woods and fields, and was wont to escape her household duties to wander there at times.

Barenziah was happy and content until her sixteenth year, when a wicked orphan stable-boy, whom she had befriended out of pity, told her he had overheard a conspiracy between her guardian, Count Sven, and a Redguard visitor to sell her as a concubine in Rihad, as no Nord or Breton would marry her on account of her black skin, and no Dark Elf would have her because of her foreign upbringing.

"Whatever shall I do?" the poor girl said, weeping and trembling, for she had been brought up in innocence and trust, and it never occurred to her that her friend would lie to her.
The wicked boy, who was called Straw, said that she must run away if she valued her virtue, but {that} she would come with her {as her protector} as a boy and the pair escaped to the nearby city of Whiterun. After a few days there, they managed to get {jobs} as guards {for} a disreputable merchant caravan. The caravan was heading east by side roads in a {mendacious} attempt to elude the lawful tolls charged on the {imperial highways}. Thus {the pair} eluded pursuit until they reached the city of Rifton, where they ceased their travels {for a time}. They felt safe in Rifton, close as {it was} to the Morrowind border so {that Dark Elves were enough of a common sight}.

{The story of how Barenziah finally came to the throne of Mournhold after this fitful start is told in Volume II of the Biography of Queen Barenziah.}

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
2 ESD only.
3 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
4 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
5 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
6 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "they".
7 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "and much of Morrowind was laid waste in the conflict that ensued."
8 ESD only.
9 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
10 ESD only.
11 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "His Excellency".
12 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
13 ESD only.
14 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "made Baron of Blackmoor, ".
15 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Baron".
16 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "her".
17 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "saw".
18 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "was taught the Imperial virtues and piety."
19 ESD only.
20 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
21 ESD only.
22 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ". Baron Sven, said the boy, had dealt with".
23 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "wept.".
24 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
25 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
26 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "and protect her." 
27 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Barenziah".
28 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "places".
29 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "in".
30 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "dishonest".
31 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "highway".
32 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "they".
33 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
34 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "they were".
35 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "dark elves were commonly seen."
36 ESD only.
The first volume of this series told the story of Barenziah's origin - heiress to the throne of Mournhold until her father rebelled against His Excellency Tiber Septim and brought ruin to the province of Morrowind. Thanks largely to the benevolence of the Emperor, the child Barenziah was not destroyed with her parents, but reared by Count Sven of Darkmoor, a loyal Imperial trustee. She grew up into a beautiful and pious child, trustful of her guardian's care. This trust was exploited by a wicked orphan stable boy at Count Sven's estate, who with lies tricked her into fleeing with him when she turned sixteen. After many adventures on the road, they settled in Rifton, a Skyrim city near the Morrowind borders.

The stable boy, Straw, was not altogether evil. He loved Barenziah in his own selfish fashion, and deception was the only way he could think of that would cement possession of her. She, of course, felt only friendship toward him, but he was hopeful that she would gradually change her mind. He wanted to buy a small farm and settle down into a comfortable marriage, but at the time his earnings were barely enough to feed and shelter them.

After only a short time in Rifton, Straw fell in with a bold Khajiit thief named Therris, who proposed that they rob the Imperial Commandant's house in the central part of the city. Therris said that he had a client, a traitor to the Empire, who would pay well for any information they could gather there. Barenziah happened to overhear this plan and was appalled. She stole away from their rooms and walked the streets of Rifton in desperation, torn between her loyalty to the Empire and her love for her friends.

In the end, loyalty to the Empire prevailed over personal friendship, and she approached the Commandant's house, revealed her true identity, and warned him of her friends' plan. He was none other than General Symmachus, who had been scouring the countryside in search of her since her disappearance and had just arrived in Rifton, hot in pursuit. He took her into his custody, and informed her that, far from being sold, she was to be reinstated as the Queen of Mournhold as soon as she turned eighteen. Until that time, she was to live with the Septim family in the newly built Imperial City, where she would learn something of Imperial government and be presented at the Imperial Court.

At the Imperial City, Barenziah befriended the Emperor Tiber Septim during the middle years of his reign. Tiber's children, particularly his eldest son and heir Pelagius, came to love her as a sister. The ballads of the day praised her beauty, chastity, wit, and learning. On her eighteenth birthday, the entire Imperial City turned out to watch her procession preliminary to her return to her native land. Sorrowful as they were at her departure, all knew that she was ready for her glorious destiny as sovereign of the new kingdom of Mournhold.
NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "of".
2 ESD only.
3 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
4 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Due".
5 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Baron".
6 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Blackmoor".
7 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
8 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "She grew beautiful, pious, and trusting in his care.".
9 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
10 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Baron".
11 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
12 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Blackmoor".
13 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
14 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "on the border of Morrowind."
15 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "did love".
16 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the lie".
17 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "he might have".
18 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "for".
19 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
20 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "in".
21 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
22 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "villain of a".
23 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
24 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the".
25 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "would find".
26 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
27 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
28 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "to her friend."
29 ESM, ESO. ESD "General Symmachus".
30 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
31 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
32 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "instated".
33 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Imperial".
34 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
35 ESD only.
36 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "make the acquaintance of people of importance.".
37 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "And so it came to pass. In".
38 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "became great friends with".
39 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "last".
40 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
41 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "also".
42 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
43 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "back to Mournhold".
44 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "to be the".
45 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
46 ESD only.
Biography of Queen Barenziah, Vol 3
by Stern Gamboge, Imperial Scribe

{In the second volume of this series, it was told how} 1 Barenziah was {kindly welcomed} 2 to the newly {constructed} 3 Imperial City {by the Emperor Tiber Septim and his family, who treated her like a long-lost daughter during her almost one-year stay} 4. After several happy months there learning her duties as {vassal queen} 5 under the Empire, {the Imperial General} 6 Symmachus escorted her to Mournhold where she took up her duties as Queen of her people under his wise guidance. Gradually they came to love one another and were married and crowned in a splendid ceremony at which the Emperor himself officiated.

After several hundred years of marriage, a son, Helseth, was born to the royal couple amid {celebration and joyous prayer} 7. Although it was not {publicly} 8 known at the time, it was shortly before this blessed event that the Staff of Chaos {had been} 9 stolen from its hiding place deep in the Mournhold mines by a clever{, enigmatic} 10 bard known only as {the} 11 Nightingale.

Eight years after Helseth's birth, Barenziah bore a daughter, Morgiah, named {after} 12 Symmachus' mother, and the royal couple's joy {seemed} 13 complete. Alas, shortly after that, relations with the Empire mysteriously deteriorated, leading to much civil unrest in Mournhold. After fruitless {investigations} 14 and attempts at reconciliation, in despair Barenziah took her young children and travelled to {the} 15 Imperial City herself to seek the {ear of then Emperor Uriel Septim VII} 16. Symmachus remained in Mournhold {to deal with the grumbling peasants and annoyed nobility, and do what he could to stave off an impending insurrection} 17.

During her audience with the Emperor, Barenziah, through her magical arts, came to realize to her horror and dismay that the so-called Emperor was an impostor, none other than the bard Nightingale. Exercising great self-control she concealed this realization from him. That evening, news came that Symmachus had {fallen} 18 in battle {with the revolting peasants of Mournhold, and that the kingdom had been taken over by the rebels} 19. Barenziah{, at this point, did not know} 20 where to seek help, {or from whom} 21.

{The gods, that fateful night, were evidently looking out for her as if in redress of her loss.} 22 {King Eadwyre of High Rock,} 23 an old friend of Uriel Septim and Symmachus{, came by on a social call} 24. He comforted her, pledged his friendship {- and furthermore,} 25 confirmed her suspicions that the Emperor was indeed {a fraud} 26, and none other than Jagar Tharn, the Imperial Battlemage{, and one of the Nightingale's many alter egos} 27. Tharn had supposedly retired {into seclusion} 28 from public work and {installed} 29 his assistant, Ria Silmane, in his stead. {The hapless assistant was later put to death under mysterious circumstances- supposedly a plot implicating her had been uncovered, and she had been summarily executed. However,} 30 her ghost had appeared {to Eadwyre in a dream} 31 and revealed to him that the true Emperor had been kidnapped by Tharn and imprisoned in an alternate {dimension} 32. Tharn had then used the Staff of Chaos to kill her when she attempted to warn the {Elder} 33 Council of his nefarious plot.
Together, Eadwyre and Barenziah plotted to gain the {false Emperor's} confidence. Meanwhile, another friend of Ria's, known only as the Champion, who apparently possessed great, albeit untapped, potential, was incarcerated at the Imperial Dungeons. However, she had access to his dreams, and she told him to hide his time until she could devise a plan that would effect his escape. Then he could begin on his mission to unmask the impostor.

Barenziah continued to charm, and eventually befriended, the ersatz Emperor. By contriving to read his secret diary, she learned that he had broken the Staff of Chaos into eight pieces and hidden them in far-flung locations scattered across Tamriel. She managed to obtain a copy of the key to Ria's friend's cell and bribed a guard to leave it there as if by accident. Their Champion, whose name was unknown even to Barenziah and Eadwyre, made his escape through a shift gate Ria had opened in an obscure corner of the Imperial Dungeons using her already failing powers. The Champion was free at last, and almost immediately went to work.

It took Barenziah several more months to learn the hiding places of all eight Staff pieces through snatches of overheard conversation and rare glances at Tharn's diary. Once she had the vital information, however -- which she communicated to Ria forthwith, who in turn passed it on to the Champion -- she and Eadwyre fled to Wayrest, his ancestral kingdom in the province of High Rock, where they managed to fend off the sporadic efforts of Tharn's henchmen to haul them back to the Imperial City, or at the very least obtain revenge. Tharn, whatever else might be said of him, was no one's fool - save perhaps Barenziah's -- and he concentrated most of his efforts toward tracking down and destroying the great Champion.

As all now know, the courageous, indefatigable Champion was successful in reuniting the eight sundered pieces of the Staff of Chaos. With it, he destroyed Tharn and rescued the true Emperor, Uriel Septim VII. Following what has come to be known as the Restoration, a grand state memorial service was held for Symmachus at the Imperial City, befitting the man who had served the Septim Dynasty for so long and so well.

Barenziah and good King Eadwyre had come to care deeply for one another during their trials and adventures, and were married in the same year shortly after their flight from the Imperial City. Her two children from her previous marriage with Symmachus remained with her, and a regent was appointed to rule Mournhold in her absence.

Up to the present time, Queen Barenziah has been in Wayrest with Prince Helseth and Princess Morgiah. She plans to return to Mournhold after Eadwyre's death. Since he was already elderly when they wed, she knows that event, alas, could not be far off as the Elves reckon time. Until then, she shares in the government of the kingdom of Wayrest with her husband, and seems glad and content with her finally quiet, and happily unremarkable, life.
NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
2 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "welcomed kindly by the Emperor Tiber Septim and his family".
3 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "built".
4 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
5 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "a regent".
6 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
7 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "and prayers to the goddess who had at last blessed their marriage".
8 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
9 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "was".
10 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
11 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
12 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "for".
13 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "was".
14 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "inquiries".
15 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
16 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Emperor's ear".
17 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
18 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "been killed".
19 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "and that Mournhold had been taken by the rebels".
20 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "knew not".
21 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "when a knock sounded at her door".
22 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
23 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "It was Eadwyre, King of Wayrest, and".
24 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
25 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "and".
26 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "an imposter".
27 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
28 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
29 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "put".
30 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "As it seemed, Tharn had never left the Imperial City. Ria was indeed dead, but".
31 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "in Eadwyre's dream".
32 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "dimension".
33 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
34 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "imposter's".
35 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "and unmask him with the help of".
36 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "who was currently in prison, but to whose dreams she had access, and".
37 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
38 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
39 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD; cf. tnote 36.
40 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD; cf. note 36.
41 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Barenziah charmed and befriended the fake Emperor.".
42 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "reading".
43 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
44 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "within the cell,".
45 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "a dark rat infested".
46 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "prison where the cowardly goblin guards feared to venture".
47 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
48 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "of the".
49 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
50 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
51 ESM, ESO. Missing in ESD.
52 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "stave".
53 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
54 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
55 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "brave, tireless".
56 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
57 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
58 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "in".
EM, ESO. ESD reads "family".
60 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ", and had".
61 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
62 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
63 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
64 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
65 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
66 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
67 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "planned".
68 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
69 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
70 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "she knew".
71 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
Biography of the Wolf Queen
by Katar Eriphanes

Few historic figures are viewed as unambiguously evil, but Potema, the so-called Wolf Queen of Solitude, surely qualifies for that dishonor. Born to the Imperial Family in the sixty-seventh year of the third era, Potema was immediately presented to her grandfather, the Emperor Uriel Septim II, a famously kindhearted man, who viewed the solemn, intense babe and whispered, "She looks like a she-wolf about ready to pounce."

Potema's childhood in the Imperial City was certainly difficult from the start. Her father, Prince Pelagius Septim, and her mother, Qizara, showed little affection for their brood. Her eldest brother Antiochus, sixteen at Potema's birth, was already a drunkard and womanizer, infamous in the empire. Her younger brothers Cephorus and Magnus were born much later, so for years she was the only child in the Imperial Court.

By the age of 14, Potema was a famous beauty with many suitors, but she was married to cement relations with King Mantiarco of the Nordic kingdom of Solitude. She entered the court, it was said, as a pawn, but she quickly became a queen. The elderly King Mantiarco loved her and allowed her all the power she wished, which was total.

When Uriel Septim II died the following year, her father was made emperor, and he faced a greatly depleted treasury, thanks to his father's poor management. Pelagius II dismissed the Elder Council, forcing them to buy back their positions. In 3E 97, after many miscarriages, the Queen of Solitude gave birth to a son, who she named Uriel after her grandfather. Mantiarco quickly made Uriel his heir, but the Queen had much larger ambitions for her child.

Two years later, Pelagius II died -- many say poisoned by a vengeful former Council member -- and his son, Potema's brother Antiochus took the throne. At age forty-eight, it could be said that Antiochus's wild seeds had yet to be sown, and the history books are nearly pornographic in their depictions of life at the Imperial court during the years of his reign. Potema, whose passion was for power not fornication, was scandalized every time she visited the Imperial City.

Mantiarco, King of Solitude, died the springtide after Pelagius II. Uriel ascended to the throne, ruling jointly with his mother. Doubtless, Uriel had the right and would have preferred to rule alone, but Potema convinced him that his position was only temporary. He would have the Empire, not merely the kingdom. In Castle Solitude, she entertained dozens of diplomats from other kingdoms of Skyrim, sowing seeds of discontent. Her guest list over the years expanded to include kings and queens of High Rock and Morrowind as well.

For thirteen years, Antiochus ruled Tamriel, and proved an able leader despite his moral laxity. Several historians point to proof that Potema cast the spell that ended her brother's life,
but evidence one way or another is lost in the sands of time. In any event, both she and her
son Uriel were visiting the Imperial court in 3E 112 when Antiochus died, and immediately
challenged the rule of his daughter and heir, Kintyra.

Potema's speech to the Elder Council is perhaps helpful to students of public speaking.

She began with flattery and self-abasement: "My most august and wise friends, members of
the Elder Council, I am but a provincial queen, and I can only assume to bring to issue what
you yourselves must have already pondered."

She continued on to praise the late Emperor, who was a popular ruler in spite of his flaws:
"He was a true Septim and a great warrior, destroying -- with your counsel -- the near
invincible armada of Pyandonea."

But little time was wasted, before she came to her point: "The Empress Magna unfortunately
did nothing to temper my brother's lustful spirits. In point of fact, no whore in the slums of the
city spread out on more beds than she. Had she attended to her duties in the Imperial
bedchamber more faithfully, we would have a true heir to the Empire, not the halfwit, milksop
bastards who call themselves the Emperor's children. The girl called Kintyra is popularly
believed to be the daughter of Magna and the Captain of the Guard. It may be that she is the
daughter of Magna and the boy who cleans the cistern. We can never know for certain. Not as
certainly as we can know the lineage of my son, Uriel. The last of the Septim Dynasty."

Despite Potema's eloquence, the Elder Council allowed Kintyra to assume the throne as the
Empress Kintyra II. Potema and Uriel angrily returned to Skyrim and began assembling the
rebellion.

Details of the War of the Red Diamond are included in other histories: we need not recount
the Empress Kintyra II's capture and eventual execution in High Rock in the year 3E 114, nor
the ascension of Potema's son, Uriel III, seven years later. Her surviving brothers, Cephorus
and Magnus, fought the Emperor and his mother for years, tearing the Empire apart in a civil
war.

When Uriel III fought his uncle Cephorus in Hammerfell at the Battle of Ichidag in 3E 127,
Potema was fighting her other brother, Uriel's uncle Magnus in Skyrim at the Battle of
Falconstar. She received word of her son's defeat and capture just as she was preparing to
mount an attack on Magnus's weakest flank. The sixty-one-year-old Wolf Queen flew into a
rage and led the assault herself. It was a success, and Magnus and his army fled. In the midst
the victory celebration, Potema heard the news that her son the Emperor had been killed by an
angry mob before he had even made it for trial in the Imperial City. He had been burned to
death within his carriage.

When Cephorus was proclaimed Emperor, Potema's fury was terrible to behold. She
summoned daedra to fight for her, had her necromancers resurrect her fallen enemies as
undead warriors, and mounted attack after attack on the forces of the Emperor Cephorus I.
Her allies began leaving her as her madness grew, and her only companions were the zombies
and skeletons she had amassed over the years. The kingdom of Solitude became a land of
death. Stories of the ancient Wolf Queen being waited on by rotting skeletal chambermaids
and holding war plans with vampiric generals terrified her subjects.
Potema died after a month long siege on her castle in the year 3E 137 at the age of 90. While she lived, she had been the Wolf Queen of Solitude, Daughter of the Emperor Pelagius II, Wife of King Mantiarco, Aunt of the Empress Kintyra II, Mother of Emperor Uriel III, and Sister of the Emperors Antiochus and Cephorus. Three years after her death, Antiochus\(^a\) died, and his -- and Potema's -- brother Magnus took the throne.

Her death has hardly diminished her notoriety. Though there is little direct evidence of this, some theologians maintain that her spirit was so strong, she became a daedra after her death, inspiring mortals to mad ambition and treason. It is also said that her madness so infused Castle Solitude that it infected the next king to rule there. Ironically, that was her 18-year-old nephew Pelagius, the son of Magnus. Whatever the truth of the legend, it is undeniable that when Pelagius left Solitude in 3E 145 to assume the title of the Emperor Pelagius III, he quickly became known as Pelagius The Mad. It is even widely rumored that he murdered his father Magnus.

The Wolf Queen must surely have had the last laugh.

\(^a\) Read "Cephorus".
I was young when the Duchess of Woda hired me as an assistant footman at her summer palace. My experience with the ways of the titled aristocracy was very limited before that day. There were wealthy merchants, traders, diplomats, and officials who had large operations in Eldenroot, and ostentatious palaces for entertaining, but my relatives were all far from those social circles.

There was no family business for me to enter when I reached adulthood, but my cousin heard that an estate far from the city required servants. It was so remotely located that there were unlikely to be many applicants for the positions. I walked for five days into the jungles of Valenwood before I met a group of riders going my direction. They were three Bosmer men, one Bosmer woman, two Breton women, and a Dunmer man, adventurers from the look of them.

"Are you also going to Moliva?" asked Prolyssa, one of the Breton women, after we had made our introductions.

"I don't know what that is," I replied. "I'm seeking a domestic position with the Duchess of Woda."

"We'll take you to her gate," said the Dunmer Missun Akin, pulling me up to his horse. "But you would be wise not to tell Her Grace that students from Moliva escorted you. Not unless you don't really want the position in her service."

Akin explained himself as we rode on. Moliva was the closest village to the Duchess's estate, where a great and renowned archer had retired after a long life of military service. His name was Hiomaste, and though he was retired, he had begun to accept students who wished to learn the art of the bow. In time, when word spread of the great teacher, more and more students arrived to learn from the Master. The Breton women had come down all the way from the Western Reach of High Rock. Akin himself had journeyed across the continent from his home near the great volcano in Morrowind. He showed me the ebony arrows he had brought from his homeland. I had never seen anything so black.

"From what we've heard," said Kopale, one of the Bosmer men. "The Duchess is an Imperial whose family has been here even before the Empire was formed, so you might think that she was accustomed to the common people of Valenwood. Nothing could be further from the truth. She despises the village, and the school most of all."

* ESM. ESO.
"I suppose she wants to control all the traffic in her jungle," laughed Prolyssa.

I accepted the information with gratitude, and found myself dreading more and more my first meeting with the intolerant Duchess. My first sight of the palace through the trees did nothing to assuage my fears.

It was nothing like any building I had ever seen in Valenwood. A vast edifice of stone and iron, with a jagged row of battlements like the jaws of a great beast. Most of the trees near the palace had been hewn away long ago: I could only imagine the scandal that must have caused, and what fear the Bosmer peasants must have had of the Duchy of Woda to have allowed it. In their stead was a wide gray-green moat circling in a ring around the palace, so it seemed to be on a perfect if artificial island. I had seen such sights in tapestries from High Rock and the Imperial Province, but never in my homeland.

"There'll be a guard at the gate, so we'll leave you here," said Akin, stopping his horse in the road. "It'd be best for you if you weren't damned by association with us."

I thanked my companions, and wished them good luck with their schooling. They rode on and I followed on foot. In a few minutes' time, I was at the front gate, which I noticed was linked to tall and ornate railings to keep the compound secure. When the gate-keeper understood that I was there to inquire about a domestic position, he allowed me past and signaled to another guard across the open lawn to extend the drawbridge and allow me to cross the moat.

There was one last security measure: the front door. An iron monstrosity with the Woda Coat of Arms across the top, reinforced by more strips of iron, and a single golden keyhole. The man standing guard unlocked the door and gave me passage into the huge gloomy gray stone palace.

Her Grace greeted me in her drawing room. She was thin and wrinkled like a reptile, cloaked in a simple red gown. It was obviously that she never smiled. Our interview consisted of a single question.

"Do you know anything about being a junior footman in the employment of an Imperial noblewoman?" Her voice was like ancient leather.

"No, Your Grace."

"Good. No servant ever understands what needs to be done, and I particularly dislike those who think they do. You're engaged."

Life at the palace was joyless, but the position of junior footman was very undemanding. I had nothing to do on most days except to stay out of the Duchess's sight. At such times, I usually walked two miles down the road to Moliva. In some ways, there was nothing special or unusual about the village - there are thousands of identical places in Valenwood. But on the hillside nearby was Master Hiomaste's archery academy, and I would often take my luncheon and watch the practice.

Prolyssa and Akin would sometimes meet me afterwards. With Akin, the subjects of conversation very seldom strayed far from archery. Though I was very fond of him, I found
Prolyssa a more enchanting companion, not only because she was pretty for a Breton, but also
because she seemed to have interests outside the realm of marksmanship.

"There's a circus in High Rock I saw when I was a little girl called the Quill Circus," she said
during one of our walks through the woods. "They've been around for as long as anyone can
remember. You have to see them if you ever can. They have plays, and sideshows, and the
most amazing acrobats and archers you've ever seen. That's my dream, to join them some day
when I'm good enough."

"How will you know when you're a good enough archer?" I asked.

She didn't answer, and when I turned, I realized that she had disappeared. I looked around,
bewildered, until I heard laughter from the tree above me. She was perched on a branch,
grinning.

"I may not join as an archer, maybe I'll join as an acrobat," she said. "Or maybe as both. I
figured that Valenwood would be the place to go to see what I could learn. You've got all
those great teachers to imitate in the trees here. Those ape men."

She coiled up, bracing her left leg before springing forward on her right. In a second, she had
leapt across to a neighboring branch. I found it difficult to keep talking to her.

"The Imga, you mean?" I stammered. "Aren't you nervous up at that height?"

"It's a cliche, I know," she said, jumping to an even higher branch, "But the secret is not to
ever look down."

"Would you mind coming down?"

"I probably should anyhow," she said. She was a good thirty feet up now, balancing herself,
arms outstretched, on a very narrow branch. She gestured toward the gate just barely visible
on the other side of the road. "This tree is actually as close as I want to get to your Duchess's
palace."

I held back a gasp as she dove off the branch, somersaulting until she landed on the ground,
knees slightly bent. That was the trick, she explained. Anticipating the blow before it
happened. I expressed to her my confidence that she would be a great attraction at the Quill
Circus. Of course, I know now that never was to be.

On that day, as I recall, I had to return early. It was one of the rare occasions when I had
work, of a sort, to do. Whenever the Duchess had guests, I was to be at the palace. That is not
to say that I had any particular duties, except to be seen standing at attention in the dining
room. The stewards and maids worked hard to bring in the food and clear the plates
afterwards, but the footmen were purely decorative, a formality.

But at least I was an audience for the drama to come.
On the last dinner in my employ at the palace, the Duchess, quite surprisingly, had invited the mayor of Moliva and Master Hiomaste himself among her other guests. The servants' gossip was manic. The mayor had been there before, albeit very irregularly, but Hiomaste's presence was unthinkable. What could she mean by such a conciliatory gesture?

The dinner itself progressed along with perfect if slightly cool civility among all parties. Hiomaste and the Duchess were both very quiet. The Mayor tried to engage the group in a discussion of the Emperor Pelagius IV's new son and heir Uriel, but it failed to spark much interest. Lady Villea, elderly but much more vivacious than her sister the Duchess, led most of the talk about crime and scandal in Eldenroot.

"I have been encouraging her to move out to the country, away from all that unpleasantness for years now," the Duchess said, meeting the eyes of the Mayor. "We've been discussing more recently the possibility of her building a palace on Moliva Hill, but there's so little space there as you know. Fortunately, we've come to a discovery. There is a wide field just a few days west, on the edge of the river, ideally suited."

"It sounds perfect," the Mayor smiled and turned to Lady Villea: "When will your ladyship begin building?"

"The very day you move your village to the site," replied the Duchess of Woda.

The Mayor turned to her to see if she was joking. She obviously was not.

"Think of how much more commerce you could bring to your village if you were close to the river," said Lady Villea jovially. "And Master Hiomaste's students could have easier access to his fine school. Everyone would benefit. I know it would put my sister's heart to ease if there was less trespassing and poaching on her lands."

"There is no poaching or trespassing on your lands now, Your Grace," frowned Hiomaste. "You do not own the jungle, nor will you. The villagers may be persuaded to leave, that I don't know. But my school will stay where it is."

The dinner party never really recovered happily. Hiomaste and the Mayor excused themselves, and my services, such as they were, were not needed in the drawing room where the group went to have their drinks. There was no laughter to be heard through the walls that evening.

The next day, even though there was a dinner planned for the evening, I left on my usual walk to Moliva. Before I had even reached the drawbridge, the guard held me back: "Where are you going, Gorgic? Not to the village, are you?"
"Why not?"

He pointed to the plume of smoke in the distance: "A fire broke out very early this morning, and it's still going. Apparently, it started at Master Hiomaste's school. It looks like the work of some traveling brigands."

"Blessed Stendarr!" I cried. "Are the students alive?"

"No one knows, but it'd be a miracle if any survived. It was late and most everyone was sleeping. I know they've already found the Master's body, or what was left of it. And they also found that girl, your friend, Prolyssa."

I spent the day in a state of shock. It seemed inconceivable what my instinct told me: that the two noble old ladies, Lady Villea and the Duchess of Woda, had arranged for a village and school that irritated them to be reduced to ashes. At dinner, they mentioned the fire in Moliva only very briefly, as if it were not news at all. But I did see the Duchess smile for the first time ever. It was a smile I will never forget until the day I die.

The next morning, I had resolved to go to the village and see if I could be of any assistance to the survivors. I was passing through the servants' hall to the grand foyer when I heard the sound of a group of people ahead. The guards and most of the servants were there, pointing at the portrait of the Duchess that hung in the center of the hall.

There was a single black bolt of ebony piercing the painting, right at the Duchess's heart.

I recognized it at once. It was one of Missun Akin's arrows I had seen in his quiver, forged, he said, in the bowels of Dagoth-Ur itself. My first reaction was relief: the Dunmer who had been kind enough to give me a ride to the palace had survived the fire. My second reaction was echoed by all present in the hall. How had the vandal gotten past the guards, the gate, the moat, and the massive iron door?

The Duchess, arriving shortly after I, was clearly furious, though she was too well bred to show it but by raising her web-thin eyebrows. She wasted no time in assigning all her servants to new duties to keep the palace grounds guarded at all times. We were given regular shifts and precise, narrow patrols.

The next morning, despite all precautions, there was another black arrow piercing the Duchess's portrait.

So it continued for a week's time. The Duchess saw to it that at least one person was always present in the foyer, but somehow the arrow always found its way to her painting whenever the guard's eyes were momentarily averted.

A complex series of signals were devised, so each patrol could report back any sounds or disturbances they encountered during their vigil. At first, the Duchess arranged them so her castellan would receive record of any disturbances during the day, and the chief of the guard during the night. But when she found that she could not sleep, she made certain that the information came to her directly.
The atmosphere in the palace had shifted from gloomy to nightmarish. A snake would slither across the moat, and suddenly Her Grace would be tearing through the east wing to investigate. A strong gust of wind ruffling the leaves on one of the few trees in the lawn was a similar emergency. An unfortunate lone traveler on the road in front of the palace, a completely innocent man at it turned out, brought such a violent reaction that he must have thought that he had stumbled on a war. In a way, he had.

And every morning, there was a new arrow in the front hall, mocking her.

I was given the terrible assignment of guarding the portrait for a few hours in the early morning. Not wanting to be the one to discover the arrow, I seated myself in a chair opposite, never letting my eyes move away for even a second. I don't know if you've had the experience of watching one object relentlessly, but it has a strange effect. All other senses vanish. That was why I was particularly startled when the Duchess rushed into the room, blurring the gulf for me between her portrait and herself.

"There's something moving behind the tree across the road from the gate!" she roared, pushing me aside, and fumbling with her key in the gold lock.

She was shaking with madness and excitement, and the key did not seem to want to go in. I reached out to help her, but the Duchess was already kneeling, her eye to the keyhole, to be certain that the key went through.

It was precisely in that second that the arrow arrived, but this one never made it as far as the portrait.

I actually met Missun Akin years later, while I was in Morrowind to entertain some nobles. He was impressed that I had risen from being a humble domestic servant to being a bard of some renown. He himself had returned to the ashlands, and, like his old master Hiomaste, was retired to the simple life of teaching and hunting.

I told him that I had heard that Lady Villea had decided not to leave the city, and that the village of Modiva had been rebuilt. He was happy to hear that, but I could not find a way to ask him what I really wanted to know. I felt like a fool just wondering if what I thought were true, that he had been behind Prolyssa's tree across the road from the gate every morning that summer, firing an arrow through the gate, across the lawn, across the moat, through a keyhole, and into a portrait of the Duchess of Woda until he struck the Duchess herself. It was clearly an impossibility. I chose not to ask.

As we left one another that day, and he was waving good-bye, he said, "I am pleased to see you doing so well, my friend. I am happy you moved that chair."

NOTES

1 ESO. ESM reads "The Black Arrow, Part II"
The Book of Daedra

{from THE REQUISITE BOOK OF DAEDRA

[These are excerpts from this lengthy tome, describing the nature of each of the Daedra.]

Azura, whose sphere is dusk and dawn, the magic in-between realms of twilight, known as Moonshadow, Mother of the Rose, and Queen of the Night Sky.

Boethiah, whose sphere is deceit and conspiracy, and the secret plots of murder, assassination, treason, and unlawful overthrow of authority.

Clavicus Vile, whose sphere is the granting of power and wishes through ritual invocations and pact.

Hermaeus Mora, whose sphere is scrying of the tides of Fate, of the past and future as read in the stars and heavens, and in whose dominion are the treasures of knowledge and memory.

Hircine, whose sphere is the Hunt, the Sport of the Great Game, the Chase, known as the Huntsman and the Father of Manbeasts.

Malacath, whose sphere is the patronage of the spurned and ostracized, the keeper of the Sworn Oath, and the Bloody Curse.

Mehrunes Dagon, whose sphere is Destruction, Change, Revolution, Energy, and Ambition.

Mephala, whose sphere is obscured to mortals; known by the names Webspinner, Spinner, and Spider; whose only consistent theme seems to be interference in the affairs of mortals for her amusement.

Meridia, whose sphere is obscured to mortals; who is associated with the energies of living things.

Molag Bal, whose sphere is the domination and enslavement of mortals; whose desire is to harvest the souls of mortals and to bring mortals souls within his sway by spreading seeds of strife and discord in the mortal realms.

Namira, whose sphere is the ancient Darkness; known as the Spirit Daedra, ruler of sundry dark and shadowy spirits; associated with spiders, insects, slugs, and other repulsive creatures which inspire mortals with an instinctive revulsion.

Nocturnal, whose sphere is the night and darkness; who is known as the Night Mistress.

---

ESLB (The Requisite Book of Daedra), ESM, ESO (The Book of Daedra)
Peryite, whose sphere is the ordering of the lowest orders of Oblivion, known as the Taskmaster.

Sanguine, whose sphere is hedonistic revelry and debauchery, and passionate indulgences of darker natures.

Sheogorath, whose sphere is Madness, and whose motives are unknowable.

Vaernima, whose sphere is the realm of dreams and nightmares, and from whose realm issues forth evil omens.

[Especially marked for special interest under the heading "Malacath" you find a reference to SCOURGE, blessed by Malacath, and dedicated to the use of mortals. In short, the reference suggests that any Daedra attempting to invoke the weapon's powers will be expelled into the voidstreams of Oblivion.]

"Of the legendary artifacts of the Daedra, many are well known, like Azura's Star, and Sheogorath's Wabbajack. Others are less well known, like Scourge, Mackkan's Hammer, Bane of Daedra...."

"...yet though Malacath blessed Scourge to be potent against his Daedra kin, he thought not that it should fall into Daedric hands, then to serve as a tool for private war among caitiff and forsaken. Thus did Malacath curse the device such that, should any dark kin seek to invoke its powers, that a void should open and swallow that Daedra, and purge him into Oblivion's voidstreams, from thence to pathfind back to the Real and Unreal Worlds in the full order of time."

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. ESLB reads "The Requisite Book of Daedra"
2 ESLB only.
3 ESM, ESO. ESLB reads "This volume is an encyclopedic reference to the Lords of the Daedric Realms, their chief clans, the themes and spheres of influence of each clan, and to the legends and lore associated with those mortals who traffick with Daedra."
4 ESM, ESO. Not in ESLB.
5 ESM, ESO. ESLB reads "Daedras".
6 ESM, ESO. ESLB reads "Greatest".
7 ESM, ESO. ESLB reads "and Sacrifice of Mortals".
8 ESM, ESO. ESLB reads "and".
9 ESLB only.
10 ESM, ESO. ESLB reads "debaucherie".
11 ESM, ESO. ESLB reads "darkkin".
12 ESM, ESO. ESLB reads "voidhole".

{[The pages of the BOOK OF LIFE AND SERVICE overflow with obscure mystical pronouncements and prophecies, few of which are comprehensible, much less relevant to your situation. However, the following two excerpts seem of possible interest. The first suggests classification of entities to be encountered here on the Soul Cairn. The second may be an invocation of command.]}

THE RANKS OF THE BLESSED

Blessed are the Bonemen, for they serve without self in spirit forever.
Blessed are the Mistmen, for they blend in the glory of the transcendent spirit.
Blessed are the Wrathmen, for they render their rage unto the ages.
Blessed are the Masters, for they bridge the past and span the future.

THE LITANY OF SERVICE

The Boneman's Oath

We die.
We pray.
To live.
We serve.

The Master's Voice

You swore.
To Serve.
Your Lord.
{Commands.}

NOTES

1 ESLB. Not in ESM.
2 ESLB. Not in ESM.
[12] Book of Rest and Endings*

[The pages of the BOOK OF REST AND ENDINGS are filled with obscure bits of cult mumbo-jumbo. {However, the following excerpt seems of some interest.} ]

THE RITUAL FOR ENDING OF WRATHMEN

From fifty Fathers
Frozen in slavepast
Rip from the wraithloom
Sunder the lifeweave
Lock tight in earthgrip
Hold firm in gravefast

NOTES

1 ESLB. Not in ESM.
Before the rule of Tiber Septim, all Tamriel was in chaos. The poet Tracizis called that period of continuous unrest "the days and nights of blood and venom." The kings were a petty lot of grasping tyrants, who fought Tiber's attempts to bring order to the land. But they were as disorganized as they were dissolute, and the strong hand of Septim brought peace forcibly to Tamriel. The year was 2E 896. The following year, the Emperor declared the beginning of a new Era. Thus began the Third Era, Year Aught.

For thirty-eight years, the Emperor Tiber reigned supreme. It was a lawful, pious, and glorious age, when justice was known to one and all, from serf to sovereign. On Tiber's death, it rained for an entire fortnight after as if the land of Tamriel itself was weeping.

The Emperor's grandson, Pelagius, came to the throne. Though his reign was short, he was as strong and resolute as his father had been, and Tamriel could have enjoyed a continuation of the Golden Age. Alas, an unknown enemy of the Septim Family hired organization of cutthroats, the Dark Brotherhood, to kill the Emperor Pelagius I as he knelt at prayer at the Temple of the One in the Imperial City. Pelagius I's reign lasted less than three years.

Pelagius had no living children, so the Crown Imperial passed to his first cousin, the daughter of Tiber's brother Agnorith. So did Kintyra, former Queen of Silvenar, assumed the throne as Kintyra I. Her reign was blessed with a time of prosperity and good harvests, and she herself was an avid patroness of art, music, and dance.

Kintyra's son was crowned after her death, the first Emperor of Tamriel to use the imperial name Uriel. The Emperor Uriel I was the great lawmaker of the Septim Dynasty, and a promoter of independent organizations and guilds. Under his kind but firm hand, the Fighters Guild and the Mages Guild increased in prominence throughout Tamriel. His son the successor Uriel II reigned for eighteen years, from the death of Uriel I in 3E64 to Pelagius II's accession in 3E82. Tragically, the rule of Uriel II was cursed with blights, plagues, and insurrections. The tenderness he inherited from his father did not serve Tamriel well, and little justice was done.

Pelagius II inherited not only the throne from his father, but the debt from the latter's poor financial and judicial management. Pelagius dismissed all of the old Elder Council, and allowed only those willing to pay great sums to resume their seats. He encouraged similar
acts among his vassals, the kings of Tamriel, and by the end of his seventeen year reign, Tamriel had returned to prosperity. His critics, however, have suggested that any advisor possessed of wisdom but not of gold had been summarily ousted by Pelagius. This may have led to some of the troubles his son Antiochus faced when he in turn became Emperor.

Antiochus was certainly one of the more flamboyant members of the usually austere Septim Family. He had numerous mistresses and nearly as many wives, and was renowned for the grandeur of his dress and his high good humor. Unfortunately, his reign was rife with civil war, surpassing even that of his grandfather Uriel II. The War of the Isle in 3E110, twelve years after Antiochus assumed the throne, nearly took the province of Summurset Isle away from Tamriel. The united alliance of the kings of Summurset and Antiochus only managed to defeat King Orghum of the island-kingdom of Pyandonea due to a freak storm. Legend credits the Psijic Order of the Isle of Artaeum with the sorcery behind the tempest.

The story of Kintyra II, heiress to her father Antiochus' throne, is certainly one of the saddest tales in imperial history. Her first cousin Uriel, son of Queen Potema of Solitude, accused Kintyra of being a bastard, alluding to the infamous decadence of the Imperial City during her father's reign. When this accusation failed to stop her coronation, Uriel bought the support of several disgruntled kings of High Rock, Skyrim, and Morrowind, and with Queen Potema's assistance, he coordinated three attacks on the Septim Empire.

The first attack occurred in the Iliac Bay region, which separates High Rock and Hammerfell. Kintyra's entourage was massacred and the Empress was taken captive. For two years, Kintyra II languished in an Imperial prison believed to be somewhere in Glenpoint or Glenmoril before she was slain in her cell under mysterious circumstances. The second attack was on a series of Imperial garrisons along the coastal Morrowind islands. The Empress' consort Kontin Arynx fell defending the forts. The third and final attack was a siege of the Imperial City itself, occurring after the Elder Council had split up the army to attack western High Rock and eastern Morrowind. The weakened government had little defence against Uriel's determined aggression, and capitulated after only a fortnight of resistance. Uriel took the throne that same evening and proclaimed himself Uriel III, Emperor of Tamriel. The year was 3E 121. Thus began the War of the Red Diamond, described in Volume II of this series.

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "day".
2 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
3 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "era".
4 ESD only.
5 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ", so".
6 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ";".
7 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "just".
8 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "king".
9 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
10 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "a".
11 ESD only.
12 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "eldest living son".
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EMPIRE I

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "we".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Septims".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the cursed".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "crown of the Empire".

ESD only.

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "assume".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Kintyra I".

ESD only.

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESD only.

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "His tenderheartedness".

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "return".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "of".

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "without".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "forcibly".

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "trouble".

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "most".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "many".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "grandness".

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "wars".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Sumurset".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Sumurset".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Orgnum".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "magic".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "storm".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "father's".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "modern".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Potena".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "famous".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "disgrunted".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Potena".

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "that".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "destroyed".

ESD only.

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "died".

ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "divided".

ESD only.

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "defense".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "attack".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "surrendered".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "night".

ESM, ESO. ESD reads "begins".
Volume I of this series described in brief the lives of the first eight Emperors of the Septim Dynasty, beginning with the {glorious} Tiber Septim and ending with his great, great, great, great, grandniece Kintyra II. Kintyra's murder in Glenpoint while in captivity is considered by some to be the end of the pure strain of Septim blood {in the imperial family}. Certainly it marks the end of something {significant}. Uriel III not only proclaimed himself Emperor of Tamriel, but also {proclaimed himself} Uriel Septim III, taking {the eminent} surname as a title. In truth, his surname was {Uriel} Mantiarco from his father's {line}. In time, Uriel III was deposed and his crimes reviled, but the tradition of taking the name Septim as a title for the Emperor of Tamriel did not die with him.

For six years, the War of the Red Diamond {which takes its name from the Septim Family's famous badge} tore {the Empire apart}. The combatants were the three surviving children of Pelagius II - Potema, Cephorus, and Magnus - and their {various} offspring. Potema, of course, supported her son Uriel III, and had the {combined} support of all of Skyrim and northern Morrowind. With the efforts of Cephorus and Magnus, {however, the province of} High Rock turned {coat}. {The provinces of} Hammerfell, {Summurset} Isle, Valenwood, Elsweyr, and Black Marsh were divided {in their loyalty}, but most kings supported Cephorus and Magnus.

In 3E127, Uriel III was captured at the Battle of Ichidag in Hammerfell. En route to his trial in the Imperial City, a mob overtook his {prisoner's} carriage and burned him alive within it. His captor and uncle continued on to the Imperial City, and by common acclaim was proclaimed Cephorus I, Emperor of Tamriel. Cephorus' reign {was} marked by nothing but war. By all accounts, he was a kind and intelligent man, but what Tamriel needed was a great warrior -- and he{, fortunately,} was that. It took an additional ten years of constant warfare for him to defeat his sister Potema. The so-called Wolf Queen of Solitude who died in the siege of her city-state in the year 137. Cephorus survived his sister by {only} three years. {He} never had {the} time during the war years to marry, so it was his brother, the fourth child of Pelagius II, who assumed the throne.

The Emperor Magnus was {already} elderly {when he took up the imperial diadem}, and the business of punishing the traitorous kings of the War of the Red Diamond drained much of his {remaining strength}. Legend {also} accuses Magnus' son and heir Pelagius III of {patricide}, but that seems {highly} unlikely - for no other reason {than that} Pelagius was King of Solitude following the death of Potema, and seldom visited the Imperial City.
Pelagius III, sometimes called Pelagius the Mad, was proclaimed Emperor in the 145th year of the Third Era. Almost from the start, his eccentricities of behaviour were noted at court. He embarrassed dignitaries, offended his vassal kings, and on one occasion marked the end of an imperial grand ball by attempting to hang himself. His long-suffering wife was finally awarded the Regency of Tamriel, and Pelagius III was sent to a series of healing institutions and asylums until his death in 3E153 at the age of thirty-four.

The Empress Regent of Tamriel was proclaimed Empress Katariah I upon the death of her husband. Some who do not mark the end of the Septim bloodline with the death of Kintyra II consider the ascendancy of this Dark Elf woman as the true mark of its decline. Her defenders assert that though Katariah was not descended from Tiber, the son she had with Pelagius was, so the imperial chain continued. Despite the racist assertions to the contrary, Katariah's forty-six-year reign was one of the most celebrated in Tamriel's history. Uncomfortable in the Imperial City, Katariah travelled extensively throughout the Empire such as no Emperor ever had since Tiber's day. She repaired much of the damage broken alliances and bungled diplomacy had created. The people of Tamriel came to love their Empress far more than the nobility did. Katariah's death in a minor skirmish in Black Marsh is a favorite subject of conspiracy minded historians. The Sage Montalius' discovery, for instance, of a disenfranchised branch of the Septim Family and their involvement with the skirmish was a revelation indeed.

When Cassynder assumed the throne upon the death of his mother, he was already middle-aged. Only half Elven, he aged like a Breton. In fact, he had left the rule of Wayrest to his half-brother Uriel due to poor health. Nevertheless, as the only true blood relation of Pelagius and thus Tiber, he was pressed into accepting the throne. To no one's surprise, the Emperor Cassynder's reign did not last long. In two years he joined his predecessors in eternal slumber.

Uriel Lariat, Cassynder's half-brother, and the child of Katariah I and her Imperial consort Gallivere Lariat (after the death of Pelagius III), left the kingdom of Wayrest to reign as Uriel IV. Legally, Uriel IV was a Septim: Cassynder had adopted him into the royal family when he had become King of Wayrest. Nevertheless, to the Council and the people of Tamriel, he was a bastard child of Katariah. Uriel did not possess the dynamism of his mother, and his long forty-three-year reign was a hotbed of sedition.

Uriel IV's story is told in the third volume of this series.

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "forebear".
2 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
3 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
4 ESD only.
5 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "a".
6 ESD only.
7 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
8 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
9 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "apart the Empire".
10 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
11 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EMPIRE II

12 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
13 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
14 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
15 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Sumurset".
16 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
17 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
18 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "is".
19 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
20 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
21 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Cephorus".
22 ESD only.
23 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
24 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
25 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "health".
26 ESD only.
27 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "murder".
28 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "very".
29 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ".,."
30 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "was".
31 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
32 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
33 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "healers".
34 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Emperess".
35 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Emperess".
36 ESD only.
37 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
38 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
39 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "does".
40 ESD only.
41 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "glorious".
42 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the".
43 ESD only.
44 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "source for".
45 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
46 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "familiy's".
47 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "at".
48 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ",, he was dead".
49 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
50 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
A Brief History of the Empire
Part Three
by Stronach k’Thojj III
Imperial Historian

The first volume of this series in brief the story of the succession of the first eight Emperors of the Septim Dynasty, from Tiber I to Kintyra II. The second volume described the War of the Red Diamond and the six Emperors that followed its aftermath, from Uriel III to Cassynder I. At the end of that volume, described how the Emperor Cassynder's half-brother Uriel IV assumed the throne of the Empire of Tamriel.

It will be recalled that Uriel IV was not a Septim by birth. His mother, though she reigned as Empress for many years, was a Dark Elf married to a true Septim Emperor, Pelagius III. Uriel's father was Katariah I's consort after Pelagius' death and during her reign, a Breton nobleman named Gallivere Lariat. Before taking the throne of Empire, Cassynder had ruled the kingdom of Wayrest, but poor health had forced him to retire. Cassynder had no children, so he legally adopted his half-brother Uriel and abdicated the kingdom. Seven years later, Cassynder inherited the Empire at the death of his mother. Three years after that, Uriel found himself the recipient of Cassynder's inheritance.

Uriel IV's reign was a long and difficult one. Despite being a legally adopted member of the Septim Family, and despite the Lariat Family's high position -- indeed, they were distant cousins of the Septims -- few of the Elder Council could be persuaded to accept him fully as a blood descendant of Tiber. The Council had assumed much responsibility during Katariah I's long reign and Cassynder I's short reign, and a strong-willed "alien" monarch like Uriel IV found it impossible to command their unwavering fealty. Time and again the Council and Emperor were at odds, and time and again the Council won the battles. Since the days of Pelagius II, the Elder Council had consisted of the wealthiest men and women in the Empire, and the power they wielded was conclusive.

The Council's last victory over Uriel IV was posthumous. Andorak, Uriel IV's son, was disinherited by vote of Council, and a cousin more closely related to the original Septim line was proclaimed Cephorus II in 3E247. Cephorus had been a Nordic king of For the first nine years of Cephorus II's reign, those loyal to Andorak battled the Imperial forces. In an act that the Sage Eraintine called "Tiber Septim's heart beating no more," the Council granted Andorak the High Rock kingdom of Shornhelm to end the war, and Andorak's descendants still rule there.

{By and large}, Cephorus II had foes that demanded more of his attention than Andorak. "From out of a cimmerian nightmare," in the words of Eraintine, a man who called himself the Camoran Usurper led an army of Daedra and undead warriors on a rampage through Valenwood, conquering kingdom after kingdom. Few could resist his onslaughts, and as month turned to bloody month in the year 3E249, even fewer tried. Cephorus II sent more and more mercenaries into Hammerfell to stop the Usurper's northward march, but they were bribed or slaughtered and raised as undead.
The story of the Camoran Usurper deserves a book of its own. (It is recommended that) the reader find Palaux Illthre's The Fall of the Usurper for more detail. In short, however, the destruction of the forces of the Usurper had little to do with the efforts of the Emperor. The result was a great regional victory and an increase in hostility toward the seemingly inefficacious Empire.

Uriel V, Cephorous II's son and successor, swivelled opinion back toward the latent power of the Empire. Turning the attention of Tamriel away from internal strife, Uriel V embarked on a series of invasions beginning almost from the moment he took the throne in 3E268. Uriel V conquered Roscrea in 271, Cathnoquey in 276, Yneslea in 279, and Esroniet in 284. In 3E288, he embarked on his most ambitious enterprise, the invasion of the continent kingdom of Akavir. This ultimately proved a failure, for two years later Uriel V was killed in Akavir on the battlefield of Ionith. Nevertheless, Uriel V holds a reputation second only to Tiber as one of the two great Warrior Emperors of Tamriel.

The last four Emperors, beginning with Uriel V's infant son, are described in the fourth and final volume of this series.

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "tells".
2 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "I".
3 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Emperess".
4 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "His".
5 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
6 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
7 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
8 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "gave him".
9 ESM, ESO. ESD has it at the end of the sentence.
10 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "difficult and long".
11 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "relation".
12 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "reign".
13 ESM, ESO. ESD does not have the quotation marks.
14 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "hold".
15 ESD only.
16 ESD only.
17 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "ultimate".
18 ESO. ESM and ESD read "3E268".
19 ESD only.
20 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "that land".
21 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Of course".
22 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
23 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "None".
24 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "fewer even tried".
25 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ", turned into undead, or slaughtered".
26 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "does deserve".
27 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "I recommend".
28 ESM, ESO. ESD does not have the brackets.
29 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
30 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
31 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
32 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "turned".
33 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "potential".
34 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "was ultimately".
35 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the great warrior emperor".
ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the".
The first book of this series described, in brief, the first eight Emperors of the Septim Dynasty beginning with Tiber I. The second volume described the War of the Red Diamond and the six Emperors who followed. The third volume described the troubles of the next three Emperors - the frustrated Uriel IV, the ineffectual Cephorus II, and the heroic Uriel V.

On Uriel V's death across the sea in distant, hostile Akavir, Uriel VI was but five years old. In fact, Uriel VI was born only shortly before his father left for Akavir. Uriel V's only other progeny, by a {morganatic alliance}, were the twins Morihatha and Eloisa, who had been born a month after Uriel V left. Uriel VI was {crowned} in the 290th year of the Third Era. The {Imperial Consort} Thonica, as the boy's mother, was given a restricted Regency until Uriel VI reached his {majority}. The {Elder} Council retained the real power, as they had ever since the days of Katariah I.

The Council so enjoyed its unlimited and unrestricted freedom to {promulgate} laws (and {generate} profits) {that} Uriel VI was not given full license to rule until 307, when he was {already} 22 years old. He had been slowly assuming positions of responsibility for years, but both the Council and his mother, who enjoyed even her limited Regency, were loath to {hand over the reins}. By the time he came to the throne, the mechanisms of government gave him little power {except for that of the imperial} veto.

This power, however, was regularly {and vigorously} exercised. By 313, Uriel VI could boast with conviction that he truly did rule Tamriel. He utilized defunct spy networks and guard units to bully and coerce the difficult members of the Elder Council. His {half-sister Morihatha} was {not surprisingly} his {staunchest} ally, {especially} after her marriage to Baron Ulfe Gersen of Winterhold brought her considerable wealth and influence. As the Sage Ugaridge said, "Uriel V conquered Esroniet, but Uriel VI conquered the Elder Council."

When Uriel VI fell {off a} horse and could not be {resuscitated} by the finest Imperial healers, his beloved sister Morihatha took up the {imperial tiara}. At 25 years of age, she had been described by (admittedly self-serving) diplomats as the most beautiful creature in {all of} Tamriel. She was certainly well-learned, vivacious, athletic, and a well-practised politician. She brought the Archmager of Skyrim to the Imperial City and created the second Imperial Battlemage since the days of Tiber Septim.

Morihatha finished the job her brother had begun, and made the Imperial Province {a true} government under the Empress {and later, the Emperor}. Outside the Imperial Province, however, the Empire had been slowly disintegrating. Open revolutions and civil wars had raged unchallenged since the days of her grandfather Cephorus II. Carefully coordinating her counterattacks, Morihatha slowly {claimed} back her rebellious vassals, always avoiding overextending herself.
Though Morihatha's military campaigns were remarkably successful, her deliberate pace often frustrated the Council. One Councilman, an Argonian who took the Colovian name of Thoricles Romus, furious at her refusal to send troops to his troubled Black Marsh, is commonly believed to have hired the assassins who claimed her life in 3E 339. Romus was summarily tried and executed, though he protested his innocence to the last.

Morihatha had no surviving children, and Eloisa had died of a fever four years before. Eloisa's 25-year-old son Pelagius was thus crowned Pelagius IV. Pelagius IV continued his aunt's work, slowly bringing back under his wing the radical and refractory kingdoms, duchies, and baronies of the Empire. He exercised Morihatha's poise and circumspect pace in his endeavours - but alas, he did not attain her success. The kingdoms had been free of constraint for so long that even a benign Imperial presence was considered odious. Nevertheless, when Pelagius died after a notably stable and prosperous twenty-nine-year reign, Tamriel was closer to unity than it had been since the days of Uriel I.

Our current Emperor, His Awesome and Terrible Majesty, Uriel Septim VII, son of Pelagius IV, has the diligence of his great-aunt Morihatha, the political skill of his great-uncle Uriel VI, and the military prowess of his great-grand-uncle Uriel V. For twenty-one years he reigned and brought justice and order to Tamriel. In the year 3E389, however, his Imperial Battlemage, Jagar Tharn, betrayed him.

Uriel VII was imprisoned in a dimension of Tharn's creation, and Tharn used his sorcery of illusion to assume the Emperor's aspect. For the next ten years, Tharn abused imperial privilege but did not continue Uriel VII's schedule of reconquest. It is not yet entirely known what Tharn's goals and personal accomplishments were during the ten years he masqueraded as his liege lord. In 3E399, an enigmatic Champion defeated the Battlemage in the dungeons of the Imperial Palace and freed Uriel VII from his other-dimensional jail.

Since his emancipation, Uriel Septim VII has worked diligently to renew the battles that would reunite Tamriel. Tharn's interference broke the momentum, it is true -- but the years since then have proven that there is hope of the Golden Age of Tiber Septim's rule glorifying Tamriel once again.

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "At".
2 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "different woman".
3 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "coronated".
4 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "consort".
5 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "minority".
6 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
7 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "make".
8 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
9 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ",".
10 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
11 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "give him reign".
12 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ", but the power to".
13 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
14 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
15 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "sister".
16 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

17 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "usual".
18 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
19 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "from his".
20 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "saved".
21 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "throne".
22 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
23 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "truly a".
24 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
25 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "took".
26 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the Council was often frustrated by her deliberate pace".
27 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "named".
28 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "lands".
29 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
30 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "be the man who".
31 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
32 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
33 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the seditious".
34 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "of his".
35 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "had".
36 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "patience and deliberate".
37 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "have".
38 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "constraints".
39 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ",,"
40 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
41 ESO. ESD and ESM read "an astonishing forty-nine-year"
42 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "magic".
43 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "privileges".
44 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "entirely known yet".
45 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "imitated".
46 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "a mysterious".
47 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "cell".
48 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "release".
49 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "to".
50 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
51 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the glorious".
52 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Septim may be visited on".
The Brothers of Darkness

by Pellarne Assi

As their name suggests, the Dark Brotherhood has a history shrouded in obfuscation. Their ways are secret to those who are not themselves Brothers of the Order ("Brother" is a generic term; some of their deadliest assassins are female, but they are often called Brothers as well). How they continue to exist in shadow, but can be easily found by those desperate enough to pay for their services, is not the least of the mysteries surrounding them.

The Dark Brotherhood sprang from a religious order, the Morag Tong, during the Second Era. The Morag Tong were worshippers of the Daedra spirit Mephala, who encouraged them to commit ritual murders. In their early years, they were as disorganized as only obscure cultists could be - there was no one to lead the band, and as a group they dared not murder anybody of any importance. This changed with the rise of the Night Mother.

All leaders of the Morag Tong, and then afterward the Dark Brotherhood, have been called the Night Mother. Whether the same woman (if it is even a woman) has commanded the Dark Brotherhood since the Second Era is unknown. What is believed is that the original Night Mother developed an important doctrine of the Morag Tong - the belief that, while Mephala does grow stronger with every murder committed in her name, certain murders were better than others. Murders that came from hate pleased Mephala more than murders committed because of greed. Murders of great men and women pleased Mephala more than murders of relative unknowns.

We can approximate the time this belief was adopted with the first known murder committed by the Morag Tong. In the year 324 of the Second Era, the Potentate Versidue-Shaie was murdered in his palace in what is today the Elsweyr kingdom of Senchal. In a brash move, the Night Mother announced the identity of the murderers by painting "MORAG TONG" on the walls in the Potentate's own blood.

Previous to that, the Morag Tong existed in relative peace, more or less like a witches' coven - occasionally persecuted but usually ignored. In a remarkable synchronicity at a time when the Arena was a fractured land, the Morag Tong was outlawed throughout the continent. Every sovereign gave the cult's elimination his highest priority. Nothing more was officially heard of them for a hundred years.

It is more difficult to date the era when the Morag Tong re-emerged as the Dark Brotherhood, especially as other guilds of assassins have sporadically appeared throughout the history of Tamriel. The first mention of the Dark Brotherhood that I have found is from the journals of the Blood Queen Arlimahera of Hегathе. She spoke of slaying her enemies by her own hand, or if necessary "with the help of the Night Mother and her Dark Brotherhood, the secret arsenal my family has employed since my grandfather's time." Arlimahera wrote
this in 2E412, so one can surmise that the Dark Brotherhood had been in existence since at least 360 if her grandfather {had truly made use of}^26 them.

The important distinction between the Dark Brotherhood and the Morag Tong was that the Brotherhood was a business as much as {it was}^27 a cult. Rulers and wealthy merchants {now}^28 used the order as an assassin's guild. The Brotherhood gained the obvious {rewards}^29 of a profitable enterprise, as well as the secondary benefit that {rulers could no longer}^30 actively persecute them: They were needed. {They were purveyors of an essential commodity.}^31 Even an extremely virtuous leader would be unwise to mistreat the Brotherhood.

Not long after Alimahera's journal entry {about them was penned}^32 came perhaps the most famous series of executions in the history of the Dark Brotherhood. The Colovian Emperor-Potentate Savirien-Chorak and every one of his heirs {were}^33 murdered on one bloody night in Sun's Dawn in 430. Within a fortnight, the Colovian Dynasty crumbled, to the delight of its enemies. For over four hundred years, until the {advent of the Warrior Emperor}^34 Tiber Septim, chaos reigned over Tamriel. Though no comparably impressive executions have been recorded, the Brotherhood must have grown fat with gold during that {interregnum}^35. {They were purveyors of an essential commodity.}^31

The Dark Brotherhood has no shortage of business opportunities - an {"accounting,"}^37 I have been informed, is the Brotherhood's favorite euphemism for {an}^38 execution. While they are officially {considered}^39 an unlawful organization in every corner of the Empire, like the Thieves Guild, they are almost {as}^40 universally tolerated.

NOTES

1 ESD only.
2 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Brothers" without the quotation marks.
3 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the".
4 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the deadliest of their".
5 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
6 ESD only.
7 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "their".
8 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
9 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
10 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "usually are".
11 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "group".
12 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "any".
13 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
14 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
15 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "belief".
16 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "This first belief is".
17 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "grows".
18 ESM, ESO. ESD does not have the quotation marks.
19 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
20 ESD only.
21 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
22 ESD only.
23 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "syncroncity".
24 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
25 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ". Assassin guilds".
26 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "truly used".
27 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
28 ESD only.
29 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "benefits".
30 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "no longer could rulers".
31 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
32 ESD only.
33 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "was".
34 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "age of".
35 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "age".
36 ESO ends here. The following paragraph only in ESD and ESM.
37 ESM. ESD does not have the quotation marks.
38 ESM. Not in ESD.
39 ESM. Not in ESD.
40 ESM. Not in ESD.
The Buying Game
by Ababael Timsar-Dadisun

So many people simply buy the items they need at the price they are given. It's a very sad state of affairs, when the game is really open to all, you don't need an invitation. And it is a game, the game of bargaining, to be played seriously and, I hasten to add, politely. In Elsweyr, it is common for the shop-owner to offer the prospective buyer tea or sweetmeats and engage in polite conversation before commencing the business. This eminently civilized tradition has a practical purpose, allowing the buyer to observe the wares for sale. It is considered impolite not to accept, though it does not imply obligation on the part of the buyer.

Whether this particular custom is part of the culture or not, it's wise for the buyer and seller to greet one another with smiles and warm salutations, like gladiators honoring one another before the battle.

Bargaining is expected all over Tamriel, but the game can be broken if one's offer is so preposterously low that it insults the shop-keeper. If you are offered something for ten gold pieces, try offering six and see where that takes you.

Do not look like you're very interested, but do not mock the quality of the goods, even if they deserve it. Much better to admire the quality of workmanship, but comment that, regretfully, you simply cannot afford such a price. When the shop-keeper compliments your taste, smile, but try to resist the flattery.

A lot of the game depends on recognizing the types of shop-keepers and not automatically assuming that the rural merchant is ignorant and easily fooled, or the rapacious city merchant is selling shoddy merchandise. Caravans, it should be mentioned, are always good places to go to buy or trade.

Knowing what you're buying and from whom is a talent bought only after years of practice. Know the specialties of certain regions and merchants before you even step foot in a shop. Recognize too the prejudices of the region. In Morrowind where I hail from, for example, Argonians are viewed with a certain amount of suspicion. Don't be surprised or insulted if the shopkeepers follow you around the shop, assuming you're going to steal something. Similarly, Nords, Bretons, and Cyrodiils are sometimes treated coolly by merchants in the Summerset Isles. Of course, I don't know any shopkeepers anywhere, no matter their open-mindedness, who aren't alerted when a Khajiit or a Bosmer enters their shop. Even Khajiiti and Bosmeri shopkeepers.

If you see something you really like or need, buy it then and there at the best price you can get. I cannot tell you how many times I passed up a rare and interesting relic, assuming that I could find it elsewhere in the region, perhaps at a larger town at a better price. Too late, I discovered I was wrong, and when I returned to the shop weeks later, the item I wanted was

* ESM. ESO.
gone. Better to get a great purchase at a decent price and discover it again at a worse price than to miss out on your opportunities for ownership. Occasionally impulsiveness is the best buying strategy.

Sense the moves of the game, and everyone can win.
Contemporary with Maqamat Lusign (interviewed in volume seventeen of this series) is the Khajiit Cherim, whose tapestries have been hailed as masterpieces all over the Empire for nigh on thirty years now. His four factories located throughout Elsweyr make reproductions of his work, but his original tapestries command stellar prices. The Emperor himself owns ten Cherim tapestries, and his representatives are currently negotiating the sale of five more.

The muted use of color contrasted with the luminous skin tones of Cherim's subjects is a marked contrast with the old style of tapestry. The subjects of his work in recent years have been fabulous tales of the ancient past: the Gods meeting to discuss the formation of the world; the Chimer following the Prophet Veloth into Morrowind; the Wild Elves battling Morihaus and his legions at the White Gold Tower. His earliest designs dealt with more contemporary subjects. I had the opportunity to discuss with him one of his first masterpieces, The Heart of Anequina, at his villa in Orcrest.

The Heart of Anequina presents an historic battle of the Five Year War between Elsweyr and Valenwood which raged from 3E 394 (or 3E 395, depending on what one considers to be the beginning of the war) until 3E 399. In most fair accounts, the war lasted 4 years and 9 months, but artistic license from the great epic poets added an additional three months to the ordeal.

The actual details of the battle itself, as interpreted by Cherim, are explicit. The faces of a hundred and twenty Wood Elf archers can be differentiated one from the other, each registering fear at the approach of the Khajiti army. Their hauberks catch the dim light of the sun. The menacing shadows of the Elsweyr battlecats loom on the hills, every muscle strained, ready to pounce in command. It is not surprising that he got all the details right, because Cherim was in the midst of it, as a Khajiit foot soldier.

Every minute part of the Khajiit {traditional} armor can be seen in the soldiers in the foreground. The embroidered edging and striped patterns on the tunics. Each lacquered plate on loose-fitting leather in the Elsweyr style. The helmets of cloth and fluted silver.

"Cherim does not understand the point of plate mail," said Cherim. "It is hot, for one, like being both burned and buried alive. Cherim wore it at the insistence of our Nord advisors during the Battle of Zelinin, and Cherim couldn't even turn to see what my fellow Khajiit were doing. Cherim did some sketches for a tapestry of the Battle of Zelinin, but Cherim finds that to make it realistic, the figures came out very mechanical, like iron golems or dwemer
centurions. Knowing our Khajiti commanders, Cherim would not be surprised if giving up the heavy plate was more aesthetic than practical."

"Elsweyr lost the Battle of Zelinin, didn't she?"

"Yes, but Elsweyr won the war, starting at the next battle, the Heart of Anequina," said Cherim with a smile. "The tide turned as soon as we Khajiit sent our Nordic advisors back to Solitude. We had to get rid of all the heavy armor they brought to us and find enough traditional armor our troops felt comfortable wearing. Obviously, the principle advantage of the armor was that we could move easily in it, as you can see from the natural stances of the soldiers in the tapestry.

"Now if you look at this poor perforated Cathay-raht who just keeps battling on in the background, you see the other advantage. It seems strange to say, but one of the best features of armor is that an arrow will either deflect completely or pass all the way through. An arrow head is like a hook, made to stick where it strikes if it doesn't pass through. A soldier in armor will find himself with a hole in his body and the bolt on the other side. Our healers can fix such a wound easily if it isn't fatal, but if the arrow still remains in the armor, as it does with heavier armor, the wound will be reopened every time the fellow moves. Unless the Khajiit strips off the armor and pulls out the arrow, which is what we had to do at the Battle of Zelinin. A difficult and time-consuming process in the heat of battle, to say the least."

I asked him next, "Is there a self portrait in the battle?"

"Yes," Cherim said with another grin. "You see the small figure of the Khajiit stealing the rings off the dead Wood Elf? His back is facing you, but he has a brown and orange striped tail like Cherim's. Cherim does not say that all stereotypes about the Khajiit are fair, but Cherim must sometimes acknowledge them."

A self-deprecating style in self-portraiture is also evident in the tapestries of Ranulf Hook, the next artist interviewed in volume nineteen of this series.

**NOTES**

1 ESM. ESO reads "by Livillus Perus, Professor at the Imperial University".
2 ESO. ESM reads "medium-weight".
3 ESM. Not in ESO.
4 ESO. ESM reads "medium".
5 ESO. ESM reads "medium".
6 ESO. ESM reads "medium".
Children of the Sky

Nords consider themselves to be the children of the sky. They call Skyrim the Throat of the World, because it is where the sky exhaled on the land and formed them. They see themselves as eternal outsiders and invaders, and even when they conquer and rule another people; they feel no kinship with them.

The breath and the voice are the vital essence of a Nord. When they defeat great enemies they take their tongues as trophies. These are woven into ropes and can hold speech like an enchantment. The power of a Nord can be articulated into a shout, like the kiai of an Akaviri swordsman. The strongest of their warriors are called "Tongues." When the Nords attack a city, they take no siege engines or cavalry; the Tongues form in a wedge in front of the gatehouse, and draw in breath. When the leader lets it out in a kiai, the doors are blown in, and the axemen rush into the city. Shouts can be used to sharpen blades or to strike enemies. A common effect is the shout that knocks an enemy back, or the power of command. A strong Nord can instill bravery in men with his battle-cry, or stop a charging warrior with a roar. The greatest of the Nords can call to specific people over hundreds of miles, and can move by casting a shout, appearing where it lands.

The most powerful Nords cannot speak without causing destruction. They must go gagged, and communicate through a sign language and through scribing runes.

The further north you go into Skyrim, the more powerful and elemental the people become, and the less they require dwellings and shelters. Wind is fundamental to Skyrim and the Nords; those that live in the far wastes always carry a wind with them.

* ESM. ESO.
Chimarvamidium

Ancient Tales of the Dwemer, Part VI
By Marobar Sul

After many battles, it was clear who would win the War. The Chimer had great skills in magick and bladery, but against the armored battalions of the Dwemer, clad in the finest shielding wrought by Jnaggo, there was little hope of their ever winning. In the interests of keeping some measure of peace in the Land, St hovin the Warlord agreed to a truce with Karenithil Barif the Beast. In exchange for the Disputed Lands, Sthovin gave Barif a mighty golem, which would protect the Chimer's territory from the excursions of the Northern Barbarians.

Barif was delighted with his gift and brought it back to his camp, where all his warriors gaped in awe at it. Sparkling gold in hue, it resembled a Dwemer cavalier with a proud aspect. To test its strength, they placed the golem in the center of an arena and flung magickal bolts of lightning at it. Its agility was such that few of the bolts struck it. It had the wherewithal to pivot on its hips to avoid the brunt of the attacks without losing its balance, feet firmly planted on the ground. A vault of fireballs followed, which the golem ably dodged, bending its knees and its legs to spin around the blasts. The few times it was struck, it made certain to be hit in the chest and waist, the strongest parts of its body.

The troops cheered at the sight of such an agile and powerful creation. With it leading the defense, the Barbarians of Skyrim would never again successfully raid their villages. They named it Chimarvamidium, the Hope of the Chimer.

Barif has the golem brought to his chambers with all his housethanes. There they tested Chimarvamidium further, its strength, its speed, its resiliency. They could find no flaw with its design.

"Imagine when the naked barbarians first meet this on one of their raids," laughed one of the housethanes.

"It is only unfortunate that it resembles a Dwemer instead of one of our own," mused Karenithil Barif. "It is revolting to think that they will have a greater respect for our other enemies than us."

"I think we should never accepted the peace terms that we did," said another, one of the most aggressive of the housethanes. "Is it too late to surprise the warlord Sthovin with an attack?"

"It is never too late to attack," said Barif. "But what of his great armored warriors?"
"I understand," said Barif's spymaster. "That his soldiers always wake at dawn. If we strike an hour before, we can catch them defenseless, before they've had a chance to bathe, let alone don their armor."

"If we capture their armorer Jnaggo, then we too would know the secrets of blacksmithery," said Barif. "Let it be done. We attack tomorrow, an hour before dawn."

So it was settled. The Chimer army marched at night, and swarmed into the Dwemer camp. They were relying on Chimarvamidium to lead the first wave, but it malfunctioned and began attacking the Chimer's own troops. Added to that, the Dwemer were fully armored, well-rested, and eager for battle. The surprise was turned, and most of the high-ranking Chimer, including Karenithil Barif the Beast, were captured.

Though they were too proud to ask, Sthovin explained to them that he had been warned of their attack by a Calling by one of his men.

"What man of yours is in our camp?" sneered Barif.

Chimarvamidium, standing erect by the side of the captured, removed its head. Within its metal body was Jnaggo, the armorer.

"A Dwemer child of eight can create a golem," he explained. "But only a truly great warrior and armorer can pretend to be one."

Publisher's Note:

This is one of the few tales in this collection, which can actually be traced to the Dwemer. The wording of the story is quite different from older versions in Aldmeris, but the essence is the same. "Chimarvamidium" may be the Dwemer "Nchmarthumidamz." This word occurs several times in plans of Dwemer armor and Animunculi, but it's meaning is not known. It is almost certainly not "Hope of the Chimer," however.

The Dwemer were probably the first to use heavy armors. It is important to note how a man dressed in armor could fool many of the Chimer in this story. Also note how the Chimer warriors react. When this story was first told, armor that covered the whole body must have still been uncommon and new, whereas even then, Dwemer creations like golems and centurions were well known.

In a rare scholarly moment, Marobar Sul leaves a few pieces of the original story intact, such as parts of the original line in Aldmeris, "A Dwemer of eight can create a golem, but an eight of Dwemer can become one."

Another aspect of this legend that scholars like myself find interesting is the mention of "the Calling." In this legend and in others, there is a suggestion that the Dwemer race as a whole had some sort of silent and magickal communication. There are records of the Psijic Order which suggest they, too, share this secret. Whatever the case, there are no documented spells of "calling." The Cyrodiil historian Borgusilus Malier first proposed this as a solution to the disappearance of the Dwemer. He theorized that in 1E 668, the Dwemer enclaves were called together by one of their powerful philosopher-sorcerers ("Kagrnak" in some documents) to embark on a great journey, one of such sublime profundity that they abandoned all their cities and lands to join the quest to foreign climes as an entire culture.
Scene: The Imperial City, Cyrodiil  
Date: 7 Frost Fall, 3E 397

It seemed as if the palace had always housed the Atrius Building Commission, the company of clerks and estate agents who authored and notarized nearly every construction of any note in the Empire. It had stood for two hundred and fifty years, since the reign of the Emperor Magnus, a plain-fronted and austere hall on a minor but respectable plaza in the Imperial City. Energetic and ambitious middle-class lads and ladies worked there, as well as complacent middle-aged ones like Decumus Scotti. No one could imagine a world without the Commission, least of all Scotti. To be accurate, he could not imagine a world without himself in the Commission.

"Lord Atrius is perfectly aware of your contributions," said the managing clerk, closing the shutter that demarcated Scotti's office behind him. "But you know that things have been difficult."

"Yes," said Scotti, stiffly.

"Lord Vanech's men have been giving us a lot of competition lately, and we must be more efficient if we are to survive. Unfortunately, that means releasing some of our historically best but presently underachieving senior clerks."

"I understand. Can't be helped."

"I'm glad that you understand," smiled the managing clerk, smiling thinly and withdrawing. "Please have your room cleared immediately."

Scotti began the task of organizing all his work to pass on to his successor. It would probably be young Imbrallius who would take most of it on, which was as it should be, he considered philosophically. The lad knew how to find business. Scotti wondered idly what the fellow would do with the contracts for the new statue of St Alessia for which the Temple of the One had applied. Probably invent a clerical error, blame it on his old predecessor Decumus Scotti, and require an additional cost to rectify.

"I have correspondence for Decumus Scotti of the Atrius Building Commission."

Scotti looked up. A fat-faced courier had entered his office and was thrusting forth a sealed scroll. He handed the boy a gold piece, and opened it up. By the poor penmanship, atrocious
spelling and grammar, and overall unprofessional tone, it was manifestly evident who the writer was. Liodes Jurus, a fellow clerk some years before, who had left the Commission after being accused of unethical business practices.

"Dear Sckotti,

I imagine you alway wondered what happened to me, and the last place you would have expected to find me is out in the woods. But that's exactly where I am. Ha ha. If you're smart and want to make a lot of extra gold for Lord Atrius (and yourself, ha ha), you'll come down to Vallinwood too. If you haven't or have been following the politics here lately, you may or may not know that there's been a war between the Boshmer and their neighbours Elswere over the past two years. Things have only just calm down, and there's a lot that needs to be rebuilt.

Now I've got more business than I can handle, but I need someone with some clout, someone representing a respected agency to get the quill in the ink. That someone is you, my friend. Come & meet me at the Mother Paskos Tavern in Falinnesti, Vallinwood. I'll be here 2 weeks and you won't be sorry.

-- Jurus

P.S.: Bring a wagonload of timber if you can."

"What do you have there, Scotti?" asked a voice.

Scotti started. It was Imbrallius, his damnably handsome face peeking through the shutters, smiling in that way that melted the hearts of the stingiest of patrons and the roughest of stonemasons. Scotti shoved the letter in his jacket pocket.

"Personal correspondence," he sniffed. "I'll be cleared up here in a just a moment."

"I don't want to hurry you," said Imbrallius, grabbing a few sheets of blank contracts from Scotti's desk. "I've just gone through a stack, and the junior scribes hands are all cramping up, so I thought you wouldn't miss a few."

The lad vanished. Scotti retrieved the letter and read it again. He thought about his life, something he rarely did. It seemed a sea of gray with a black insurmountable wall looming. There was only one narrow passage he could see in that wall. Quickly, before he had a moment to reconsider it, he grabbed a dozen of the blank contracts with the shimmering gold leaf ATRIUS BUILDING COMMISSION BY APPOINTMENT OF HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY and hid them in the satchel with his personal effects.

The next day he began his adventure with a giddy lack of hesitation. He arranged for a seat in a caravan bound for Valenwood, the single escorted conveyance to the southeast leaving the Imperial City that week. He had scarcely hours to pack, but he remembered to purchase a wagonload of timber.
"It will be extra gold to pay for a horse to pull that," frowned the convoy head.

"So I anticipated," smiled Scotti with his best Imbrallius grin.

Ten wagons in all set off that afternoon through the familiar Cyrodilic countryside. Past fields of wildflowers, gently rolling woodlands, friendly hamlets. The clop of the horses' hooves against the sound stone road reminded Scotti that the Atrius Building Commission constructed it. Five of the eighteen necessary contracts for its completion were drafted by his own hand.

"Very smart of you to bring that wood along," said a gray-whiskered Breton man next to him on his wagon. "You must be in Commerce."

"Of a sort," said Scotti, in a way he hoped was mysterious, before introducing himself: "Decumus Scotti."

"Gryf Mallon," said the man. "I'm a poet, actually a translator of old Bosmer literature. I was researching some newly discovered tracts of the Mnoriad Pley Bar two years ago when the war broke out and I had to leave. You are no doubt familiar with the Mnoriad, if you're aware of the Green Pact."

Scotti thought the man might be speaking perfect gibberish, but he nodded his head.

"Naturally, I don't pretend that the Mnoriad is as renowned as the Meh Ayleidion, or as ancient as the Dansir Gol, but I think it has a remarkable significance to understanding the nature of the merelithic Bosmer mind. The origin of the Wood Elf aversion to cutting their own wood or eating any plant material at all, yet paradoxically their willingness to import plantstuff from other cultures, I feel can be linked to a passage in the Mnoriad," Mallon shuffled through some of his papers, searching for the appropriate text.

To Scotti's vast relief, the carriage soon stopped to camp for the night. They were high on a bluff over a gray stream, and before them was the great valley of Valenwood. Only the cry of seabirds declared the presence of the ocean to the bay to the west: here the timber was so tall and wide, twisting around itself like an impossible knot begun eons ago, to be impenetrable. A few more modest trees, only fifty feet to the lowest branches, stood on the cliff at the edge of camp. The sight was so alien to Scotti and he found himself so anxious about the proposition of entering the wilderness that he could not imagine sleeping.

Fortunately, Mallon had supposed he had found another academic with a passion for the riddles of ancient cultures. Long into the night, he recited Bosmer verse in the original and in his own translation, sobbing and bellowing and whispering wherever appropriate. Gradually, Scotti began to feel drowsy, but a sudden crack of wood snapping made him sit straight up.

"What was that?"

Mallon smiled: "I like it too. 'Convocation in the malignity of the moonless speculum, a dance of fire --'"

"There are some enormous birds up in the trees moving around," whispered Scotti, pointing in the direction of the dark shapes above.
"I wouldn't worry about that," said Mallon, irritated with his audience. "Now listen to how the poet characterizes Herma-Mora's invocation in the eighteenth stanza of the fourth book."

The dark shapes in the trees were some of them perched like birds, others slithered like snakes, and still others stood up straight like men. As Mallon recited his verse, Scotti watched the figures softly leap from branch to branch, half-gliding across impossible distances for anything without wings. They gathered in groups and then reorganized until they had spread to every tree around the camp. Suddenly they plummeted from the heights.

"Mara!" cried Scotti. "They're falling like rain!"

"Probably seed pods," Mallon shrugged, not turning around. "Some of the trees have remarkable --"

The camp erupted into chaos. Fires burst out in the wagons, the horses wailed from mortal blows, casks of wine, fresh water, and liquor gushed their contents to the ground. A nimble shadow dashed past Scotti and Mallon, gathering sacks of grain and gold with impossible agility and grace. Scotti had only one glance at it, lit up by a sudden nearby burst of flame. It was a sleek creature with pointed ears, wide yellow eyes, mottled pied fur and a tail like a whip.

" Werewolf," he whimpered, shrinking back.

"Cathay-raht," groaned Mallon. "Much worse. Khajiti cousins or some such thing, come to plunder."

"Are you sure?"

As quickly as they struck, the creatures retreated, diving off the bluff before the battlemage and knight, the caravan's escorts, had fully opened their eyes. Mallon and Scotti ran to the precipice and saw a hundred feet below the tiny figures dash out of the water, shake themselves, and disappear into the wood.

" Werewolves aren't acrobats like that," said Mallon. "They were definitely Cathay-raht. Bastard thieves. Thank Stendarr they didn't realize the value of my notebooks. It wasn't a complete loss."
It was a complete loss. The Cathay-Raht had stolen or destroyed almost every item of value in the caravan in just a few minutes' time. Decumus Scotti's wagonload of wood he had hoped to trade with the Bosmer had been set on fire and then toppled off the bluff. His clothing and contracts were tattered and ground into the mud of dirt mixed with spilt wine. All the pilgrims, merchants, and adventurers in the group moaned and wept as they gathered the remnants of their belongings by the rising sun of the dawn.

"I best not tell anyone that I managed to hold onto my notes for my translation of the Mnoriad Pley Bar," whispered the poet Gryf Mallon. "They'd probably turn on me."

Scotti politely declined the opportunity of telling Mallon just how little value he himself placed on the man's property. Instead, he counted the coins in his purse. Thirty-four gold pieces. Very little indeed for an entrepreneur beginning a new business.

"Hoy!" came a cry from the wood. A small party of Bosmer emerged from the thicket, clad in leather mail and bearing arms. "Friend or foe?"

"Neither," growled the convoy head.

"You must be the Cyrodiils," laughed the leader of the group, a tall skeleton-thin youth with a sharp vulpine face. "We heard you were en route. Evidently, so did our enemies."

"I thought the war was over," muttered one of the caravan's now ruined merchants.

The Bosmer laughed again: "No act of war. Just a little border enterprise. You are going on to Falinesti?"

"I'm not," the convoy head shook his head. "As far as I'm concerned, my duty is done. No more horses, no more caravan. Just a fat profit loss to me."

The men and women crowded around the man, protesting, threatening, begging, but he refused to step foot in Valenwood. If these were the new times of peace, he said, he'd rather come back for the next war.

Scotti tried a different route and approached the Bosmer. He spoke with an authoritative but friendly voice, the kind he used in negotiations with peevish carpenters: "I don't suppose you'd consider escorting me to Falinesti. I'm a representative for an important Imperial agency, the Atrius Building Commission, here to help repair and alleviate some of the problems the war with the Khajiit brought to your province. Patriotism --"

"Twenty gold pieces, and you must carry your own gear if you have any left," replied the Bosmer.
Scotti reflected that negotiations with peevish carpenters rarely went his way either.

Six eager people had enough gold on them for payment. Among those without funds was the poet, who appealed to Scotti for assistance.

"I'm sorry, Gryf, I only have fourteen gold left over. Not even enough for a decent room when I get to Falinesti. I really would help you if I could," said Scotti, persuading himself that it was true.

The band of six and their Bosmer escorts began the descent down a rocky path along the bluff. Within an hour's time, they were deep in the jungles of Valenwood. A never-ending canopy of hues of browns and greens obscured the sky. A millennia's worth of fallen leaves formed a deep, wormy sea of putrefaction beneath their feet. Several miles were crossed wading through the slime. For several more, they took a labyrinthian path across fallen branches and the low-hanging boughs of giant trees.

All the while, hour after hour, the inexhaustible Bosmer host moved so fast, the Cyrodiils struggled to keep from being left behind. A red-faced little merchant with short legs took a bad step on a rotten branch and nearly fell. His fellow provincials had to help him up. The Bosmer paused only a moment, their eyes continually darting to the shadows in the trees above before moving on at their usual expeditious pace.

"What are they so nervous about?" wheezed the merchant irritably. "More Cathay-Raht?"

"Don't be ridiculous," laughed the Bosmer unconvincingly. "Khajiiti this far into Valenwood? In times of peace? They'd never dare."

When the group passed high enough above the swamp that the smell was somewhat dissipated, Scotti felt a sudden pang of hunger. He was used to four meals a day in the Cyrodilic custom. Hours of nonstop exertion without food was not part of his regimen as a comfortably paid clerk. He pondered, feeling somewhat delirious, how long they had been trotting through the jungle. Twelve hours? Twenty? A week? Time was meaningless. Sunlight was only sporadic through the vegetative ceiling. Phosphorescent molds on the trees and in the muck below provided the only regular illumination.

"Is it at all possible for us to rest and eat?" he hollered to his host up ahead.

"We're near to Falinesti," came the echoing reply. "Lots of food there."

The path continued upward for several hours more across a clot of fallen logs, rising up to the first and then the second boughs of the tree line. As they rounded a long corner, the travelers found themselves midway up a waterfall that fell a hundred feet or more. No one had the energy to complain as they began pulling up the stacks of rock, agonizing foot by foot. The Bosmer escorts disappeared into the mist, but Scotti kept climbing until there was no more rock left. He wiped the sweat and river water from his eyes.

Falinesti spread across the horizon before him. Sprawling across both banks of the river stood the mighty graht-oak city, with groves and orchards of lesser trees crowding it like supplicants before their king. At a lesser scale, the tree that formed the moving city would have been extraordinary: gnarled and twisted with a gorgeous crown of gold and green,
dripping with vines and shining with sap. At a mile tall and half as wide, it was the most
magnificent thing Scotti had ever seen. If he had not been a starving man with the soul of a
clerk, he would have sung.

"There you are," said the leader of the escorts. "Not too far a walk. You should be glad it's
wintertide. In summertide, the city's on the far south end of the province."

Scotti was lost as to how to proceed. The sight of the vertical metropolis where people moved
about like ants disoriented all his sensibilities.

"You wouldn't know of an inn called," he paused for a moment, and then pulled Jurus's letter
from his pocket. "Something like 'Mother Paskos Tavern'?"

"Mother Pascost?" the lead Bosmer laughed his familiar contemptuous laugh. "You won't
want to stay there? Visitors always prefer the Aysia Hall in the top boughs. It's expensive, but
very nice."

"I'm meeting someone at Mother Pascost's Tavern."

"If you've made up your mind to go, take a lift to Havel Slump and ask for directions there.
Just don't get lost and fall asleep in the western cross."

This apparently struck the youth's friends as a very witty jest, and so it was with their laughter
echoing behind him that Scotti crossed the writhing root system to the base of Falinesti. The
ground was littered with leaves and refuse, and from moment to moment a glass or a bone
would plummet from far above, so he walked with his neck crooked to have warning. An
intricate network of platforms anchored to thick vines slipped up and down the slick trunk of
the city with perfect grace, manned by operators with arms as thick as an ox's belly. Scotti
approaches the nearest fellow at one of the platforms, who was idly smoking from a glass
pipe.

"I was wondering if you might take me to Havel Slump."

The mer nodded and within a few minutes time, Scotti was two hundred feet in the air at a
crook between two mighty branches. Curled webs of moss stretched unevenly across the fork,
forming a sharing roof for several dozen small buildings. There were only a few souls in the
alley, but around the bend ahead, he could hear the sound of music and people. Scotti tipped
the Falinesti Platform Ferryman a gold piece and asked for the location of Mother Pascost's
Tavern.

"Straight ahead of you, sir, but you won't find anyone there," the Ferryman explained,
pointing in the direction of the noise. "Morndas everyone in Havel Slump has revelry."

Scotti walked carefully along the narrow street. Though the ground felt as solid as the marble
avenues of the Imperial City, there were slick cracks in the bark that exposed fatal drops into
the river. He took a moment to sit down, to rest and get used to the view from the heights. It
was a beautiful day for certain, but it took Scotti only a few minutes of contemplation to rise
up in alarm. A jolly little raft anchored down stream below him had distinctly moved several
inches while he watched it. But it hadn't moved at all. He had. Together with everything
around him. It was no metaphor: the city of Falinesti walked. And, considering its size, it moved quickly.

Scotti rose to his feet and into a cloud of smoke that drifted out from around the bend. It was the most delicious roast he had ever smelled. The clerk forgot his fear and ran.

The "revelry" as the Ferryman had termed it took place on an enormous platform tied to the tree, wide enough to be a plaza in any other city. A fantastic assortment of the most amazing people Scotti had ever seen were jammed shoulder-to-shoulder together, many eating, many more drinking, and some dancing to a lutist and singer perched on an offshoot above the crowd. They were largely Bosmer, true natives clad in colorful leather and bones, with a close minority of orcs. Whirling through the throng, dancing and bellowing at one another were a hideous ape people. A few heads bobbing over the tops of the crowd belonged not, as Scotti first assumed, to very tall people, but to a family of centaurs.

"Care for some mutton?" queried a wizened old mer who roasted an enormous beast on some red-hot rocks.

Scotti quickly paid him a gold piece and devoured the leg he was given. And then another gold piece and another leg. The fellow chuckled when Scotti began choking on a piece of gristle, and handed him a mug of a frothing white drink. He drank it and felt a quiver run through his body as if he were being tickled.

"What is that?" Scotti asked.

"Jagga. Fermented pig's milk. I can let you have a flagon of it and a bit more mutton for another gold."

Scotti agreed, paid, gobbled down the meat, and took the flagon with him as he slipped into the crowd. His co-worker Liodes Jurus, the man who had told him to come to Valenwood, was nowhere to be seen. When the flagon was a quarter empty, Scotti stopped looking for Jurus. When it was half empty, he was dancing with the group, oblivious to the broken planks and gaps in the fencework. At three quarters empty, he was trading jokes with a group of creatures whose language was completely alien to him. By the time the flagon was completely drained, he was asleep, snoring, while the revelry continued on all around his supine body.

The next morning, still asleep, Scotti had the sensation of someone kissing him. He made a face to return the favor, but a pain like fire spread through his chest and forced him to open his eyes. There was an insect the size of a large calf sitting on him, crushing him, its spiky legs holding him down while a central spiral-bladed vortex of a mouth tore through his shirt. He screamed and thrashed but the beast was too strong. It had found its meal and it was going to finish it.

It's over, thought Scotti wildly, I should have never left home. I could have stayed in the City, and perhaps found work with Lord Vanech. I could have begun again as a junior clerk and worked my way back up.

Suddenly the mouth released itself. The creature shivered once, expelled a burst of yellow bile, and died.
"Got one!" cried a voice, not too distantly.

For a moment, Scotti lay still. His head throbbed and his chest burned. Out of the corner of his eye he saw movement. Another of the horrible monsters was scurried towards him. He scrambled, trying to push himself free, but before he could come out, there was a sound of a bow cracking and an arrow pierced the second insect.

"Good shot!" cried another voice. "Get the first one again! I just saw it move a little!"

This time, Scotti felt the impact of the bolt hit the carcass. He cried out, but he could hear how muffled his voice was by the beetle's body. Cautiously, he tried sliding a foot out and rolling under, but the movement apparently had the effect of convincing the archers that the creature still lived. A volley of arrows was launched forth. Now the beast was sufficiently perforated so pools of its blood, and likely the blood of its victims, began to seep out onto Scotti's body.

When Scotti was a lad, before he grew too sophisticated for such sports, he had often gone to the Imperial Arena for the competitions of war. He recalled a great veteran of the fights, when asked, telling him his secret, "Whenever I'm in doubt of what to do, and I have a shield, I stay behind it."

Scotti followed that advice. After an hour, when he no longer heard arrows being fired, he threw aside the remains of the bug and leapt as quickly as he could to a stand. It was not a moment too soon. A gang of eight archers had their bows pointing his direction, ready to fire. When they saw him, they laughed.

"Didn't anyone ever tell you not to sleep in the western cross? How're we going to exterminate all the hoarvors if you drunks keep feeding 'em?"

Scotti shook his head and walked back along the platform, round the bend, to Havel Slump. He was bloodied and torn and tired and he had far too much fermented pig's milk. All he wanted was a proper place to lie down. He stepped into Mother Pascost's Tavern, a dank place, wet with sap, smelling of mildew.

"My name is Decumus Scotti," he said. "I was hoping you have someone named Jurus staying here."

"Decumus Scotti?" pondered the fleshy proprietress, Mother Pascost herself. "I've heard that name. Oh, you must be the fellow he left the note for. Let me go see if I can find it."
Mother Pascost disappeared into the sordid hole that was her tavern, and emerged a moment later with a scrap of paper with Liodes Jurus's familiar scrawl. Decumus Scotti held it up before a patch of sunlight that had found its way through the massive boughs of the tree city, and read.

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Sckotti,
So you made it to Falinnesti, Vallinwood! Congradulatens! Im sure you had quit a adventure getting here. Unfortonitly, Im not here anymore as you probaby guess. Theres a town down rivver called Athie Im at. Git a bote and join me! Its ideal! I hope you brot a lot of contracks, cause these peple need a lot of building done. They wer close to the war, you see, but not so close they dont have any mony left to pay. Ha ha. Meat me down here as son as you can.

-- Jurus

--

So, Scotti pondered, Jurus had left Falinesti and gone to some place called Athie. Given his poor penmanship and ghastly spelling, it could equally well be Athy, Aphy, Othry, Imthri, Urtha, or Krakamaka. The sensible thing to do, Scotti knew, was to call this adventure over and try to find some way to get back home to the Imperial City. He was no mercenary devoted to a life of thrills: he was, or at least had been, a senior clerk at a successful private building commission. Over the last few weeks, he had been robbed by the Cathay-Raht, taken on a death march through the jungle by a gang of giggling Bosmeri, half-starved to death, drugged with fermented pig's milk, nearly slain by some kind of giant tick, and attacked by archers. He was filthy, exhausted, and had, he counted, ten gold pieces to his name. Now the man whose proposal brought him to the depths of misery was not even there. It was both judicious and seemly to abandon the enterprise entirely.

And yet, a small but distinct voice in his head told him: You have been chosen. You have no other choice but to see this through.

Scotti turned to the stout old woman, Mother Pascost, who had been watching him curiously: "I was wondering if you knew of a village that was at the edge of the recent conflict with Elsweyr. It's called something like Ath-ie?"

"You must mean Athay," she grinned. "My middle lad, Viglil, he manages a dairy down there. Beautiful country, right on the river. Is that where your friend went?"

"Yes," said Scotti. "Do you know the fastest way to get there?"
After a short conversation, an even shorter ride to Falinesti's roots by way of the platforms, and a jog to the river bank, Scotti was negotiating transport with a huge fair-haired Bosmer with a face like a pickled carp. He called himself Captain Balfix, but even Scotti with his sheltered life could recognize him for what he was. A retired pirate for hire, a smuggler for certain, and probably much worse. His ship, which had clearly been stolen in the distant past, was a bent old Imperial sloop.

"Fifty gold and we'll be in Athay in two days time," boomed Captain Balfix expansively.

"I have ten, no, sorry, nine gold pieces," replied Scotti, and feeling the need for explanation, added, "I had ten, but I gave one to the Platform Ferryman to get me down here."

"Nine is just as fine," said the captain agreeably. "Truth be told, I was going to Athay whether you paid me or not. Make yourself comfortable on the boat, we'll be leaving in just a few minutes."

Decumus Scotti boarded the vessel, which sat low in the water of the river, stacked high with crates and sacks that spilled out of the hold and galley and onto the deck. Each was marked with stamps advertising the most innocuous substances: copper scraps, lard, ink, High Rock meal (marked 'For Cattle'), tar, fish jelly. Scotti's imagination reeled picturing what sorts of illicit imports were truly aboard.

It took more than those few minutes for Captain Balfix to haul in the rest of his cargo, but in an hour, the anchor was up and they were sailing downriver towards Athay. The green gray water barely rippled, only touched by the fingers of the breeze. Lush plant life crowded the banks, obscuring from sight all the animals that sang and roared at one another. Lulled by the serene surroundings, Scotti drifted to sleep.

At night, he awoke and gratefully accepted some clean clothes and food from Captain Balfix.

"Why are you going to Athay, if I may ask?" queried the Bosmer.

"I'm meeting a former colleague there. He asked me to come down from the Imperial City where I worked for the Atrius Building Commission to negotiate some contracts," Scotti took another bite of the dried sausages they were sharing for dinner. "We're going to try to repair and refurbish whatever bridges, roads, and other structures that got damaged in the recent war with the Khajiiti."

"It's been a hard two years," the captain nodded his head. "Though I suppose good for me and the likes of you and your friend. Trade routes cut off. Now they think there's going to be war with the Summurset Isles, you heard that?"

Scotti shook his head.

"I've done my share of smuggling skooma down the coast, even helping some revolutionary types escape the Mane's wrath, but now the wars've made me a legitimate trader, a businessman. The first casualties of war is always the corrupted."

Scotti said he was sorry to hear that, and they lapsed into silence, watching the stars and moons' reflection on the still water. The next day, Scotti awoke to find the captain wrapped up
in his sail, torpid from alcohol, singing in a low, slurred voice. When he saw Scotti rise, he offered his flagon of jagga.

"I learned my lesson during revelry at western cross."

The captain laughed, and then burst into tears, "I don't want to be legitimate. Other pirates I used to know are still raping and stealing and smuggling and selling nice folk like you into slavery. I swear to you, I never thought the first time that I ran a real shipment of legal goods that my life would turn out like this. Oh, I know, I could go back to it, but Baan Dar knows not after all I've seen. I'm a ruined man."

Scotti helped the weeping mer out of the sail, murmuring words of reassurance. Then he added, "Forgive me for changing the subject, but where are we?"

"Oh," moaned Captain Balfix miserably. "We made good time. Athay's right around the bend in the river."

"Then it looks like Athay's on fire," said Scotti, pointing. A great plume of smoke black as pitch was rising above the trees. As they drifted around the bend, they next saw the flames, and then the blackened skeletal remains of the village. Dying, blazing villagers leapt from rocks into the river. A cacophony of wailing met their ears, and they could see, roaming along the edges of the town, the figures of Khajiiti soldiers bearing torches.

"Baan Dar bless me!" slurred the captain. "The war's back on!"

"Oh, no," whimpered Scotti. The sloop drifted with the current toward the opposite shore away from the fiery town. Scotti turned his attention there, and the sanctuary it offered. Just a peaceful arbor, away from the horror. There was a shudder of leaves in two of the trees and a dozen lithe Khajiit dropped to the ground, armed with bows.

"They see us," hissed Scotti. "And they've got bows!"

"Well, of course they have bows," snarled Captain Balfix. "We Bosmer may have invented the bloody things, but we didn't think to keep them secret, you bloody bureaucrat."

"Now, they're setting their arrows on fire!"

"Yes, they do that sometimes."

"Captain, they're shooting at us! They're shooting at us with flaming arrows!"

"Ah, so they are," the captain agreed. "The aim here is to avoid being hit."

But hit they were, and very shortly thereafter. Even worse, the second volley of arrows hit the supply of pitch, which ignited in a tremendous blue blaze. Scotti grabbed Captain Balfix and they leapt overboard just before the ship and all its cargo disintegrated. The shock of the cold
water brought the Bosmer into temporary sobriety. He called to Scotti, who was already swimming as fast as he could toward the bend.

"Master Decumus, where do you think you're swimming to?"

"Back to Falinesti!" cried Scotti.

"It will take you days, and by the time you get there, everyone will know about the attack on Athay! They'll never let anyone they don't know in! The closest village downriver is Grenos, maybe they'll give us shelter!"

Scotti swam back to the captain and side-by-side they began paddling in the middle of the river, past the burning residuum of the village. He thanked Mara that he had learned to swim. Many a Cyrodiil did not, as largely land-locked as the Imperial Province was. Had he been raised in Mir Corrup or Artemon, he might have been doomed, but the Imperial City itself was encircled by water, and every lad and lass there knew how to cross without a boat. Even those who grew up to be clerks and not adventurers.

Captain Balfix's sobriety faded as he grew used to the water's temperature. Even in wintertide, the Xylo River was fairly temperate and after a fashion, even comfortable. The Bosmer's strokes were uneven, and he'd stray closer to Scotti and then further away, pushing ahead and then falling behind.

Scotti looked to the shore to his right: the flames had caught the trees like tinder. Behind them was an inferno, with which they were barely keeping pace. To the shore on their left, all looked fair, until he saw a tremble in the river-reeds, and then what caused it. A pride of the largest cats he had ever seen. They were auburn-haired, green-eyed beasts with jaws and teeth to match his wildest nightmares. And they were watching the two swimmers, and keeping pace.

"Captain Balfix, we can't go to either that shore or the other one, or we'll be parboiled or eaten," Scotti whispered. "Try to even your kicking and your strokes. Breath like you would normally. If you're feeling tired, tell me, and we'll float on our backs for a while."

Anyone who has had the experience of giving rational advice to a drunkard would understand the hopelessness. Scotti kept pace with the captain, slowing himself, quickening, drifting left and right, while the Bosmer moaned old ditties from his pirate days. When he wasn't watching his companion, he watched the cats on the shore. After a stretch, he turned to his right. Another village had caught fire. Undoubtedly, it was Grenos. Scotti stared at the blazing fury, awed by the sight of the destruction, and did not hear that the captain had ceased to sing.

When he turned back, Captain Balfix was gone.

Scotti dove into the murky depths of the river over and over again. There was nothing to be done. When he surfaced after his final search, he saw that the giant cats had moved on, perhaps assuming that he too had drowned. He continued his lonely swim downriver. A tributary, he noted, had formed a final barrier, keeping the flames from spreading further. But there were no more towns. After several hours, he began to ponder the wisdom of going ashore. Which shore was the question.
He was spared the decision. Ahead of him was a rocky island with a bonfire. He did not know if he were intruding on a party of Bosmeri or Khajiiti, only that he could swim no more. With straining, aching muscles, he pulled himself onto the rocks.

They were Bosmer refugees he gathered, even before they told him. Roasting over the fire was the remains of one of the giant cats that had been stalking him through the jungle on the opposite shore.

"Senche-Tiger," said one of the young warriors ravenously. "It's no animal -- it's as smart as any Cathay-Raht or Ohmes or any other bleeding Khajiiti. Pity this one drowned. I would have gladly killed it. You'll like the meat, though. Sweet, from all the sugar these asses eat."

Scotti did not know if he was capable of eating a creature as intelligent as a man or mer, but he surprised himself, as he had done several times over the last days. It was rich, succulent, and sweet, like sugared pork, but no seasonings had been added. He surveyed the crowd as he ate. A sad lot, some still weeping for lost family members. They were the survivors of both the villages of Grenos and Athay, and war was on every person's lips. Why had the Khajiiti attacked again? Why -- specifically directed at Scotti, as a Cyrodiil -- why was the Emperor not enforcing peace in his provinces?

"I was to meet another Cyrodiil," he said to a Bosmer maiden who he understood to be from Athay. "His name was Liodes Jurus. I don't suppose you know what might have happened to him."

"I don't know your friend, but there were many Cyrodiils in Athay when the fire came," said the girl. "Some of them, I think, left quickly. They were going to Vindisi, inland, in the jungle. I am going there tomorrow, so are many of us. If you wish, you may come as well."

Decumus Scotti nodded solemnly. He made himself as comfortable as he could in the stony ground of the river island, and somehow, after much effort, he fell asleep. But he did not sleep well.
Eighteen Bosmeri and one Cyrodilic former senior clerk for an Imperial building commission trudged through the jungle westward from the Xylo River to the ancient village of Vindisi. For Decumus Scotti, the jungle was hostile, unfamiliar ground. The enormous vermiculated trees filled the bright morning with darkness, and resembled nothing so much as grasping claws, bent on impeding their progress. Even the fronds of the low plants quivered with malevolent energy. What was worse, he was not alone in his anxiety. His fellow travelers, the natives who had survived the Khajiit attacks on the villages of Grenos and Athay, wore faces of undisguised fear.

There was something sentient in the jungle, and not merely the mad but benevolent indigenous spirits. In his peripheral vision, Scotti could see the shadows of the Khajiiti following the refugees, leaping from tree to tree. When he turned to face them, the lithe forms vanished into the gloom as if they had never been there. But he knew he had seen them. And the Bosmeri saw them too, and quickened their pace.

After eighteen hours, bitten raw by insects, scratched by a thousand thorns, they emerged into a valley clearing. It was night, but a row of blazing torches greeted them, illuminating the leather-wrought tents and jumbled stones of the hamlet of Vindisi. At the end of the valley, the torches marked a sacred site, a gnarled bower of trees pressed closed together to form a temple. Wordlessly, the Bosmeri walked the torch arcade toward the trees. Scotti followed them. When they reached the solid mass of living wood with only one gaping portal, Scotti could see a dim blue light glowing within. A low sonorous moan from a hundred voices echoed within. The Bosmeri maiden he had been following held out her hand, stopping him.

"You do not understand, but no outsider, not even a friend may enter," she said. "This is a holy place."

Scotti nodded, and watched the refugees march into the temple, heads bowed. Their voices joined with the ones within. When the last wood elf had gone inside, Scotti turned his attention back to the village. There must be food to be had somewhere. A tendril of smoke and a faint whiff of roasting venison beyond the torchlight led him.

They were five Cyrodiils, two Bretons, and a Nord, the group gathered around a campfire of glowing white stones, pulling steaming strips of meat from the cadaver of a great stag. At Scotti's approach, they rose up, all but the Nord who was distracted by his hunk of animal flesh.

"Good evening, sorry to interrupt, but I was wondering if I might have a little something to eat. I'm afraid I'm rather hungry, after walking all day with some refugees from Grenos and Athay."

They bade him to sit down and eat, and introduced themselves.
"So the war's back on, it seems," said Scotti amiably.

"Best thing for these effete do-nothings," replied the Nord in between bites. "I've never seen such a lazy culture. Now they've got the Khajiiti striking them on land, and the high elves at sea. If there's any province that deserves a little distress, it's damnable Valenwood."

"I don't see how they're so offensive to you," laughed one of the Bretons.

"They're congenital thieves, even worse than the Khajiiti because they are so blessed meek in their aggression," the Nord spat out a gob of fat which sizzled on the hot stones of the fire. "They spread their forests into territory that doesn't belong to them, slowly infiltrating their neighbors, and they're puzzled when Elsweyr shoves back at them. They're all villains of the worst order."

"What are you doing here?" asked Scotti.

"I'm a diplomat from the court of Jehenna," muttered the Nord, returning to his food.

"What about you, what are you doing here?" asked one of the Cyrodiils.

"I work for Lord Atrius's building commission in the Imperial City," said Scotti. "One of my former colleagues suggested that I come down to Valenwood. He said the war was over, and I could contract a great deal of business for my firm rebuilding what was lost. One disaster after another, and I've lost all my money, I'm in the middle of a rekindling of war, and I cannot find my former colleague."

"Your former colleague," murmured another of the Cyrodiils, who had introduced himself as Reglius. "He wasn't by any chance named Liodes Jurus, was he?"

"You know him?"

"He lured me down to Valenwood in nearly the exact same circumstances," smiled Reglius, grimly. "I worked for your employer's competitor, Lord Vanech's men, where Liodes Jurus also formerly worked. He wrote to me, asking that I represent an Imperial building commission and contract some post-war construction. I had just been released from my employment, and I thought that if I brought some new business, I could have my job back. Jurus and I met in Athay, and he said he was going to arrange a very lucrative meeting with the Silvenar."

Scotti was stunned: "Where is he now?"

"I'm no theologian, so I couldn't say," Reglius shrugged. "He's dead. When the Khajiiti attacked Athay, they began by torching the harbor where Jurus was readying his boat. Or, I should say, my boat since it was purchased with the gold I brought. By the time we were even aware of what was happening enough to flee, everything by the water was ash. The Khajiiti may be animals, but they know how to arrange an attack."

"I think they followed us through the jungle to Vindisi," said Scotti nervously. "There was definitely a group of something jumping along the treetops."
"Probably one of the monkey folk," snorted the Nord. "Nothing to be concerned about."

"When we first came to Vindisi and the Bosmer all entered that tree, they were furious, whispering something about unleashing an ancient terror on their enemies," the Breton shivered, remembering. "They've been there ever since, for over a day and a half now. If you want something to be afraid of, that's the direction to look."

The other Breton, who was a representative of the Daggerfall Mages Guild, was staring off into the darkness while his fellow provincial spoke. "Maybe. But there's something in the jungle too, right on the edge of the village, looking in."

"More refugees maybe?" asked Scotti, trying to keep the alarm out his voice.

"Not unless they're traveling through the trees now," whispered the wizard. The Nord and one of the Cyrodiils grabbed a long tarp of wet leather and pulled it across the fire, instantly extinguishing it without so much as a sizzle. Now Scotti could see the intruders, their elliptical yellow eyes and long cruel blades catching the torchlight. He froze with fear, praying that he too was not so visible to them.

He felt something bump against his back, and gasped.

Reglius's voice hissed from up above: "Be quiet for Mara's sake and climb up here."

Scotti grabbed hold of the knotted double-vine that hung down from a tall tree at the edge of the dead campfire. He scrambled up it as quickly as he could, holding his breath lest any grunt of exertion escape him. At the top of the vine, high above the village, was an abandoned nest from some great bird in a trident-shaped branch. As soon as Scotti had pulled himself into the soft, fragrant straw, Reglius pulled up the vine. No one else was there, and when Scotti looked down, he could see no one below. No one, that is except the Khajiiti, slowly moving toward the glow of the temple tree.

"Thank you," whispered Scotti, deeply touched that a competitor had helped him. He turned away from the village, and saw that the tree's upper branches brushed against the mossy rock walls that surrounded the valley below. "How are you at climbing?"

"You're mad," said Reglius under his breath. "We should stay here until they leave."

"If they burn Vindisi like they did Athay and Grenos, we'll be dead sure as if we were on the ground," Scotti began the slow careful climb up the tree, testing each branch. "Can you see what they're doing?"

"I can't really tell," Reglius stared down into the gloom. "They're at the front of the temple. I think they also have ... it looks like long ropes, trailing off behind them, off into the pass."

Scotti crawled onto the strongest branch that pointed toward the wet, rocky face of the cliff. It was not a far jump at all. So close, in fact, that he could smell the moisture and feel the coolness of the stone. But it was a jump nevertheless, and in his history as a clerk, he had never before leapt from a tree a hundred feet off the ground to a sheer rock. He pictured in his mind's eye the shadows that had pursued him through the jungle from the heights above. How
their legs coiled to spring, how their arms snapped forward in an elegant fluid motion to grasp. He leapt.

His hands grappled for rock, but long thick cords of moss were more accessible. He held hard, but when he tried to plant his feet forward, they slipped up skyward. For a few seconds, he found himself upside down before he managed to pull himself into a more conventional position. There was a narrow outcropping jutting out of the cliff where he could stand and finally exhale.

"Reglius. Reglius. Reglius," Scotti did not dare to call out. In a minute, there was a shaking of branches, and Lord Vanech's man emerged. First his satchel, then his head, then the rest of him. Scotti started to whisper something, but Reglius shook his head violently and pointed downward. One of the Khajiiti was at the base of the tree, peering at the remains of the campfire.

Reglius awkwardly tried to balance himself on the branch, but as strong as it was it was exceedingly difficult with only one free hand. Scotti cupped his palms and then pointed at the satchel. It seemed to pain Reglius to let it out of his grasp, but he relented and tossed it to Scotti.

There was a small, almost invisible hole in the bag, and when Scotti caught it, a single gold coin dropped out. It rang as it bounced against the rock wall on the descent, a high soft sound that seemed like the loudest alarm Scotti had ever heard.

Then many things happened very quickly.

The Cathay-Raht at the base of the tree looked up and gave a loud wail. The other Khajiiti followed in chorus, as the cat below crouched down and then sprung up into the lower branches. Reglius saw it below him, climbing up with impossible dexterity, and panicked. Even before he jumped, Scotti could tell that he was going to fall. With a cry, Reglius the Clerk plunged to the ground, breaking his neck on impact.

A flash of white fire erupted from every crevice of the temple, and the moan of the Bosmeri prayer changed into something terrible and otherworldly. The climbing Cathay-Raht stopped and stared.


It was as if a crack in reality had opened wide. A flood of horrific beasts, tentacled toads, insects of armor and spine, gelatinous serpents, vapiduous beings with the face of gods, all poured forth from the great hollow tree, blind with fury. They tore the Khajiiti in front of the temple to pieces. All the other cats fled for the jungle, but as they did so, they began pulling on the ropes they carried. In a few seconds time, the entire village of Vindisi was boiling with the lunatic apparitions of the Wild Hunt.

Over the babbling, barking, howling horde, Scotti heard the Cyrodiils in hiding cry out as they were devoured. The Nord too was found and eaten, and both Bretons. The wizard had turned himself invisible, but the swarm did not rely on their sight. The tree the Cathay-Raht was in began to sway and rock from the impossible violence beneath it. Scotti looked at the Khajiiti's fear-struck eyes, and held out one of the cords of moss.
The cat's face showed its pitiful gratitude as it leapt for the vine. It didn't have time to entirely replace that expression when Scotti pulled back the cord, and watched it fall. The Hunt consumed it to the bone before it struck the ground.

Scotti's own jump up to the next outcropping of rock was immeasurably more successful. From there, he pulled himself to the top of the cliff and was able to look down into the chaos that had been the village of Vindisi. The Hunt's mass had grown and began to spill out through the pass out of the valley, pursuing the fleeing Khajiiti. It was then that the madness truly began.

In the moons' light, from Scotti's vantage, he could see where the Khajiiti had attached their ropes. With a thunderous boom, an avalanche of boulders poured over the pass. When the dust cleared, he saw that the valley had been sealed. The Wild Hunt had nowhere to turn but on itself.

Scotti turned his head, unable to bear to look at the cannibalistic orgy. The night jungle stood before him, a web of wood. He slung Reglius's satchel over his shoulder, and entered.
Soap! The forest will eat love! Straight ahead! Stupid and a stupid cow!"

The voice boomed out so suddenly that Decumus Scotti jumped. He stared off into the dim jungle glade from which he only heard animal and insect calls, and the low whistling of wind moments before. It was a queer, oddly accented voice of indiscriminate gender, tremulous in its modulations, but unmistakably human. Or, at very least, elven. An isolated Bosmer perhaps with a poor grasp of the Cyrodiilic language. After countless hours of plodding through the dense knot of Valenwood jungle, any voice of slight familiarity sounded wondrous.

"Hello?" he cried.

"Beetles on any names? Certainly yesterday yes!" the voice called back. "Who, what, and when, and mice!"

"I'm afraid I don't understand," replied Scotti, turning toward the brambled tree, thick as a wagon, where the voice had issued. "But you needn't be afraid of me. My name is Decumus Scotti. I'm a Cyrodiil from the Imperial City. I came here to help rebuild Valenwood after the war, you see, and now I'm rather lost."

"Gemstones and grilled slaves ... The war," moaned the voice and broke down into sobs.

"You know about the war? I wasn't sure, I wasn't even sure how far away from the border I am now," Scotti began slowly walking toward the tree. He dropped Reglius's satchel to the ground, and held out his empty hands. "I'm unarmed. I only want to know the way to the closest town. I'm trying to meet my friend, Liodes Jurus, in Silvenar."

"Silvenar!" the voice laughed. It laughed even louder as Scotti circled the tree. "Worms and wine! Worms and wine! Silvenar sings for worms and wine!"

There was nothing to be found anywhere around the tree. "I don't see you. Why are you hiding?"

In frustration born of hunger and exhaustion, he struck the tree trunk. A sudden shiver of gold and red erupted from a hollow nook above, and Scotti was surrounded by six winged creatures scarcely more than a few inches long. Bright crimson eyes were set on either side of tunnel-like protuberances, the animals' always open mouths. They were legless, and their thin, rapidly beating, aureate wings seemed poorly constructed to transport their fat, swollen bellies. And yet, they darted through the air like sparks from a fire. Whirling about the poor clerk, they began chattering what he now understood to be perfect nonsense.
"Wines and worms, how far from the border am I! Academic garnishments, and alas, Liodes Jurus!"

"Hello, I'm afraid I'm unarmed? Smoken flames and the closest town is dear Oblivion."

"Swollen on bad meat, an indigo nimbus, but you needn't be afraid of me!"

"Why are you hiding? Why are you hiding? Before I begin to friend, love me, Lady Zuleika!"

Furious with the mimics, Scotti swung his arms, driving them up into the treetops. He stomped back to the clearing and opened up the satchel again, as he had done some hours before. There was still, unsurprisingly, nothing useful in the bag, and nothing to eat in any corner or pocket. A goodly amount of gold (he smiled grimly, as he had done before, at the irony of being financially solvent in the jungle), a stack of neat blank contracts from Lord Vanech's building commission, some thin cord, and an oiled leather cloak for bad weather. At least, Scotti considered, he had not suffered rain.

A rolling moan of thunder reminded Scotti of what he had suspected for some weeks now. He was cursed.

Within an hour's time, he was wearing the cloak and clawing his way through mud. The trees, which had earlier allowed no sunlight in, provided no shelter against the pounding storm and wind. The only sounds that pierced the pelting of the rain were the mocking calls of the flying creatures, flitting just above, babbling their nonsense. Scotti bellowed at them, threw rocks, but they seemed enamored of his company.

While he was reaching to grab a promising looking stone to hurl at his tormentors, Scotti felt something shift beneath his feet. Wet but solid ground suddenly liquefied and became a rolling tide, rushing him forward. Light as a leaf, he flew head over feet over head, until the mudflow dropped and he continued forward, plunging down into a river twenty-five feet below.

The storm passed quite as instantly as it had arrived. The sun melted the dark clouds and warmed Scotti as he swam for the shore. There, another sign of the Khajiiti incursion into Valenwood greeted him. A small fishing village had stood there once, so recently extinct that it smoldered like a still-warm corpse. Dirt cairns that had once housed fish by the smell of them had been ravaged, their bounty turned to ash. Rafts and skiffs lay broken, scuttled, half-submerged. All the villagers were no more, either dead or refugees far away. Or so he presumed. Something banged against the wall of one of the ruins. Scotti ran to investigate.

"My name is Decumus Scotti?" sang the first winged beast. "I'm a Cyrodiil from? The Imperial City? I came here to help rebuild Valenwood after the war, you see, and now I'm rather lost?"

"I swell to maculate, apeneck!" agreed one of its companions. "I don't see you. Why are you hiding?"

As they fell into chattering, Scotti began to search the rest of the village. Surely the cats had left something behind, a scrap of dried meat, a morsel of fish sausage, anything. But they had been immaculate in their complete annihilation. There was nothing to eat anywhere. Scotti did
find one item of possible use under the tumbled remains of a stone hut. A bow and two arrows made of bone. The string had been lost, likely burned away in the heat of the fire, but he pulled the cord from Reglius's satchel and restrung it.

The creatures flew over and hovered nearby as he worked: "The convent of the sacred Liodes Jurus?"

"You know about the war! Worms and wine, circumscribe a golden host, apeneck!"

The moment the cord was taut, Scotti nocked an arrow and swung around, pulling the string tight against his chest. The winged beasts, having had experience with archers before, shot off in all directions in a blur. They needn't have bothered. Scotti's first arrow dove into the ground three feet in front of him. He swore and retrieved it. The mimics, having likewise had experience with poor archers before, returned at once to hovering nearby and mocking Scotti.

On his second shot, Scotti did much better, in purely technical terms. He remembered how the archers in Falinesti looked when he pulled himself out from under the hoarvor tick, and they were all taking aim at him. He extended his left hand, right hand, and right elbow in a symmetrical line, drawing the bow so his hand touched his jawline, and he could see the creature in his sight like the arrow was a finger he was pointing with. The bolt missed the target by only two feet, but it continued on its trajectory, snapping when it struck a rock wall.

Scotti walked to the river's edge. He had only one arrow left, and perhaps, he considered, it would be most practical to find a slow-moving fish and fire it on that. If he missed, at least there was less of a chance of breaking the shaft, and he could always retrieve it from the water. A rather torpid, whiskered fish rolled by, and he took aim at it.

"My name is Decumus Scotti!" one of the creatures howled, frightening the fish away. "Stupid and a stupid cow! Will you dance a dance in fire!"

Scotti turned and aimed the arrow as he had done before. This time, however, he remembered to plant his feet as the archers had done, seven inches apart, knees straight, left leg slightly forward to meet the angle of his right shoulder. He released the last arrow.

The arrow also proved a serviceable prong for roasting the creature against the smoking hot stones of one of the ruins. Its other companions had disappeared instantly after the beast was slain, and Scotti was able to dine in peace. The meat proved to be delicious, if scarcely more than a first course. He was picking the last of it from the bones, when a boat sailed into view from around the bend of the river. At the helm were Bosmer sailors. Scotti ran to the bank and waved his arms. They averted their eyes and continued past.

"You bloody, callous bastards!" Scotti howled. "Knaves! Hooligans! Apenecks! Scoundrels!"

A gray-whiskered form came out from a hatch, and Scotti immediately recognized him as Gryf Mallon, the poet translator he had met in the caravan from Cyrodiil.

He peered Scotti's direction, and his eyes lit up with delight, "Decumus Scotti! Precisely the man I hoped to see! I want to get your thoughts on a rather puzzling passage in the Mnoriad Pley Bar! It begins 'I went weeping into the world, searching for wonders,' perhaps you're familiar with it?"
"I'd like nothing better than to discuss the Mnoriad Pley Bar with you, Gryf!" Scotti called back. "Would you let me come aboard though first?"

Overjoyed at being on a ship bound for any port at all, Scotti was true to his word. For over an hour as the boat rolled down the river past the blackened remnants of Bosmeri villages, he asked no questions and spoke nothing of his life over the past weeks: he merely listened to Mallon's theories of merethic Aldmeri esoterica. The translator was undemanding of his guest's scholarship, accepting nods and shrugs as civilized conversation. He even produced some wine and fish jelly, which he shared with Scotti absent-mindedly, as he expounded on his various theses.

Finally, while Mallon was searching for a reference to some minor point in his notes, Scotti asked, "Rather off subject, but I was wondering where we're bound."

"The very heart of the province, Silvenar," Mallon said, not looking up from the passage he was reading. "It's somewhat bothersome, actually, as I wanted to go to Woodhearth first to talk to a Bosmer there who claims to have an original copy of Dirith Yalmillhiad, if you can believe it. But for the time being, that has to wait. Summurset Isle has surrounded the city, and is in the process of starving the citizenry until they surrender. It's a tiresome prospect, since the Bosmeri are happy to eat one another, so there's a risk that at the end, only one fat wood elf will remain to wave the flag."

"That is vexing," agreed Scotti, sympathetically. "To the east, the Khajiiti are burning everything, and to the west, the High Elves are waging war. I don't suppose the borders to the north are clear?"

"They're even worse," replied Mallon, finger on the page, still distracted. "The Cyrodiils and Redguards don't want Bosmer refugees streaming into their provinces. It only stands to reason. Imagine how much more criminally inclined they'd be now that they're homeless and hungry."

"So," murmured Scotti, feeling a shiver. "We're trapped in Valenwood."

"Not at all. I need to leave fairly shortly myself, as my publisher has set a very definite deadline for my new book of translations. From what I understand, one merely petitions to the Silvenar for special border protection and one can cross into Cyrodiil with impunity."

"Petition the Silvenar, or petition at Silvenar?"

"Petition the Silvenar at Silvenar. It's an odd nomenclature that is typical of this place, the sort of thing that makes my job as a translator that much more challenging. The Silvenar, he, or rather they are the closest the Bosmeri have to a great leader. The essential thing to remember about the Silvenar --" Mallon smiled, finding the passage he was looking for, "Here! 'A fortnight, inexplicable, the world burns into a dance.' There's that metaphor again."

"What were you saying about the Silvenar?" asked Scotti. "The essential thing to remember?"

"I don't remember what I was saying," replied Mallon, turning back to his oration.
In a week's time, the little boat bumped along the shallow, calmer waters of the foaming current the Xylo had become, and Decumus Scotti first saw the city of Silvenar. If Falinesti was a tree, then Silvenar was a flower. A magnificent pile of faded shades of green, red, blue, and white, shining with crystalline residue. Mallon had mentioned off-hand, when not otherwise explaining Aldmeri prosody, that Silvenar had once been a blossoming glade in the forest, but owing to some spell or natural cause, the trees' sap began flowing with translucent liqueur. The process of the sap flowing and hardening over the colorful trees had formed the web of the city. Mallon's description was intriguing, but it hardly prepared him for the city's beauty.

"What is the finest, most luxurious tavern here?" Scotti asked one of the Bosmer boatmen.

"Prithala Hall," Mallon answered. "But why don't you stay with me? I'm visiting an acquaintance of mine, a scholar I think you'll find fascinating. His hovel isn't much, but he has the most extraordinary ideas about the principles of a Merethic Aldmeri tribe the Sarmathi --"

"Under any other circumstances, I would happily accept," said Scotti graciously. "But after weeks of sleeping on the ground or on a raft, and eating whatever I could scrounge, I feel the need for some indulgent creature comforts. And then, after a day or two, I'll petition the Silvenar for safe passage to Cyrodiil."

The men bade each other goodbye. Gryf Mallon gave him the address of his publisher in the Imperial City, which Scotti accepted and quickly forgot. The clerk wandered the streets of Silvenar, crossing bridges of amber, admiring the petrified forest architecture. In front of a particularly estimable palace of silvery reflective crystal, he found Prithala Hall.

He took the finest room, and ordered a gluttonous meal of the finest quality. At a nearby table, he saw two very fat fellows, a man and a Bosmer, remarking how much finer the food was there than at the Silvenar's palace. They began to discuss the war and some issues of finances and rebuilding provincial bridges. The man noticed Scotti looking at them, and his eyes flashed recognition.

"Scotti, is that you? Kynareth, where have you been? I've had to make all the contacts here on my own!"

At the sound of his voice, Scotti recognized him. The fat man was Liodes Jurus, vastly engorged.
Decumus Scotti sat down, listening to Liodes Juru's. The clerk could hardly believe how fat his former colleague at Lord Atrius's Building Commission had become. The piquant aroma of the roasted meat dish before Scotti melted away. All the other sounds and textures of Prithala Hall vanished all around him, as if nothing else existed but the vast form of Jurus. Scotti did not consider himself an emotional man, but he felt a tide flow over him at the sight and sound of the man whose badly written letters had been the guideposts that carried him from the Imperial City back in early Frost Fall.

"Where have you been?" Jurus demanded again. "I told you to meet me in Falinesti weeks ago."

"I was there weeks ago," Scotti stammered, too surprised to be indignant. "I got your note to meet you in Athay, and so I went there, but the Khajiiti had burned it to the ground. Somehow, I found my way with the refugees in another village, and someone there told me that you had been killed."

"And you believed that right away?" Jurus sneered.

"The fellow seemed very well-informed about you. He was a clerk from Lord Vanech's Building Commission named Reglius, and he said that you had also suggested that he come down to Valenwood to profit from the war."

"Oh, yes," said Jurus, after thinking a moment. "I recall the name now. Well, it's good for business to have two representatives from Imperial building commissions here. We just need to all coordinate our bids, and all should be well."

"Reglius is dead," said Scotti. "But I have his contracts from Lord Vanech's Commission."

"Even better," gasped Jurus, impressed. "I never knew you were such a ruthless competitor, Decumus Scotti. Yes, this could certainly improve our position with the Silvenar. Have I introduced you to Basth here?"

Scotti had only been dimly aware of the Bosmer's presence at the table with Jurus, which was surprising given that the mer's girth nearly equaled his dining companion. The clerk nodded to Basth coldly, still numb and confused. It had not left his mind that only any hour earlier, Scotti had intended to petition the Silvenar for safe passage through the border back to Cyrodiil. The thought of doing business with Jurus after all, of profiting from Valenwood war with Elsweyr, and now the second one with the Summurset Isle, seemed like something happening to another person.

"Your colleague and I were talking about the Silvenar," said Basth, putting down the leg of mutton he had been gnawing on. "I don't suppose you've heard about his nature?"
"A little, but nothing very specific. I got the impression that he's very important and very peculiar."

"He's the representative of the People, legally, physically, and emotionally," explained Jurus, a little annoyed at his new partner's lack of common knowledge. "When they're healthy, so is he. When they're mostly female, so is he. When they cry for food or trade or an absence of foreign interference, he feels it too, and makes laws accordingly. In a way, he's a despot, but he's the people's despot."

"That sounds," said Scotti, searching for the appropriate word. "Like ... bunk."

"Perhaps it is," shrugged Basth. "But he has many rights as the Voice of the People, including the granting of foreign building and trade contracts. It's not important whether you believe us. Just think of the Silvenar as being like one of your mad Emperors, like Pelagius. The problem facing us now is that since Valenwood is being attacked on all sides, the Silvenar's aspect is now one of distrust and fear of foreigners. The one hope of his people, and thus of the Silvenar himself, is that the Emperor will intervene and stop the war."

"Will he?" asked Scotti.

"You know as well as we do that the Emperor has not been himself lately," Jurus helped himself to Reglius's satchel and pulled out the blank contracts. "Who knows what he'll choose to do or not do? That reality is not our concern, but these blessings from the late good sir Reglius make our job much simpler."

They discussed how they would represent themselves to the Silvenar into the evening. Scotti ate continuously, but not nearly so much as Jurus and Basth. When the sun had begun to rise in the hills, its light reddening through the crystal walls of the tavern, Jurus and Basth left to their rooms at the palace, granted to them diplomatically in lieu of an actual immediate audience with the Silvenar. Scotti went to his room. He thought about staying up a little longer to ruminate over Jurus's plans and see what might be the flaw in them, but upon touching the cool, soft bed, he immediately fell asleep.

The next afternoon, Scotti awoke, feeling himself again. In other words, timid. For several weeks now, he had been a creature bent on mere survival. He had been driven to exhaustion, attacked by several jungle beasts, starved, nearly drowned, and forced into discussions of ancient Aldmeri poetical works. The discussion he had with Jurus and Basth about how to dupe the Silvenar into signing their contracts seemed perfectly reasonable then. Scotti dressed himself in his old battered clothes and went downstairs in search of food and a peaceful place to think.

"You're up," cried Basth upon seeing him. "We should go to the palace now."

"Now?" whined Scotti. "Look at me. I need new clothes. This isn't the way one should dress to pay a call on a prostitute, let alone the Voice of the People of Valenwood. I haven't even bathed."

"You must cease from this moment forward being a clerk, and become a student of mercantile trade," said Liodes Jurus grandly, taking Scotti by the arm and leading him into the sunlit boulevard outside. "The first rule is to recognize what you represent to the prospective client,
and what angle best suits you. You cannot dazzle him with opulent fashion and professional bearing, my dear boy, and it would be fatal if you attempted to. Trust me on this. Several others besides Basth and I are guests at the palace, and they have made the error of appearing too eager, too formal, too ready for business. They will never be granted audience with the Silvenar, but we have remained aloof ever since the initial rejection. I've dallied about the court, spread my knowledge of life in the Imperial City, had my ears pierced, attended promenades, eaten and drunk of all that was given to me. I dare say I've put on a pound or two. The message we've sent is clear: it is in his, not our, best interest to meet."

"Our plan worked," added Basth. "When I told his minister that our Imperial representative had arrived, and that we were at last willing to meet with the Silvenar this morning, we were told to bring you there straightaway."

"Aren't we late then?" asked Scotti.

"Very," laughed Jurus. "But that's again part of the angle we're representing. Benevolent disinterest. Remember not to confuse the Silvenar with conventional nobility. His is the mind of the common people. When you grasp that, you'll understand how to manipulate him."

Jurus spent the last several minutes of the walk through the city expounding on his theories about what Valenwood needed, how much, and at what price. They were staggering figures, far more construction and far higher costs than anything Scotti had been used to dealing with. He listened carefully. All around them, the city of Silvenar revealed itself, glass and flower, roaring winds and beautiful inertia. When they reached the palace of the Silvenar, Decumus Scotti stopped, stunned. Jurus looked at him for a moment and then laughed.

"It's quite bizarre, isn't it?"

That it was. A frozen scarlet burst of twisted, uneven spires as if a rival sun rising. A blossom the size of a village, where courtiers and servants resembled nothing so much as insects walked about it sucking its ichor. Entering over a bent petal-like bridge, the three walked through the palace of unbalanced walls. Where the partitions bent close together and touched, there was a shaded hall or a small chamber. Where they warped away from one another, there was a courtyard. There were no doors anywhere, no any way to get to the Silvenar but by crossing through the entire spiral of the palace, through meetings and bedrooms and dining halls, past dignitaries, consorts, musicians, and many guards.

"It's an interesting place," said Basth. "But not very much privacy. Of course, that suits the Silvenar well."

When they reached the inner corridors, two hours after they first entered the palace, guards, brandishing blades and bows, stopped them.

"We have an audience with the Silvenar," said Jurus, patiently. "This is Lord Decumus Scotti, the Imperial representative."

One of the guards disappeared down the winding corridor, and returned moments later with a tall, proud Bosmer clad in a loose robe of patchwork leather. He was the Minister of Trade: "The Silvenar wishes to speak with Lord Decumus Scotti alone."
It was not the place to argue or show fear, so Scotti stepped forward, not even looking toward Jurus and Basth. He was certain they were showing their masks of benevolent indifference. Following the Minister into the audience chamber, Scotti recited to himself all the facts and figures Jurus had presented to him. He willed himself to remember the Angle and the Image he must project.

The audience chamber of the Silvenar was an enormous dome where the walls bent from bowl-shaped at the base inward to almost meet at the top. A thin ray of sunlight streamed through the fissure hundreds of feet above, and directly upon the Silvenar, who stood upon a puff of shimmering gray powder. For all the wonder of the city and the palace, the Silvenar himself looked perfectly ordinary. An average, blandly handsome, slightly tired-looking, extra-ordinary Wood Elf of the type one might see in any capitol in the Empire. It was only when he stepped from the dais that Scotti noticed an eccentricity in his appearance. He was very short.

"I had to speak with you alone," said the Silvenar in a voice common and unrefined. "May I see your papers?"

Scotti handed him the blank contracts from Lord Vanech's Building Commission. The Silvenar studied them, running his finger over the embossed seal of the Emperor, before handing them back. He suddenly seemed shy, looking to the floor. "There are many charlatans at my court who wish to benefit from the wars. I thought you and your colleagues were among them, but those contracts are genuine."

"Yes, they are," said Scotti calmly. The Silvenar's conventional aspect made it easy for Scotti to speak, with no formal greetings, no deference, exactly as Jurus had instructed: "It seems most sensible to begin straightaway talking about the roads which need to be rebuilt, and then the harbors that the Altmeri have destroyed, and then I can give you my estimates on the cost of resupplying and renovating the trade routes."

"Why hasn't the Emperor seen fit to send a representative when the war with Elsweyr began, two years ago?" asked the Silvenar glumly.

Scotti thought a moment before replying of all the common Bosmeri he had met in Valenwood. The greedy, frightened mercenaries who had escorted him from the border. The hard-drinking revelers and expert pest exterminating archers in the Western Cross of Falinesti. Nosy old Mother Pascost in Havel Slump. Captain Balfix, the poor sadly reformed pirate. The terrified but hopeful refugees of Athay and Grenos. The mad, murderous, self-devouring Wild Hunt of Vindisi. The silent, dour boatmen hired by Gryf Mallon. The degenerate, grasping Basth. If one creature represented their total disposition, and that of many more throughout the province, what would be his personality? Scotti was a clerk by occupation and nature, instinctively comfortable cataloging and filing, making things fit in a system. If the soul of Valenwood were to be filed, where would it be put?

The answer came upon him almost before he posed himself the question. Denial.

"I'm afraid that question doesn't interest me," said Scotti. "Now, can we get back to the business at hand?"
All afternoon, Scotti and the Silvenar discussed the pressing needs of Valenwood. Every contract was filled and signed. So much was required and there were so many costs associated that addendums and codicils had to be scribbled into the margins of the papers, and those had to be resigned. Scotti maintained his benevolent indifference, but he found that dealing with the Silvenar was not quite the same as dealing with a simple, sullen child. The Voice of the People knew certain practical, everyday things very well: the yields of fish, the benefits of trade, the condition of every township and forest in his province.

"We will have a banquet tomorrow night to celebrate this commission," said the Silvenar at last.

"Best make it tonight," replied Scotti. "We should leave for Cyrodiil with the contracts tomorrow, so I'll need a safe passage to the border. We best not waste any more time."

"Agreed," said the Silvenar, and called for his Minister of Trade to put his seal on the contracts and arrange for the feast.

Scotti left the chamber, and was greeted by Basth and Jurus. Their faces showed the strain of maintaining the illusion of unconcern for too many hours. As soon as they were out of sight of the guards, they begged Scotti to tell them all. When he showed them the contract, Basth began weeping with delight.

"Anything about the Silvenar that surprised you?" asked Jurus.

"I hadn't expected him to be half my height."

"Was he?" Jurus looked mildly surprised. "He must have shrunk since I tried to have an audience with him earlier. Maybe there is something to all that nonsense about him being affected by the plight of his people."
The banquet at the palace of the Silvenar was well attended by every jealous bureaucrat and trader who had attempted to contract the rebuilding of Valenwood. They looked on Decumus Scotti, Liodes Jurus, and Basth with undisguised hatred. It made Scotti very uncomfortable, but Jurus delighted in it. As the servants brought in platter after platter of roasted meats, Jurus poured himself a cup of Jagga and toasted the clerk.

"I can confess it now," said Jurus. "I had grave doubts about inviting you to join me on this adventure. All the other clerks and agents of building commissions I contacted were more outwardly aggressive, but none of them made it through, let alone to the audience chamber of the Silvenar, let alone brokered the deals on their own like you did. Come, have a cup of Jagga with me."

"No thank you," said Scotti. "I had too much of that drug in Falinesti, and nearly got sucked dry by a giant tick because of it. I'll find something else to drink."

Scotti wandered about the hall until he saw some diplomats drinking mugs of a steaming brown liquid, poured from a large silver urn. He asked them if it was tea.

"Tea made from leaves?" scoffed the first diplomat. "Not in Valenwood. This is Rotmeth."

Scotti poured himself a mug and took a tentative sip. It was gamy, bitter and sugared, and very salty. At first it seemed very disagreeable to his palate, but a moment later he found he had drained the mug and was pouring another. His body tingled. All the sounds in the chamber seemed oddly disjointed, but not frighteningly so.

"So you're the fellow who got the Silvenar to sign all those contracts," said the second diplomat. "That must have required some deep negotiation."

"Not at all, not at all, just a little basic understand of mercantile trading," grinned Scotti, pouring himself a third mug of Rotmeth. "The Silvenar was very eager to involve the Imperial state with the affairs of Valenwood. I was very eager to take a percentage of the commission. With all that blessed eagerness, it was merely a matter of putting quill to contract, bless you."

"You have been in the employ of his Imperial Majesty very long?" asked the first diplomat.

"It's a bite, or rather, a bit more complicated than that in the Imperial City. Between you and me, I don't really have a job. I used to work for Lord Atrius and his Building Commission, but I got sacked. And then, the contracts are from Lord Vanech and his Building Commission, 'cause I got em from this fellow Reglius who is a competitor but still a very fine fellow until
he was made dead by those Khajiiti," Scotti drained his fifth mug. "When I go back to the Imperial City, then the real negotiations can begin, bless you. I can go to my old employer and to Lord Vanech, and say, look here you, which one of you wants these commissions? And they'll fall over each other to take them from me. It will be bidding war for my percentage the likes of which no one nowhere has never seen."

"So you're not a representative of his Imperial Majesty, the Emperor?" asked the first diplomat.

"Didn't you hear what I'm said? You stupid?" Scotti felt a surge of rage, which quickly subsided. He chuckled, and poured himself a seventh mug. "The Building Commissions are privately owned, but they're still representatives of the Emperor. So I'm a representative of the Emperor. Or I will be. When I get these contracts in. It's very complicated. I can understand why you're not following me. Bless you, it's all like the poet said, a dance in fire, if you follow the illusion, that is to say, allusion."

"And your colleagues? Are they representatives of the Emperor?" asked the second diplomat.

Scotti burst into laughter, shaking his head. The diplomats bade him their respects and went to talk to the Minister. Scotti stumbled out of the palace, and reeled through the strange, organic avenues and boulevards of the city. It took him several hours to find his way to Prithala Hall and his room. Once there, he slept, very nearly on his bed.

The next morning, he woke to Jurus and Basth in his room, shaking him. He felt half-asleep and unable to open his eyes fully, but otherwise fine. The conversation with the diplomats floated in his mind in a haze, like an obscure childhood memory.

"What in Mara's name is Rotmeth?" he asked quickly.

"Rancid, strongly fermented meat juices with lots of spices to kill the poisons," smiled Basth. "I should have warned you to stay with Jagga."

"You must understand the Meat Mandate by now," laughed Jurus. "These Bosmeri would rather eat each other than touch the fruit of the vine or the field."

"What did I say to those diplomats?" cried Scotti, panicking.

"Nothing bad apparently," said Jurus, pulling out some papers. "Your escorts are downstairs to bring you to the Imperial Province. Here are your papers of safe passage. The Silvenar seems very impatient about business proceeding forward rapidly. He promises to send you some sort of rare treasure when the contracts are fulfilled. See, he's already given me something."

Jurus showed off his new, bejeweled earring, a beautiful large faceted ruby. Basth showed that he had a similar one. The two fat fellows left the room so Scotti could dress and pack.

A full regiment of the Silvenar's guards was on the street in front of the tavern. They surrounded a carriage crested with the official arms of Valenwood. Still dazed, Scotti climbed in, and the captain of the guard gave the signal. They began a quick gallop. Scotti shook himself, and then peered behind. Basth and Jurus were waving him goodbye.
"Wait!" Scotti cried. "Aren't you coming back to the Imperial Province too?"

"The Silvenar asked that we stay behind as Imperial representatives!" yelled Liodes Jurus. "In case there's a need for more contracts and negotiations! He's appointed us Undrape, some sort of special honor for foreigners at court! Don't worry! Lots of banquets to attend! You can handle the negotiations with Vanech and Atrius yourself and we'll keep things settled here!"

Jurus continued to yell advice about business, but his voice became indistinct with distance. Soon it disappeared altogether as the convoy rounded the streets of Silvenar. The jungle loomed suddenly and then they were in it. Scotti had only gone through it by foot or along the rivers by slow-moving boats. Now it flashed all around him in profusions of greens. The horses seemed even faster moving through underbrush than on the smooth paths of the city. None of the weird sounds or dank smells of the jungle penetrated the escort. It felt to Scotti as if he were watching a play about the jungle with a background of a quickly moving scrim, which offered only the merest suggestion of the place.

So it went for two weeks. There was lots of food and water in the carriage with the clerk, so he merely ate and slept as the caravan pressed endlessly on. From time to time, he'd hear the sound of blades clashing, but when he looked around whatever had attacked the caravan had long since been left behind. At last, they reached the border, where an Imperial garrison was stationed.

Scotti presented the soldiers who met the carriage with the papers. They asked him a barrage of questions that he answered monosyllabically, and then let him pass. It took several more days to arrive at the gates of the Imperial City. The horses that had flown so fast through the jungle now slowed down in the unfamiliar territory of the wooded Colovian Estates. By contrast, the cries of his province's birds and smells of his province's plant life brought Decumus Scotti alive. It was as if he had been dreaming all the past months.

At the gates of the City, Scotti's carriage door was opened for him and he stepped out on uncertain legs. Before he had a moment to say something to the escort, they had vanished, galloping back south through the forest. The first thing he did now that he was home was go to the closest tavern and have tea and fruit and bread. If he never ate meat again, he told himself, that would suit him very nicely.

Negotiations with Lord Atrius and Lord Vanech proceeded immediately thereafter. It was most agreeable. Both commissions recognized how lucrative the rebuilding of Valenwood would be for their agency. Lord Vanech claimed, quite justifiably, that as the contracts had been written on forms notarized by his commission, he had the legal right to them. Lord Atrius claimed that Decumus Scotti was his agent and representative, and that he had never been released from employment. The Emperor was called to arbitrate, but he claimed to be unavailable. His advisor, the Imperial Battlemage Jagar Tharn, had disappeared long ago and could not be called on for his wisdom and impartial mediation.

Scotti lived very comfortably off the bribes from Lord Atrius and Lord Vanech. Every week, a letter would arrive from Jurus or Bast asking about the status of negotiations. Gradually, these letters ceased coming, and more urgent ones came from the Minister of Trade and the Silvenar himself. The War of the Blue Divide with Summurset Isle ended with the Altmeri winning several new coastal islands from the Wood Elves. The war with Elsweyr continued,
ravaging the eastern borders of Valenwood. Still, Vanech and Atrius fought over who would help.

One fine morning in the early spring of the year 3E 398, a courier arrived at Decumus Scotti's door.

"Lord Vanech has won the Valenwood commission, and requests that you and the contracts come to his hall at your earliest convenience."

"Has Lord Atrius decided not to challenge further?" asked Scotti.

"He's been unable to, having died very suddenly, just now, from a terribly unfortunate accident," said the courier.

Scotti had wondered how long it would be before the Dark Brotherhood was brought in for final negotiations. As he walked toward Lord Vanech's Building Commission, a long, severe piece of architecture on a minor but respectable plaza, he wondered if he had played the game, as he ought to have. Could Vanech be so rapacious as to offer him a lower percentage of the commission now that his chief competitor was dead? Thankfully, he discovered, Lord Vanech had already decided to pay Scotti what he had proposed during the heat of the winter negotiations. His advisors had explained to him that other, lesser building commissions might come forward unless the matter were handled quickly and fairly.

"Glad we have all the legal issues done with," said Lord Vanech, fondly. "Now we can get to the business of helping the poor Bosmeri, and collecting the profits. It's a pity you weren't our representative for all the troubles with Bend'r-mahk and the Arnesian business. But there will be plenty more wars, I'm sure of that."

Scotti and Lord Vanech sent word to the Silvenar that at last they were prepared to honor the contracts. A few weeks later, they held a banquet in honor of the profitable enterprise. Decumus Scotti was the darling of the Imperial City, and no expense was spared to make it an unforgettable evening.

As Scotti met the nobles and wealthy merchants who would be benefiting from his business dealings, an exotic but somehow faintly familiar smell rose in the ballroom. He traced it to its source: a thick roasted slab of meat, so long and thick it covered several platters. The Cyrodilic revelers were eating it ravenously, unable to find the words to express their delight at its taste and texture.

"It's like nothing I've ever had before!"

"It's like pig-fed venison!"

"Do you see the marbling of fat and meat? It's a masterpiece!"

Scotti went to take a slice, but then he saw something imbedded deep in the dried and rendered roast. He nearly collided with his new employer Lord Vanech as he stumbled back.

"Where did this come from?" Scotti stammered.
"From our client, the Silvenar," beamed his lordship. "It's some kind of local delicacy they call Unthrappa."

Scotti vomited, and didn't stop for some time. It cast rather a temporary pall on the evening, but when Decumus Scotti was carried off to his manor house, the guests continued to dine. The Unthrappa was the delight of all. Even more so when Lord Vanech himself took a slice and found the first of two rubies buried within. How very clever of the Bosmer to invent such a dish, the Cyrodiils agreed.
In Morrowind, both worshippers and sorcerers summon lesser Daedra and bound Daedra as servants and instruments.

Most Daedric servants can be summoned by sorcerers only for very brief periods, within the most fragile and tenuous frameworks of command and binding. This fortunately limits their capacity for mischief, though in only a few minutes, most of these servants can do terrible harm to their summoners as well as their enemies.

Worshippers may bind other Daedric servants to this plane through rituals and pacts. Such arrangements result in the Daedric servant remaining on this plane indefinitely -- or at least until their bodily manifestations on this plane are destroyed, precipitating their supernatural essences back to Oblivion. Whenever Daedra are encountered at Daedric ruins or in tombs, they are almost invariably long-term visitors to our plane.

Likewise, lesser entities bound by their Daedra Lords into weapons and armor may be summoned for brief periods, or may persist indefinitely, so long as they are not destroyed and banished. The class of bound weapons and bound armors summoned by Temple followers and conjurors are examples of short-term bindings; Daedric artifacts like Mehrunes Razor and the Mask of Clavicus Vile are examples of long-term bindings.

The Tribunal Temple of Morrowind has incorporated the veneration of Daedra as lesser spirits subservient to the immortal Almsivi, the Triune godhead of Almalexia, Sotha Sil, and Vivec. These subordinate Daedra are divided into the Good Daedra and the Bad Daedra. The Good Daedra have willingly submitted to the authority of Almsivi; the Bad Daedra are rebels who defy Almsivi -- treacherous kin who are more often adversaries than allies.

The Good Daedra are Boethiah, Azura, and Mephala. The hunger is a powerful and violent lesser Daedra associated with Boethiah, Father of Plots -- a sinuous, long-limbed, long-tailed creature with a beast-skulled head, noted for its paralyzing touch and its ability to disintegrate weapons and armor. The winged twilight is a messenger of Azura, Goddess of Dusk and Dawn. Winged twilights resemble the feral harpies of the West, though the feminine aspects of the winged twilights are more ravishing, and their long, sharp, hooked tails are immeasurably more deadly. Spider Daedra are the servants of Mephala, taking the form of spider-humanoid centaurs, with a naked upper head, torso, and arms of human proportions, mounted on the eight legs and armored carapace of a giant spider. Unfortunately, these Daedra are so fierce and irrational that they cannot be trusted to heed the commands of the Spinner. As a consequence, few sorcerers are willing to either summon or bind such creatures in Morrowind.

The Bad Daedra are Mehrunes Dagon, Malacath, Sheogorath, and Molag Bal. Three lesser Daedra are associated with Mehrunes Dagon: the agile and pesky scamp, the ferocious and
beast-like clannfear, and the noble and deadly dremora. The crocodile-headed humanoid Daedra called the daedroth is a servant of Molag Bal, while the giant but dim-witted ogrim is a servant of Malacath. Sheogorath's lesser Daedra, the golden saint, a half-clothed human female in appearance, is highly resistant to magic and a dangerous spellcaster.

Another type of lesser Daedra often encountered in Morrowind is the Atronach, or Elemental Daedra. Atronachs have no binding kinship or alignments with the Daedra Lords, serving one realm or another at whim, shifting sides according to seduction, compulsion, or opportunity.
[21] The Death Blow of Abernanit

The Death Blow of Abernanit
With Explains by the sage
Geocrates Varnus

Broken battlements and wrecked walls
Where worship of the Horror (1) once embraced.
The bites of fifty winters (2) frost and wind
Have cracked and pitted the unholy gates,
And brought down the cruel, obscene spire.
All is dust, all is nothing more than dust.
The blood has dried and screams have echoed out.
Framed by hills in the wildest, forlorn place
Of Morrowind
Sits the barren bones of Abernanit.

When thrice-blessed Rangidil (3) first saw Abernanit,
It burnished silver bright with power and permanence.
A dreadful place with dreadful men to guard it
With fever glassed eyes and strength through the Horror.
Rangidil saw the foes' number was far greater
Than the few Ordinators and Buoyant Armigers he led,
Watching from the hills above, the field and castle of death
While it stood, it damned the souls of the people
Of Morrowind.
Accursed, iniquitous castle Abernanit.

The alarum was sounded calling the holy warriors to battle
To answer villiany's shield with justice's spear,
To steel themselves to fight at the front and be brave.
Rangidil too grasped his shield and his thin ebon spear
And the clamor of battle began with a resounding crash
To shake the clouds down from the sky.
The shield wall was smashed and blood staunched
The ground of the field, a battle like no other
Of Morrowind
To destroy the evil of Abernanit.

The maniacal horde were skilled at arms, for certes,
But the three holy fists of Mother, Lord, and Wizard (4) pushed
The monster's army back in charge after charge.
Rangidil saw from above, urging the army to defend,
Dagoth Thras (5) himself in his pernicious tower spire,
And knew that only when the heart of evil was caught

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* ESM. ESO.
Would the land e'er be truly saved.
He pledge then by the Temple and the Holy Tribunal
Of Morrowind
To take the tower of Abernanit.

In a violent push, the tower base was pierced,
But all efforts to fell the spire came to naught
As if all the strength of the Horror held that one tower.
The stairwell up was steep and so tight
That two warriors could not ascend it side by side.
So single-file the army clambered up and up
To take the tower room and end the reign
Of one of the cruellest petty tyrants in the annals
Of Morrowind,
Dagoth Thras of Abernanit.

They awaited a victory cry from the first to scale the tower
But silence only returned, and then the blood,
First only a rivulet and then a scarlet course
Poured down the steep stairwell, with the cry from above,
"Dagoth Thras is besting our army one by one!"
Rangidil called his army back, every Ordinator and
Buoyant Armiger, and he himself ascended the stairs,
Passing the bloody remains of the best warriors
Of Morrowind
To the tower room of Abernanit.

Like a raven of death on its aerie was Dagoth Thras
Holding bloody shield and bloody blade at the tower room door.
Every thrust of Rangidil's spear was blocked with ease;
Every slash of Rangidil's blade was deflected away;
Every blow of Rangidil's mace was met by the shield;
Every quick arrow shot could find no purchase
For the Monster's greatest power was in his dread blessing
That no weapon from no warrior found in all
Of Morrowind
Could pass the shield of Abernanit.

As hour passed hour, Rangidil came to understand
How his greatest warriors met their end with Dagoth Thras.
For he could exhaust them by blocking their attacks
And then, thus weakened, they were simply cut down.
The villain was patient and skilled with the shield
And Rangidil felt even his own mighty arms growing numb
While Dagoth Thras anticipated and blocked each cut
And Rangidil feared that without the blessing of the Divine Three
Of Morrowind
He'd die in the tower of Abernanit.

But he still poured down blows as he yelled,
"Foe! I am Rangidil, a prince of the True Temple,
And I've fought in many a battle, and many a warrior
Has tried to stop my blade and has failed.
Very few can anticipate which blow I'm planning,
And fewer, knowing that, know how to arrest the design,
Or have the strength to absorb all of my strikes.
There is no greater master of shield blocking in all
Of Morrowind
Than here in the castle Abernanit.

My foe, dark lord Dagoth Thras, before you slay me,
I beg you, tell me how you know how to block."
Wickedly proud, Dagoth Thras heard Rangidil's plea,
And decided that before he gutted the Temple champion,
He would deign to give him some knowledge for the afterlife,
How his instinct and reflexes worked, and as he started
To explain, he realized that he did not how he did it,
And watched, puzzled, as Rangidil delivered what the tales
Of Morrowind
Called "The death blow of Abernanit."

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Geocrates Varnus explains:}

1. "The Horror" refers to the daedra prince Mehrunes Dagon.
2. "Fifty winters" suggests that the epic was written fifty years after the Siege of Abernanit, which took place in 3E 150.
3. "Thrice-blessed Rangidil" is Rangidil Ketil, born 2E 803, died 3E 195. He was the commander of the Temple Ordinators, and "thrice-blessed" by being blessed by the Tribunal of Gods.
5. "Dagoth Thras" was a powerful daedra-worshipper of unknown origin who declared himself the heir of the Sixth House, though there is little evidence he descended from the vanished family.

NOTES

1 ESO. ESM without break.
2 ESO. Not in ESM.
Ynaleigh was the wealthiest landowner in Gunal, and he had over the years saved a tremendous dowry for the man who would marry his daughter, Genefra. When she reached the age of consent, he locked the gold away for safe-keeping, and announced his intention to have her marry. She was a comely lass, a scholar, a great athlete, but dour and brooding in aspect. This personality defect did not bother her potential suitors any more than her positive traits impressed them. Every man knew the tremendous wealth that would be his as the husband of Genefra and son-in-law of Ynaleigh. That alone was enough for hundreds to come to Gunal to pay court.

"The man who will marry my daughter," said Ynaleigh to the assembled. "Must not be doing so purely out of avarice. He must demonstrate his own wealth to my satisfaction."

This simple pronouncement removed a vast majority of the suitors, who knew they could not impress the landowner with their meager fortunes. A few dozen did come forward within a few days, clad in fine killarc cloth of spun silver, accompanied by exotic servants, traveling in magnificent carriages. Of all who came who met with Ynaleigh's approval, none arrived in a more resplendent fashion that Welyn Naerillic. The young man, who no one had ever heard of, arrived in a shining ebon coach drawn by a team of dragons, his clothing of rarest manufacture, and accompanied by an army of the most fantastical servants any of Gunal had ever seen. Valets with eyes on all sides of their heads, maidservants that seemed cast in gemstones.

But such was not enough with Ynaleigh.

"The man who marries my daughter must prove himself a intelligent fellow, for I would not have an ignoramus as a son-in-law and business partner," he declared.

This eliminated a large part of the wealthy suitors, who, through their lives of luxury, had never needed to think very much if at all. Still some came forward over the next few days, demonstrating their wit and learning, quoting the great sages of the past and offering their philosophies of metaphysics and alchemy. Welyn Naerillic too came and asked Ynaleigh to dine at the villa he had rented outside of Gunal. There the landowner saw scores of scribes working on translations of Aldmeri tracts, and enjoyed the young man's somewhat irreverent but intriguing intelligence.

Nevertheless, though he was much impressed with Welyn Naerillic, Ynaleigh had another challenge.

* ESM. ESO (More Than Mortal).
"I love my daughter very much," said Ynaleigh. "And I hope that the man who marries her will make her happy as well. Should any of you make her smile, she and the great dowry are yours."

The suitors lined up for days, singing her songs, proclaiming their devotion, describing her beauty in the most poetic of terms. Genefra merely glared at all with hatred and melancholia. Ynaleigh who stood by her side began to despair at last. His daughter's suitors were failing to a man at this task. Finally Welyn Naerillic came to the chamber.

"I will make your daughter smile," he said. "I dare say, I'll make her laugh, but only after you've agreed to marry us. If she is not delighted within one hour of our engagement, the wedding can be called off."

Ynaleigh turned to his daughter. She was not smiling, but her eyes had sparked with some morbid curiosity in this young man. As no other suitor had even registered that for her, he agreed.

"The dowry is naturally not to be paid 'til after you've wed," said Ynaleigh. "Being engaged is not enough."

"Might I see the dowry still?" asked Welyn.

Knowing how fabled the treasure was and understanding that this would likely be the closest the young man would come to possessing it, Ynaleigh agreed. He had grown quite found of Welyn. On his orders, Welyn, Ynaleigh, glum Genefra, and the castellan delved deep into the stronghold of Gunal. The first vault had to be opened by touching a series of runic symbols: should one of the marks be mispressed, a volley of poisoned arrows would have struck the thief. Ynaleigh was particularly proud of the next level of security -- a lock composed of blades with eighteen tumblers required three keys to be turned simultaneously to allow entry. The blades were designed to eviscerate any who merely picked one of the locks. Finally, they reached the storeroom.

It was entirely empty.

"By Lorkhan, we've been burgled!" cried Ynaleigh. "But how? Who could have done this?"

"A humble but, if I may say so, rather talented burglar," said Welyn. "A man who has loved your daughter from afar for many years, but did not possess the glamour or the learning to impress. That is, until the gold from her dowry afforded me the opportunity."

"You?" bellowed Ynaleigh, scarcely able to believe it. Then something even more unbelievable happened.

Genefra began to laugh. She had never even dreamed of meeting anyone like this thief. She threw herself into his arms before her father's outraged eyes. After a moment, Ynaleigh too began to laugh.

Genefra and Welyn were married in a month's time. Though he was in fact quite poor and had little scholarship, Ynaleigh was amazed how much his wealth increased with such a son-in-
law and business partner. He only made certain never to ask from whence came the excess gold.

Publisher's Note:

The tale of a man trying to win the hand of a maiden whose father (usually a wealthy man or a king) tests each suitor is quite common. See, for instance, the more recent "Four Suitors of Benitah" by Jole Yolivess. The behavior of the characters is quite out of character for the Dwemer. No one today knows their marriage customs, or even if they had marriage at all.

One rather odd theory of the Disappearance of the Dwarves came from this and a few other tales of "Marobar Sul." It was proposed that the Dwemer never, in fact, left. They did not depart Niri, much less the continent of Tamriel, and they are still among us, disguised. These scholars use the story of "Azura and the Box" to suggest that the Dwemer feared Azura, a being they could neither understand nor control, and they adopted the dress and manner of Chimer and Altmer in order to hide from Azura's gaze.
The Dragon Break Reexamined

by Fal Droon

The late 3rd era was a period of remarkable religious ferment and creativity. The upheavals of the reign of Uriel VII were only the outward signs of the historical forces that would eventually lead to the fall of the Septim Dynasty. The so called "Dragon Break" was first proposed at this time, by a wide variety of cults and fringe sects across the Empire, connected only by a common obsession with the events surrounding Tiber Septim's rise to power -- the "founding myth," if you will, of the Septim Dynasty.

The basis of the Dragon Break doctrine is now known to be a rather prosaic error in the timeline printed in the otherwise authoritative "Encyclopedia Tamrielica," first published in 3E 12, during the early years of Tiber Septim's reign. At that time, the archives of Alinor were still inaccessible to human scholars, and the extant records from the Alessian period were extremely fragmentary. The Alessians had systematically burned all the libraries they could find, and their own records were largely destroyed during the War of Righteousness.

The author of the Encyclopedia Tamrielica was apparently unfamiliar with the Alessian "year," which their priesthood used to record all dates. We now know this refers to the length of the long vision-trances undertaken by the High Priestess, which might last anywhere from a few weeks to several months. Based on analysis of the surviving trance scrolls, as well as murals and friezes from Alessian temples, I estimate that the Alessian Order actually lasted only about 150 years, rather than the famous "one thousand and eight years" given by the Encyclopedia Tamrielica. The "mystery" of the millennial-plus rule of the Alessians was accepted but unexplained until the spread of the Lorkhan cults in the late 3rd era, when the doctrine of the Dragon Break took hold. Because this dating (and explanation) was so widely held at the time, and then repeated by historians down through today, it has come to have the force of tradition. Recall, however, that the 3rd era historians were already separated from the Alessians by a gulf of more than 2,000 years. And history was still in its infancy, relying on the few archives from those early days.

Today, modern archaeology and paleonumerology have confirmed what my own research in Alessian dating first suggested: that the Dragon Break was invented in the late 3rd era, based on a scholarly error, fueled by obsession with eschatology and Numidiumism, and perpetuated by scholarly inertia.

* ESM (The Dragon Break Re-Examined). ESO.
...and even if we overlook the dubious moral and legal justifications for hundreds of years of occupation of these two provinces, what economic or military benefits can we derive from Morrowind and Black Marsh?

Indeed, a few beneficiaries of Imperial monopolies in the provinces do profit from exploitation of their wealth and resources. But does the Empire as a whole benefit? Hardly. The vast machineries of the Imperial bureaucracies cost far more to maintain than can be recovered in duties and taxes. And the cost of establishing and maintaining the garrisons of the Imperial legion in the far-flung wilderness posts of these provinces would be cost-effective only if there were evidence of a military threat from the East. But no such evidence exits. No army of Morrowind or Black Marsh has ever threatened the security of any other Imperial province, let alone the security of Cyrodiil itself.

In fact, a greater threat to Imperial security lies in the idle legions that the taxpayer spends thousands of drakes to support. The generals of these legions, facing no enemies or opposition within the borders of their provinces, may look with ambition to the West. With their loyal veteran troops and coffers fattened by friendly monopolists, they become unpredictable political factors in the uncertainties surrounding the Imperial succession.

If the occupation of Morrowind and Black Marsh were motivated by idealistic aspirations, perhaps there might lie some justification for bearing the burden of Empire. But consider the shame of the Empire's mute acceptance to the unspeakable practice of slavery in Morrowind. Instead of using our Imperial legions to free the wretched Khajiit and Argonian slaves from their Dark Elf masters, we pay our troopers to PROTECT the indefensible institution of slavery. Within the ebony mines of Morrowind, bloated monopolists under Imperial charters exploit slave labor to harvest the outrageous profits assured by rampant graft and corruption.

Consider the colossal arrogance of our proposition to bring Peace and Enlightenment to the East, when in fact, we have only brought our armies into lands who have never threatened us, and when we have only exploited the most shameful and evil practices we have found in Morrowind and Black Marsh simply to enrich the friends and flatterers of the Imperial family.

Impartially considered, our occupation of the Eastern provinces is morally corrupt, militarily indefensible, and economically ruinous. The only conclusion is that we should disband the Eastern legions, withdraw the Imperial bureaucracies and monopolists from the East, and give these ancient lands and peoples their freedom. Only by doing so may we hope to preserve the fragile ideals and fortunes of Western culture.

* ESM (The Eastern Provinces ...). ESO.
[25] Fall of the Snow Prince

Fall of the Snow Prince

[An account of the Battle of the Moesring as transcribed by Lokheim, chronicler to the chieftain Ingjaldr White-Eye]

From whence he came we did not know, but into the battle he rode, on a brilliant steed of pallid white. Elf we called him, for Elf he was, yet unlike any other of his kind we had ever seen before that day. His spear and armor bore the radiant and terrible glow of unknown magicka, and so adorned this unknown rider seemed more wight than warrior.

What troubled, nay, frightened us most at that moment was the call that rose from the Elven ranks. It was not fear, not wonder, but an unabashed and unbridled joy, the kind of felicity felt by a damned man who has been granted a second chance at life. For at that time the Elves were as damned and near death as ever they had been during the great skirmishes of Solstheim. The Battle of the Moesring was to be the final stand between Nord and Elf on our fair island. Led by Ysgramor, we had driven the Elven scourge from Skyrim, and were intent on cleansing Solstheim of their kind as well. Our warriors, armed with the finest axes and swords Nord craftsmen could forge, cut great swaths through the enemy ranks. The slopes of the Moesring ran red with Elf blood. Why, then, would our foe rejoice? Could one rider bring such hope to an army so hopeless?

To most of our kind, the meaning of the call was clear, but the words were but a litany of Elven chants and cries. There were some among us, however, the scholars and chroniclers, who knew well the words and shuddered at their significance.

"The Snow Prince is come! Doom is at hand!"

There was then a great calm that overcame the Elves that still stood. Through their mass the Snow Prince did ride, and as a longboat slices the icy waters of the Fjalding he parted the ranks of his kin. The magnificent white horse slowed to a gallop, then a trot, and the unknown Elf rider moved to the front of the line at a slow, almost ghostlike pace.

A Nord warrior sees much in a life of bloodshed and battle, and is rarely surprised by anything armed combat may bring. But few among us that day could have imagined the awe and uncertainty of a raging battlefield that all at once went motionless and silent. Such is the effect the Snow Prince had on us all. For when the joyous cries of the Elves had ended, there remained a quiet known only in the solitude of slumber. It was then our combined host, Elf and Nord alike, were joined in a terrible understanding -- victory or defeat mattered little that day on the slopes of the Moesring Mountains. The one truth we all shared was that death would come to many that day, victor and vanquished alike. The glorious Snow Prince, an Elf unlike any other, did come that day to bring death to our kind. And death he so brought.

* ESM. ESO.
Like a sudden, violent snow squall that rends travelers blind and threatens to tear loose the very foundations of the sturdiest hall, the Snow Prince did sweep into our numbers. Indeed the ice and snow did begin to swirl and churn about the Elf, as if called upon to serve his bidding. The spinning of that gleaming spear whistled a dirge to all those who would stand in the way of the Snow Prince, and our mightiest fell before him that day. Ulfgi Anvil-Hand, Strom the White, Freida Oaken-Wand, Heimdall the Frenzied. All lay dead at the foot of the Moesring Mountains.

For the first time that day it seemed the tide of battle had actually turned. The Elves, spurred on by the deeds of the Snow Prince, rallied together for one last charge against our ranks. It was then, in a single instant, that the Battle of the Moesring came to a sudden and unexpected end.

Finna, daughter of Jofrior, a lass of only twelve years and squire to her mother, watched as the Snow Prince cut down her only parent. In her rage and sorrow, Finna picked up Jofrior's sword and threw it savagely at her mother's killer. When the Elf's gleaming spear stopped its deadly dance, the battlefield fell silent, and all eyes turned to the Snow Prince. No one that day was more surprised than the Elf himself at the sight that greeted them all. For upon his great steed the Snow Prince still sat, the sword of Jofrior buried deeply in his breast. And then, he fell, from his horse, from the battle, from life. The Snow Prince lay dead, slain by a child.

With their savior defeated, the spirit of the remaining Elven warriors soon shattered. Many fled, and those that remained on the battlefield were soon cut down by our broad Nord axes. When the day was done, all that remained was the carnage of the battlefield. And from that battlefield came a dim reminder of valor and skill, for the brilliant armor and spear of the Snow Prince still shined. Even in death, this mighty and unknown Elf filled us with awe.

It is common practice to burn the corpses of our fallen foes. This is as much a necessity as it is custom, for death brings with it disease and dread. Our chieftains wished to cleanse Solsheim of the Elven horde, in death as well as life. It was decided, however, that such was not to be the fate of the Snow Prince. One so mighty in war yet so loved by his kin deserved better. Even in death, even if an enemy of our people.

And so we brought the body of the Snow Prince, wrapped in fine silks, to a freshly dug barrow. The gleaming armor and spear were presented on a pedestal of honor, and the tomb was arrayed with treasures worthy of royalty. All of the mighty chieftains agreed with this course, that the Elf should be so honored. His body would be preserved in the barrow for as long as the earth chose, but would not be offered the protection of our Stalhrim, which was reserved for Nord dead alone.

So ends this account of the Battle of the Moesring, and the fall of the magnificent Elven Snow Prince. May our gods honor him in death, and may we never meet his kind again in life.
The Great Sage was a tall, untidy man, bearded but bald. His library resembled him: all the books had been moved over the years to the bottom shelves where they gathered in dusty conglomerations. He used several of the books in his current lecture, explaining to his students, Taksim and Vonguldak, how the Mages Guild had first been founded by Vanus Galerion. They had many questions about Galerion's beginnings in the Psijic Order, and how the study of magic there differed from the Mages Guild.

"It was, and is, a very structured way of life," explained the Great Sage. "Quite elitist, actually. That was the aspect of it Galerion most objected to. He wanted the study of magic to be free. Well, not free exactly, but at least available to all who could afford it. In doing that, he changed the course of life in Tamriel."

"He codified the praxes and rituals used by all modern potionmakers, itemmakers, and spellmakers, didn't he, Great Sage?" asked Vonguldak.

"That was only part of it. Magic as we know it today comes from Vanus Galerion. He restructured the schools to be understandable by the masses. He invented the tools of alchemy and enchanting so everyone could concoct whatever they wanted, whatever their skills and purse would allow them to, without fears of magical backfire. Well, eventually he created that."

"What do you mean, Great Sage?" asked Taksim.

"The first tools were more automated than the ones we have today. Any layman could use them without the least understanding of enchantment and alchemy. On the Isle of Artaeum, the students had to learn the skills laboriously and over many years, but Galerion decided that was another example of the Psijics' elitism. The tools he invented were like robotic master enchanter and alchemists, capable of creating anything the customer required, provided he could pay."

"So someone could, for example, create a sword that would cleave the world in twain?" asked Vonguldak.

"I suppose, in theory, but it would probably take all the gold in the world," chuckled the Great Sage. "No, I can't say we were ever in very great danger, but that it isn't to say that there weren't a few unfortunate incidents where a unschooled yokel invented something beyond his ken. Eventually, of course, Galerion tore apart his old tools, and created what we use today.

* ESM. ESO.
It's a little elitist, requiring that people know what they're doing before they do it, but remarkably practical."

"What did people invent?" asked Taksim. "Are there any stories?"

"You're trying to distract me so I don't test you," said the Great Sage. "But I suppose I can tell you one story, just to illustrate a point. This particular tale takes place in the city of Alinor on the west coast of Summurset Isle, and concerns a scribe named Thaurbad.

This was in the Second Era, not long after Vanus Galerion had first founded the Mages Guild and chapter houses had sprung up all over Summurset, though not yet spread to the mainland of Tamriel.

For five years, this scribe, Thaurbad, had conducted all his correspondence to the outside world by way of his messenger boy, Gorgos. For the first year of his adoption of the hermit life, his few remaining friends and family -- friends and family of his dead wife, truth be told -- had tried visiting, but even the most indefatigable kin gives up eventually when given no encouragement. No one had a good reason to keep in touch with Thaurbad Hulzik, and in time, very few even tried. His sister-in-law sent him the occasional letter with news of people he could barely remember, but even that communication was rare. Most of messages to and from his house dealt with his business, writing the weekly proclamation from the Temple of Auri-El. These were bulletins nailed on the temple door, community news, sermons, that sort of thing.

The first message Gorgos brought him that day was from his healer, reminding him of his appointment on Turdas. Thaurbad took a while to write his response, glum and affirmative. He had the Crimson Plague, which he was being treated for at considerable expense -- you have to remember these were the days before the School of Restoration had become quite so specialized. It was a dreadful disease and had taken away his voicebox. That was why he only communicated by script.

The next message was from Alfiers, the secretary at the church, as curt and noxious as ever: "THAURBAD, ATTACHED IS SUNDAS'S SERMON, NEXT WEEK'S EVENTS CALENDAR, AND THE OBITUARIES. TRY TO LIVEN THEM UP A LITTLE. I WASN'T HAPPY WITH YOUR LAST ATTEMPT."

Thaurbad had taken the job putting together the Bulletin before Alfiers joined the temple, so his only mental image of her was purely theoretical and had evolved over time. At first he thought of Alfiers as an ugly fat sloadess covered with warts; more recently, she had mutated into a rail-thin, spinster sorcess. Of course, it was possible his clairvoyance was accurate and she had just lost weight.

Whatever Alfiers looked like, her attitude towards Thaurbad was clear, unwavering disdain. She hated his sense of humor, always found the most minor of misspellings, and considered his structure and calligraphy the worst kind of amateur work. Luckily, working for a temple was the next most secure job to working for the good King of Alinor. It didn't bring in very much money, but his expenses were minimal. The truth was, he didn't need to do it anymore. He had quite a fortune stashed away, but he didn't have anything else to occupy his days. And the truth was further that having little else to occupy his time and thoughts, the Bulletin was very important to him.
Gorgos, having delivered all the messages, began to clean and as he did so, he told Thaurbad all the news in town. The boy always did so, and Thaurbad seldom paid him any attention, but this time he had an interesting report. The Mages Guild had come to Alinor.

As Thaurbad listened intently, Gorgos told him all about the Guild, the remarkable Archmagister, and the incredible tools of alchemy and enchanting. Finally, when the lad had finished, Thaurbad scribbled a quick note and handed it and a quill to Gorgos. The note read, "Have them enchant this quill."

"It will be expensive," said Gorgos.

Thaurbad gave Gorgos a sizeable chunk of the thousands of gold pieces he had saved over the years, and sent him out the door. Now, Thaurbad decided, he would finally have the ability to impress Alfiers and bring glory to the Temple of Auri-El.

The way I've heard the story, Gorgos had thought about taking the gold and leaving Alinor, but he had come to care for poor old Thaurbad. And even more, he hated Alfiers who he had to see every day to get his messages for his master. It wasn't perhaps for the best of motivations, but Gorgos decided to go to the Guild and get the quill enchanted.

The Mages Guild was not then, especially not then, an elitist institution, as I have said, but when the messenger boy came in and asked to use the Itemmaker, he was greeted with some suspicion. When he showed the bag of gold, the attitude melted, and he was ushered in the room.

Now, I haven't seen one of the enchanting tools of old, so you must use your imagination. There was a large prism for the item to be bound with magicka, assuredly, and an assortment of soul gems and globes of trapped energies. Other than that, I cannot be certain how it looked or how it worked. Because of all the gold he gave to the Guild, Gorgos could infuse the quill with the highest-price soul available, which was something daedric called Feyfolken. The initiate at the Guild, being ignorant as most Guildmembers were at that time, did not know very much about the spirit except that it was filled with energy. When Gorgos left the room, the quill had been enchanted to its very limit and then some. It was virtually quivering with power.

Of course, when Thaurbad used it, that's when it became clear how over his head he was.

And now," said the Great Sage. "It's time for your test."

"But what happened? What were the quill's powers?" cried Taksim.

"You can't stop the tale there!" objected Vonguldak.

"We will continue the tale after your conjuration test, provided you both perform exceptionally well," said the Great Sage.
After the test had been given and Vonguldak and Taksim had demonstrated their knowledge of elementary conjuration, the Great Sage told them that they were free to enjoy the day. The two lads, who most afternoons fidgeted through their lessons, refused to leave their seats. "You told us that after the test, you'd tell us more of your tale about the scribe and his enchanted quill," said Taksim.

"You've already told us about the scribe, how he lived alone, and his battles with the Temple secretary over the Bulletin he scripted for posting, and how he suffered from the Crimson Plague and couldn't speak. When you left off, his messenger boy had just had his master's quill enchanted with the spirit of a daedra named Feyfolken," added Vonguldak to add the Great Sage's memory.

"As it happens," said the Great Sage. "I was thinking about a nap. However, the story does touch on some issues of the natures of spirits and thus is related to conjuration, so I'll continue.

Thaurbad began using the quill to write the Temple Bulletin, and there was something about the slightly lopsided, almost three-dimensional quality of the letters that Thaurbad liked a lot.

Into the night, Thaurbad put together the Temple of Auri-El's Bulletin. For the moment he washed over the page with the Feyfolken quill, it became a work of art, an illuminated manuscript crafted of gold, but with good, simple and strong vernacular. The sermon excerpts read like poetry, despite being based on the archpriest's workmanlike exhortation of the most banal of the Alessian doctrines. The obituaries of two of the Temple's chief benefactors were stark and powerful, pitifully mundane deaths transitioned into world-class tragedies. Thaurbad worked the magical palette until he nearly fainted from exhaustion. At six o'clock in the morning, a day before deadline, he handed the Bulletin to Gorgos for him to carry to Alfiers, the Temple secretary.

As expected, Alfiers never wrote back to compliment him or even comment on how early he had sent the bulletin. It didn't matter. Thaurbad knew it was the best Bulletin the Temple had ever posted. At one o'clock on Sundays, Gorgos brought him many messages.

"The Bulletin today was so beautiful, when I read it in the vestibule, I'm ashamed to tell you I wept copiously," wrote the archpriest. "I don't think I've seen anything that captures Auri-El's glory so beautifully before. The cathedrals of Firsthold pale in comparison. My friend, I prostrate myself before the greatest artist since Gallael."

The archpriest was, like most men of the cloth, given to hyperbole. Still, Thaurbad was happy with the compliment. More messages followed. All of the Temple Elders and thirty-three of the parishioners young and old had all taken the time to find out who wrote the bulletin and
how to get a message to congratulate him. And there was only one person they could go
through for that information: Alfiers. Imagining the dragon lady besieged by his admirers filled
Thaurbad with positive glee.

He was still in a good mood the next day when he took the ferry to his appointment with his
healer, Telemichiel. The herbalist was new, a pretty Redguard woman who tried to talk to
him, even after he gave her the note reading "My name is Thaurbad Hulzik and I have an
appointment with Telemichiel for eleven o'clock. Please forgive me for not talking, but I have
no voicebox anymore."

"Has it started raining yet?" she asked cheerfully. "The diviner said it might."

Thaurbad frowned and shook his head angrily. Why was it that everyone thought that mute
people liked to be talked to? Did soldiers who lost their arms like to be thrown balls? It was
undoubtedly not a purposefully cruel behavior, but Thaurbad still suspected that some people
just liked to prove that they weren't crippled too.

The examination itself was routine horror. Telemichiel performed the regular invasive torture,
all the while chatting and chatting and chatting.

"You ought to try talking once in a while. That's the only way to see if you're getting better. If
you don't feel comfortable doing it in public, you could try practicing it by yourself," said
Telemichiel, knowing his patient would ignore his advice. "Try singing in the bath. You'll
probably find you don't sound as bad as you think."

Thaurbad left the examination with the promise of test results in a couple of weeks. On the
ferry ride back home, Thaurbad began thinking of next week's temple bulletin. What about a
double-border around the "Last Sundas's Offering Plate" announcement? Putting the sermon
in two columns instead of one might have interesting effects. It was almost unbearable to
think that he couldn't get started on it until Alfiers sent him information.

When she did, it was with the note, "LAST BULLETIN A LITTLE BETTER. NEXT TIME,
DON'T USE THE WORD 'FORTUITOUS' IN PLACE OF 'FORTUNATE.' THE WORDS
ARE NOT, IF YOU LOOK THEM UP, SYNONYMOUS."

In response, Thaurbad almost followed Telemichiel's advice by screaming obscenities at
Gorgos. Instead, he drank a bottle of cheap wine, composed and sent a suitable reply, and fell
asleep on the floor.

The next morning, after a long bath, Thaurbad began work on the Bulletin. His idea for
putting a light shading effect on the "Special Announcements" section had an amazing
textural effect. Alfiers always hated the extra decorations he added to the borders, but using
the Feyfolken quill, they looked strangely powerful and majestic.

Gorgos came to him with a message from Alfiers at that very moment as if in response to the
thought. Thaurbad opened it up. It simply said, "I'M SORRY."

Thaurbad kept working. Alfiers's note he put from his mind, sure that she would soon follow
it up with the complete message "I'M SORRY THAT NO ONE EVER TAUGHT YOU TO
KEEP RIGHT-HAND AND LEFT-HAND MARGINS THE SAME LENGTH" or "I'M
SORRY WE CAN'T GET SOMEONE OTHER THAN A WEIRD, OLD MAN AS SCRIBE OF OUR BULLETIN." It didn't matter what she was sorry about. The columns from the sermon notes rose like the massive pillars of roses, crowned with unashamedly ornate headers. The obituaries and birth announcements were framed together with a spherical border, as a heartbreaking declaration of the circle of life. The Bulletin was simultaneously both warm and avant-garde. It was a masterpiece. When he sent it off to Alfiers late that afternoon, he knew she'd hate it, and was glad.

Thaurbad was surprised to get a message from the Temple on Loredas. Before he read the content, he could tell from the style that it wasn't from Alfiers. The handwriting wasn't Alfiers's usual belligerent slashing style, and it wasn't all in Alfiers's usual capital letters, which read like a scream from Oblivion.

"Thaurbad, I thought you should know Alfiers isn't at the Temple anymore. She quit her position yesterday, very suddenly. My name is Vanderthil, and I was lucky enough (let me admit it now, I begged pitifully) to be your new Temple contact. I'm overwhelmed by your genius. I was having a crisis of faith until I read last week's Bulletin. This week's Bulletin is a miracle. Enough. I just wanted to say I'm honored to be working with you. -- Vanderthil."

The response on Sundas after the service even astonished Thaurbad. The archpriest attributed the massive increase in attendance and collection plate offerings entirely to the Bulletin. Thaurbad's salary was quadrupled. Gorgos brought over a hundred and twenty messages from his adoring public.

The following week, Thaurbad sat in front of his writing plank, a glass of fine Torvali mead at his side, staring at the blank scroll. He had no ideas. The Bulletin, his child, his second-wife, bored him. The third-rate sermons of the archbishop were absolute anathema, and the deaths and births of the Temple patrons struck him as entirely pointless. Blah blah, he thought as he scribbled on the page.

He knew he wrote the letters B-L-A-H B-L-A-H. The words that appeared on the scroll were, "A necklace of pearl on a white neck."

He scrawled a jagged line across the page. It appeared in through that damned beautiful Feyfolken quill: "Glory to Auri-El."

Thaurbad slammed the quill and poetry spilled forth in a stream of ink. He scratched over the page, blotting over everything, and the vanquished words sprung back up in different form, even more exquisite than before. Every daub and splatter caused the document to whirl like a kaleidoscope before falling together in gorgeous asymmetry. There was nothing he could do to ruin the Bulletin. Feyfolken had taken over. He was a reader, not an author.

Now," asked the Great Sage. "What was Feyfolken from your knowledge of the School of Conjuration?"

"What happened next?" cried Vonguldak.

"First, tell me what Feyfolken was, and then I'll continue the story."
"You said it was a daedra," said Taksim. "And it seems to have something to do with artistic expression. Was Feyfolken a servitor of Azura?"

"But the scribe may have been imagining all this," said Vonguldak. "Perhaps Feyfolken is a servitor of Sheogorath, and he's gone mad. Or the quill's writing makes everyone who views it, like all the congregation at the Temple of Auri-El go mad."

"Hermaeus Mora is the daedra of knowledge ... and Hircine is the daedra of the wild ... and the daedra of revenge is Boethiah," pondered Taksim. And then he smiled, "Feyfolken is a servitor of Clavicus Vile, isn't it?"

"Very good," said the Great Sage. "How did you know?"

"It's his style," said Taksim. "Assuming that he doesn't want the power of the quill now that he has it. What happens next?"

"I'll tell you," said the Great Sage, and continued the tale.
Thaurbad had at last seen the power of the quill," said the Great Sage, continuing his tale. "Enchanted with the daedra Feyfolken, servitor of Clavicus Vile, it had brought him great wealth and fame as the scribe of the weekly Bulletin of the Temple of Auri-El. But he realized that it was the artist, and he merely the witness to its magic. He was furious and jealous. With a cry, he snapped the quill in half.

He turned to finish his glass of mead. When he turned around, the quill was intact.

He had no other quills but the one he had enchanted, so he dipped his finger in the inkwell and wrote a note to Gorgos in big sloppy letters. When Gorgos returned with a new batch of congratulatory messages from the Temple, praising his latest Bulletin, he handed the note and the quill to the messenger boy. The note read: "Take the quill back to the Mages Guild and sell it. Buy me another quill with no enchantments."

Gorgos didn't know what to make of the note, but he did as he was told. He returned a few hours later.

"They wouldn't give us any gold back for it," said Gorgos. "They said it wasn't enchanted. I told 'em, I said 'What are you talking about, you enchanted it right here with that Feyfolken soul gem,' and they said, 'Well, there ain't a soul in it now. Maybe you did something and it got loose.'"

Gorgos paused to look at his master. Thaurbad couldn't speak, of course, but he seemed even more than usually speechless.

"Anyway, I threw the quill away and got you this new one, like you said."

Thaurbad studied the new quill. It was white-feathered while his old quill had been dove gray. It felt good in his hand. He sighed with relief and waved his messenger lad away. He had a Bulletin to write, and this time, without any magic except for his own talent.

Within two days time, he was nearly back on schedule. It looked plain but it was entirely his. Thaurbad felt a strange reassurance when he ran his eyes over the page and noticed some slight errors. It had been a long time since the Bulletin contained any errors. In fact, Thaurbad reflected happily, there were probably other mistakes still in the document that he was not seeing.

He was finishing a final whirl of plain calligraphy on the borders when Gorgos arrived with some messages from the Temple. He looked through them all quickly, until one caught his eye. The wax seal on the letter read "Feyfolken." With complete bafflement, he broke it open.

"I think you should kill yourself," it read in perfectly gorgeous script.
He dropped the letter to the floor, seeing sudden movement on the Bulletin. Feyfolken script leapt from the letter and coursed over the scroll in a flood, translating his shabby document into a work of sublime beauty. Thaurbad no longer cared about the weird croaking quality of his voice. He screamed for a very long time. And then drank. Heavily.

Gorgos brought Thaurbad a message from Vanderthil, the secretary of the Temple, early Fredas morning, but it took the scribe until mid-morning to work up the courage to look at it. "Good Morning, I am just checking in on the Bulletin. You usually have it in on Turdas night. I'm curious. You planning something special? -- Vanderthil."

Thaurbad responded, "Vanderthil, I'm sorry. I've been sick. There won't be a Bulletin this Sunday" and handed the note to Gorgos before retiring to his bath. When he came back an hour later, Gorgos was just returning from the Temple, smiling.

"Vanderthil and the archpriest went crazy," he said. "They said it was your best work ever."

Thaurbad looked at Gorgos, uncomprehending. Then he noticed that the Bulletin was gone. Shaking, he dipped his finger in the inkwell and scrawled the words "What did the note I sent with you say?"

"You don't remember?" asked Gorgos, holding back a smile. He knew the master had been drinking a lot lately. "I don't remember the exact words, but it was something like, 'Vanderthil, here it is. Sorry it's late. I've been having severe mental problems lately. - Thaurbad.' Since you said, 'here it is,' I figured you wanted me to bring the Bulletin along, so I did. And like I said, they loved it. I bet you get three times as much letters this Sundas."

Thaurbad nodded his head, smiled, and waved the messenger lad away. Gorgos returned back to the Temple, while his master turned to his writing plank, and pulled out a fresh sheet of parchment.

He wrote with the quill: "What do you want, Feyfolken?"

The words became: "Goodbye. I hate my life. I have cut my wrists."

Thaurbad tried another tact: "Have I gone insane?"

The words became: "Goodbye. I have poison. I hate my life."

"Why are you doing this to me?"

"I Thaurbad Hulzik cannot live with myself and my ingratitude. That's why I've put this noose around my neck."

Thaurbad picked up a fresh parchment, dipped his finger in the inkwell, and proceeded to rewrite the entire Bulletin. While his original draft, before Feyfolken had altered it, had been simple and flawed, the new copy was a scrawl. Lower-case I's were undotted, G's looked like Y's, sentences ran into margins and curled up and all over like serpents. Ink from the first page leaked onto the second page. When he yanked the pages from the notebook, a long tear nearly divided the third page in half. Something about the final result was evocative.
Thaurbad at least hoped so. He wrote another note reading, simply, "Use this Bulletin instead of the piece of trash I sent you."

When Gorgos returned with new messages, Thaurbad handed the envelope to him. The new letters were all the same, except for one from his healer, Telemichiel. "Thaurbad, we need you to come in as soon as possible. We've received the reports from Black Marsh about a strain of the Crimson Plague that sounds very much like your disease, and we need to re-examine you. Nothing is definite yet, but we're going to want to see what our options are."

It took Thaurbad the rest of the day and fifteen drams of the stoutest mead to recover. The larger part of the next morning was spent recovering from this means of recovery. He started to write a message to Vanderthil: "What did you think of the new Bulletin?" with the quill. Feyfolken's improved version was "I'm going to ignite myself on fire, because I'm a dying no-talent."

Thaurbad rewrote the note using his finger-and-ink message. When Gorgos appeared, he handed him the note. There was one message in Vanderthil's handwriting.

It read, "Thaurbad, not only are you divinely inspired, but you have a great sense of humor. Imagine us using those scribbles you sent instead of the real Bulletin. You made the archbishop laugh heartily. I cannot wait to see what you have next week. Yours fondly, Vanderthil."

The funeral service a week later brought out far more friends and admirers than Thaurbad Hulzik would've believed possible. The coffin, of course, had to be closed, but that didn't stop the mourners from filing into lines to touch its smooth oak surface, imagining it as the flesh of the artist himself. The archbishop managed to rise to the occasion and deliver a better than usual eulogy. Thaurbad's old nemesis, the secretary before Vanderthil, Alfiers came in from Cloudburst, wailing and telling all who would listen that Thaurbad's suggestions had changed the direction of her life. When she heard Thaurbad had left her his quill in his final testament, she broke down in tears. Vanderthil was even more inconsolable, until she found a handsome and delightfully single young man.

"I can hardly believe he's gone and I never even saw him face-to-face or spoke to him," she said. "I saw the body, but even if he hadn't been all burned up, I wouldn't have been able to tell if it was him or not."

"I wish I could tell you there'd been a mistake, but there was plenty of medical evidence," said Telemichiel. "I supplied some of it myself. He was a patient of mine, you see."

"Oh," said Vanderthil. "Was he sick or something?"

"He had the Crimson Plague years ago, that's what took away his voice box, but it appeared to have gone into complete remission. Actually, I had just sent him a note telling him words to that effect the day before he killed himself."

"You're that healer?" exclaimed Vanderthil. "Thaurbad's messenger boy Gorgos told me that he had just picked up that message when I sent mine, complementing him on the new, primitive design for the Bulletin. It was amazing work. I never would've told him this, but I
had begun to suspect he was stuck in an outmoded style. It turned out he had one last work of genius, before going out in a blaze of glory. Figuratively. And literally."

Vanderthil showed the healer Thaurbad's last Bulletin, and Telemichiel agreed that its frantic, nearly illegible style spoke volumes about the power and majesty of the god Auri-El."

"Now I'm thoroughly confused," said Vonguldak.

"About which part?" asked the Great Sage. "I think the tale is very straight-forward."

"Feyfolken made all the Bulletins beautiful, except for the last one, the one Thaubad did for himself," said Taksim thoughtfully. "But why did he misread the notes from Vanderthil and the healer? Did Feyfolken change those words?"

"Perhaps," smiled the Great Sage.

"Or did Feyfolken changed Thaurbad's perceptions of those words?" asked Vonguldak. "Did Feyfolken make him mad after all?"

"Very likely," said the Great Sage.

"But that would mean that Feyfolken was a servitor of Sheogorath," said Vonguldak. "And you said he was a servitor of Clavicus Vile. Which was he, an agent of mischief or an agent of insanity?"

"The will was surely altered by Feyfolken," said Taksim, "And that's the sort of thing a servitor of Clavicus Vile would do to perpetuate the curse."

"As an appropriate ending to the tale of the scribe and his cursed quill," smiled the Great Sage. "I will let you read into it as you will."
The Stars of Tamriel are divided into thirteen constellations. Three of them are the major constellations, known as the Guardians. These are the Warrior, the Mage, and the Thief. Each of the Guardians protects its three Charges from the thirteenth constellation, the Serpent.

When the sun rises near one of the constellations, it is that constellation's season. Each constellation has a Season of approximately one month. The Serpent has no season, for it moves about in the heavens, usually threatening one of the other constellations.

The Warrior

Warrior is the first Guardian Constellation and protects his charges from the Serpent during their Seasons. The Warrior's own season is Last Seed when his Strength is needed for the harvest. His Charges are the Lady, the Steed, and the Lord. Minor Constellations which share his Quadrant of the Heavens. The Serpent threatens Different Charges during Different Seasons, and the Warrior's Very Aspect will Change according to the Times. If, for Example, His Lady is being threatened the Warrior will seem as if he is looking to His Left, Eyes blazing towards that Part of the Sky wherein she resides. Thus, to find the Serpent during the Warrior's Season look to where he looks, for that is where the Coiled Beast is Active. Those born under the sign of the Warrior are skilled with weapons of all kinds, but prone to short tempers.

* ESAR (Ffoulkes Firmament). ESM, ESO (The Firmament). The ESAR edition is introduced by this paraphrase: "It says here that the stars of Tamriel are divided into thirteen constellations. Three of them are the Major Constellations, the Guardians, which protect the Minor ones, their Charges, from the thirteenth constellation, which is the Serpent. Each Guardian has three Charges a piece, and are only on guard during their particular season."
The Mage

{The} Mage is a Guardian Constellation whose Season is Rain's Hand when magicka was first used by men. His Charges are the Apprentice, the Golem, and the Ritual. Those born under the Mage have more magicka and talent for all kinds of spellcasting, but are often arrogant and absent-minded.

The Thief

{The} Thief is the last Guardian Constellation, and her Season is the darkest month of Evening Star. Her Charges are the Lover, the Shadow, and the Tower. Those born under the sign of the Thief are not typically thieves, though they take risks more often and only rarely come to harm. They will run out of luck eventually, however, and rarely live as long as those born under other signs.
The Serpent

{The} Serpent wanders about in the sky and has no Season, though its motions are predictable to a degree. No characteristics are common to all who are born under the sign of the Serpent. Those born under this sign are the most blessed and the most cursed.

The Lady

{The} Lady is one of the Warrior's Charges and her Season is Heartfire. Those born under the sign of the Lady are kind and tolerant.

The Steed

{The} Steed is one of the Warrior's Charges, and her Season is Mid Year. Those born under the sign of the Steed are impatient and always hurrying from one place to another.
The Lord's Season is First Seed and he oversees all of Tamriel during the planting. Those born under the sign of the Lord are stronger and healthier than those born under other signs.

Apprentice's Season is Sun's Height. Those born under the sign of the apprentice have a special affinity for magick of all kinds, but are more vulnerable to magick as well.

Atronach (often called the Golem) is one of the Mage's Charges. Its season is Sun's Dusk. Those born under this sign are natural sorcerers with deep reserves of magicka, but they cannot generate magicka of their own.
The Ritual

The Ritual is one of the Mage's Charges and its Season is Morning Star. Those born under this sign have a variety of abilities depending on the aspects of the moons and the Divines.

The Lover

The Lover is one of the Thief's Charges and her season is Sun's Dawn. Those born under the sign of the Lover are graceful and passionate.

The Shadow

The Shadow's Season is Second Seed. The Shadow grants those born under her sign the ability to hide in shadows.
The Tower is one of the Thief's Charges and its Season is Frostfall. Those born under the sign of the Tower have a knack for finding gold and can open locks of all kinds.

NOTES

1 ESM. Not in ESO.
2 ESM, ESO. ESAR reads "a".
3 ESM, ESO. ESAR reads "thus".
4 ESAR only.
5 ESM, ESAR. ESAR reads "his Season".
6 ESM, ESO. Not in ESAR.
7 ESAR only.
8 ESM. Not in ESO.
9 ESM. Not in ESO.
10 ESM not illustrated.
11 ESM. Not in ESO.
[28] The Firsthold Revolt

You told me that if her brother won, she would be sister to the King of Wayrest, and Reman would want to keep her for the alliance. But her brother Helseth lost and has fled with his mother back to Morrowind, and still Reman has not left her to marry me. "Lady Gialene took a long, slow drag of the hookah and blew out dragon's breath, so the scent of blossoms perfumed her gilded chamber. "You make a very poor advisor, Kael. I might have spent my time romancing the king of Cloudrest or Alinor instead of the wretched royal husband of Queen Morgiah."

Kael knew better than to hurt his lady's vanity by the mere suggestion that the King of Firsthold might have come to love his Dunmer Queen. Instead he gave her a few minutes to pause and look from her balcony out over the high cliff palaces of the ancient capitol. The moons shone like crystal on the deep sapphire waters of the Abecean Sea. It was ever springtide here, and he could well understand why she would prefer a throne in this land than in Cloudrest or Alinor.

Finally, he spoke: "The people are with you, my lady. They do not relish the idea of Reman's Dark Elf heirs ruling the kingdom when he is gone."

"I wonder," she said calmly. "I wonder if as the King would not give up his Queen for want of alliances, whether she would give herself up out of fear. Of all the people of Firsthold, who most dislikes the Dunmer influence on the court?"

"Is this a trick question, my lady?" asked Kael. "The Trebbite Monks, of course. Their credo has ever been for pure Altmer bloodlines on Summurset, and among the royal families most of all. But, my lady, they make very weak allies."

"I know," said Gialene, taking up her hookah again thoughtfully, a smile creeping across her face. "Morgiah has seen to it that they have no power. She would have exterminated them altogether had Reman not stopped her for all the good they do for the country folk. What if they found themselves with a very powerful benefactress? One with intimate knowledge of the court of Firsthold, the chief concubine of the King, and all the gold to buy weapons with that her father, the King of Skywatch, could supply?"

"Well-armed and with the support of the country people, they would be formidable," nodded Kael. "But as your advisor, I must warn you: if you make yourself an active foe of Queen Morgiah, you must play to win. She has inherited much of her mother Queen Barenziah's intelligence and spirit of vengeance."

"She will not know I am her foe until it is too late," shrugged Gialene. "Go to the Trebbite monastery and bring me Friar Lylim. We must strategize our plan of attack."

* ESM. ESO.
For two weeks, Reman was advised about growing resentment in the countryside from peasants who called Morgiah the "Black Queen," but it was nothing that he had not heard before. His attention was on the pirates on a small island off the coast called Calluis Lar. They had been more brazen as late, attacking royal barges in organized raids. To deliver a crushing blow, he ordered the greatest part of his militia to invade the island -- an incursion he himself would lead.

A few days after Reman left the capitol, the revolt of the Trebbite Monks exploded. The attacks were well-coordinated and without warning. The Chief of the Guards did not wait to be announced, bursting into Morgiah's bedchamber ahead of a flurry of maidservants.

"My Queen," he said. "It is a revolution."

By contrast, Gialene was not asleep when Kael came to deliver the news. She was seated by the window, smoking her hookah and looking at the fires far off in the hills.

"Morgiah is with council," he explained. "I am certain they are telling her that the Trebbite Monks are behind the uprising, and that the revolution will be at the city gates by morning."

"How large is the revolutionary army in contrast to the remaining royal militia?" asked Gialene.

"The odds are well in our favor," said Kael. "Though not perhaps as much as we hoped. The country folk, it seems, like to complain about their queen, but stop short of insurrection. Primarily, the army is composed of the Monks themselves and a horde of mercenaries your father's gold bought. In a way of thinking, it is preferable this way -- they are more professional and organized than a common mob. Really, they are a true army, complete with a horn section."

"If that doesn't frighten the Black Queen into abdication, nothing will," smiled Gialene, rising from her chair. "The poor dear must be beside herself with worry. I must fly to her side and enjoy it."

Gialene was disappointed when she saw Morgiah come out of the Council Chambers. Considering that she had been woken from a deep sleep with cries of revolution and had spent the last several hours in consultation with her meager general force, she looked beautiful. There was a sparkle of proud defiance in her bright red eyes.

"My Queen," Gialene cried, forcing real tears. "I came as soon as I heard! Will we all be slaughtered?"

"A distinct possibility," replied Morgiah simply. Gialene tried to read her, but the expressions of women, especially alien women, were a far greater challenge than those of Altmer men.

"I hate myself for even thinking to propose this," said Gialene. "But since the cause of their fury is you, perhaps if you were to give up the throne, they might disperse. Please understand, my queen, I am thinking only of the good of the kingdom and our own lives."

"I understand the spirit of your suggestion," smiled Morgiah. "And I will take it under advisement. Believe me, I've thought of it myself. But I don't think it will come to that."
"Have you a plan for defending us?" asked Gialene, contorting her features to an expression she knew bespoke girlish hope.

"The king left us several dozen of his royal battlemages," said Morgiah. "I think the mob believes we have nothing but palace guards and a few soldiers to protect us. When they get to the gates are greeted with a wave of fireballs, I find it highly likely that they will lose heart and retreat."

"But isn't there some protection they could be using against such an assault?" asked Gialene in her best worried voice.

"If they knew about it, naturally there is. But an unruly mob is unlikely to have mages skilled in the arts of Restoration, by which they could shield themselves from the spells, or Mysticism, by which they could reflect the spells back on my battlemages. That would be the worst scenario, but even if they were well-organized enough to have Mystics in their ranks -- and enough of them to reflect so many spells -- it just isn't done. No battlefield commander would advise such a defense during a siege unless he knew precisely was he was going to be meeting. And then, of course, once the trap is sprung" Morgiah winked. "It's too late for a countering spell."

"A most cunning solution, your highness," said Gialene, honestly impressed.

Morgiah excused herself to meet with her battlemages, and Gialene gave her an embrace. Kael was waiting in the palace garden for his lady.

"Are there Mystics among the mercenaries?" she asked quickly.

"Several, in fact," replied Kael, bewildered by her query. "Largely rejects from the Psijic Order, but they know enough to cast the regular spells of the school."

"You must sneak out the city gates and tell Friar Lylim to have them cast reflection spells on all the front line before they attack," said Gialene.

"That's most irregular battlefield strategy," frowned Kael.

"I know it is, fool, that's what Morgiah is counting on. There's a gang of battlemages who are going to be waiting on the battlements to greet our army with a barrage of fire balls."

"Battlemages? I would have thought that King Reman would have brought them with him to fight the pirates."

"You would have thought that," laughed Gialene. "But then we would be defeated. Now go!"

Friar Lylim agreed with Kael that it was a bizarre, unheard-of way to begin a battle, casting reflection spells on all one's troops. It went against every tradition, and as a Trebbite Monk, he valued tradition above every other virtue. There was little other choice, though, given the intelligence. He had few enough healers in the army as it were, and their energies could not be wasted casting resistance spells.
At dawn's light, the rebel army was in sight of the gleaming spires of Firsthold. Friar Lylim gathered together every soldier who knew even the rudimentary secrets of Mysticism, who knew how to tap into the elementary conundrums and knots of the energies of magicka. Though few were masters of the art, their combined force was powerful to behold. A great surge of entangling power washed over the army, crackling, hissing, and infusing all with their ghostly force. When they arrived at the gates, every soldier, even the least imaginative, knew that no spell would touch him for a long time.

Friar Lylim watched his army batter into the gate with the great satisfaction of a commander who has counteracted an unthinkable attack with an outrageous defense. The smile quickly faded from his face.

They were met at the battlements not by mages but by common archers of the palace guard. As the flaming arrows fell upon the siegers like a red rain, the healers ran in to help the wounded. Their healing spells reflected off the dying men, one after the other. Chaos ruled as the attackers suddenly found themselves defenseless and began a panicked, unorganized retreat. Friar Lylim himself considered briefly holding his ground before fleeing himself.

Later, he would send furious notes to Lady Gialene and Kael, but they were returned. Even his best secret agents within the palace were unable to find their whereabouts.

Neither had, as it turns out, much previous experience with torture, and they soon confessed their treachery to the King's satisfaction. Kael was executed, and Gialene was sent back with escort to her father's court of Skywatch. He has still to find a husband for her. Reman, by contrast, has elected not to take a new royal concubine. The common folk of Firsthold consider this break in palace protocol to be more of the sinister alien influence of the Black Queen, and grumble to all who will listen.
The Five Songs of King Wulfharth

Shor's Tongue

The first song of King Wulfharth is ancient, circa 1E500. After the defeat of the Alessian army at Glenumbria Moors, where King Hoag Merkiller was slain, Wulfharth of Atmora was elected by the Pact of Chieftains. His thu'um was so powerful that he could not verbally swear into the office, and scribes were used to draw up his oaths. Immediately thereafter the scribes wrote down the first new law of his reign: a fiery reinstatement of the traditional Nordic pantheon. The Edicts were outlawed, their priests put to the stake, and their halls set ablaze. The shadow of King Borgas had ended for a span. For his zealotry, King Wulfharth was called Shor's Tongue, and Ysmir, Dragon of the North.

Kyne's Son

The second song of King Wulfharth glorifies his deeds in the eyes of the Old Gods. He fights the eastern Orcs and shouts their chief into Hell. He rebuilds the 418th step of High Hrothgar, which had been damaged by a dragon. When he swallowed a thundercloud to keep his army from catching cold, the Nords called him the Breath of Kyne.

Old Knocker

The third song of King Wulfharth tells of his death. Orkey, an enemy god, had always tried to ruin the Nords, even in Atmora where he stole their years away. Seeing the strength of King Wulfharth, Orkey summoned the ghost of Alduin Time-Eater again. Nearly every Nord was eaten down to six years old. Boy Wulfharth pleaded to Shor, the dead Chieftain of the Gods, to help his people. Shor's own ghost then fought the Time-Eater on the spirit plane, as he did at the beginning of time, and he won, and Orkey's folk, the Orcs, were ruined. As Boy Wulfharth watched the battle in the sky he learned a new thu'um, What Happens When You Shake the Dragon Just So. He used this new magic to change his people back to normal. In his haste to save so many, though, he shook too many years out on himself. He grew older than the Greybeards, and died. The flames of his pyre were said to have reached the hearth of Kyne itself.

The Ash King

The fourth song of King Wulfharth tells of his rebirth. The Dwarves and Devils of the eastern kingdoms had started to fight again, and the Nords hoped they might reclaim their ancient holdings there because of it. They planned an attack, but then gave up, knowing that they had no strong King to lead them. Then in walked the Devil of Dagoth, who swore he came in peace. Moreover, he told the Nords a wondrous thing: he knew where the Heart of Shor was! Long ago the Chief of the Gods had been killed by Elven giants, and they ripped out Shor's Heart and used it as a standard to strike fear into the Nords. This worked until Ysgramor

* ESM. ESO.
Shouted Some Sense and the Nords fought back again. Knowing that they were going to lose eventually, the Elven giants hid the Heart of Shor so that the Nords might never have their God back. But here was the Devil of Dagoth with good news! The Dwarves and Devils of the eastern kingdom had his Heart, and this was the reason for their recent unrest. The Nords asked the Devil of Dagoth why he might betray his countryman so, and he said that the Devils have betrayed each other since the beginning of time, and this was so, and so the Nords believed him. The Tongues sung Shor's ghost into the world again. Shor gathered an army as he did of old, and then he sucked in the long-strewn ashes of King Wulfharth and remade him, for he needed a good general. But the Devil of Dagoth petitioned to be that general, too, and he pointed out his role as the blessed harbinger of this holy war. So Shor had two generals, the Ash King and the Devil of Dagoth, and he marched on the eastern kingdoms with all the sons of Skyrim.

Red Mountain

The fifth song of King Wulfharth is sad. The survivors of the disaster came back under a red sky. That year is called Sun's Death. The Devil of Dagoth had tricked the Nords, for the Heart of Shor was not in the eastern kingdoms, and had never been there at all. As soon as Shor's army had got to Red Mountain, all the Devils and Dwarves fell upon them. Their sorcerers lifted the mountain and threw it onto Shor, trapping him underneath Red Mountain until the end of time. They slaughtered the sons of Skyrim, but not before King Wulfharth killed King Dumalacath the Dwarf-Orc, and doomed his people. Then Vehk the Devil blasted the Ash King into Hell and it was over. Later, Kyne lifted the ashes of the ashes of Ysmir into the sky, saving him from Hell and showing her sons the color of blood when it is brought by betrayal. And the Nords will never trust another Devil again.

{***}1

The Secret Song of Wulfharth Ash-King

The Truth at Red Mountain

The Heart of Shor was in Resdayn, as Dagoth-Ur had promised. As Shor's army approached the westernmost bank of the Inner Sea, they stared across at Red Mountain, where the Dwemer armies had gathered. News from the scouts reported that the Chimeri forces had just left Narsis, and that they were taking their time joining their cousins against the Nords. Dagoth-Ur said that the Tribunal had betrayed their King's trust, that they sent Dagoth-Ur to Lorkhan (for that is what they called Shor in Resdayn) so that the god might wreak vengeance on the Dwarves for their hubris; that Nerevar's peace with the Dwemer would be the ruin of the Velothi way. This was the reason for the slow muster, Dagoth-Ur said.

The Armies Grow

And Lorkhan (for that is what they called Shor in Resdayn) said: "I do not wreak vengeance on the Dwarves for the reasons that the Tribunal might believe I do. Nevertheless, it is true that they will die by my hand, and any whoever should side with them. This Nerevar is the son of Boethiah, one of the strongest Padomaics. He is a hero to his people despite his Tribunal, and he shall muster enough that this battle will be harder going still. We will need more than what we have." And so Dagoth-Ur, who wanted the Dwarves as dead as the Tribunal did, went to Kogoran and summoned his House chap'thil, his nix-hounds, his
wizards, archers, his stolen men of brass. And the Ash King, Wulfharth, hoary Ysmir, went and made peace with the Orcs in spite of his Nordic blood, and they brought many warriors but no wizards at all. Many Nords could not bring themselves to ally with their traditional enemies, even in the face of Red Mountain. They were close to desertion. Then Wulfharth said: "Don't you see where you really are? Don't you know who Shor really is? Don't you know what this war is?" And they looked from the King to the God to the Devils and Orcs, and some knew, really knew, and they are the ones that stayed.

The Doom Drum

Nerevar carried Keening, a dagger made of the sound of the shadow of the moons. His champions were Dumac Dwarfking, who carried a hammer of divine mass, and Alandro Sul, who was the immortal son of Azura and wore the Wraith Mail. They met Lorkhan at the last battle of Red Mountain. Lorkhan had his Heart again, but he had long been from it, and he needed time. Wulfharth met Sul but could not strike him, and he fell from grievous wounds, but not before shouting Sul blind. Dagoth-Ur met Dumac and slew him, but not before Sunder struck his lord's Heart. Nerevar turned away from Lorkhan and struck down Dagoth-Ur in rage, but he took a mortal wound from Lorkhan in turn. But Nerevar feigned the death that was coming early and so struck Lorkhan with surprise on his side. The Heart had been made solid by Sunder's tuning blow and Keening could now cut it out. And it was cut out and Lorkhan was defeated and the whole ordeal was thought over.

NOTES

1 ESO. Not in ESM.
Historians often portray the human settlement of Tamriel as a straightforward process of military expansion of the Nords of Skyrim. In fact, human settlers occupied nearly every corner of Tamriel before Skyrim was even founded. These so-called "Nedic peoples" include the proto-Cyrodilians, the ancestors of the Bretons, the aboriginals of Hammerfell, and perhaps a now-vanished Human population of Morrowind. Strictly speaking, the Nords are simply another of these Nedic peoples, the only one that failed to find a method of peaceful accommodation with the Elves who already occupied Tamriel.

Ysgramor was certainly not the first human settler in Tamriel. In fact, in "fleeing civil war in Atmora," as the Song of Return states, Ysgramor was following a long tradition of migration from Atmora; Tamriel had served as a "safety valve" for Atmora for centuries before Ysgramor's arrival. Malcontents, dissidents, rebels, landless younger sons, all made the difficult crossing from Atmora to the "New World" of Tamriel. New archeological excavations date the earliest human settlements in Hammerfell, High Rock, and Cyrodiil at ME800-1000, centuries earlier than Ysgramor, even assuming that the twelve Nord "kings" prior to Harald were actual historical figures.

The Nedic peoples were a minority in a land of Elves, and had no choice but to live peacefully with the Elder Race. In High Rock, Hammerfell, Cyrodiil, and possibly Morrowind, they did just that, and the Nedic peoples flourished and expanded over the last centuries of the Merethic Era. Only in Skyrim did this accommodation break down, an event recorded in the Song of Return. Perhaps, being close to reinforcements from Atmora, the proto-Nords did not feel it necessary to submit to the authority of the Skyrim Elves. Indeed, the early Nord chronicles note that under King Harald, the first historical Nord ruler (1E 113-221), "the Atmoran mercenaries returned to their homeland" following the consolidation of Skyrim as a centralized kingdom. Whatever the case, the pattern was set -- in Skyrim, expansion would proceed militarily, with human settlement following the frontier of conquest, and the line between Human territory and Elven territory was relatively clear.

But beyond this "zone of conflict," the other Nedic peoples continued to merge with their Elven neighbors. When the Nord armies of the First Empire finally entered High Rock and Cyrodiil, they found Bretons and proto-Cyrodiiils already living there among the Elves. Indeed, the Nords found it difficult to distinguish between Elf and Breton, the two races had already intermingled to such a degree. The arrival of the Nord armies upset the balance of power between the Nedic peoples and the Elves. Although the Nords' expansion into High Rock and Cyrodiil was relatively brief (less than two centuries), the result was decisive; from then on, power in those regions shifted from the Elves to the Humans.

* ESM. ESO.
During the early bloody years of the Second Era, Vanus Galerion was born under the name Trechtus, a serf on the estate of a minor nobleman, Lord Gyrnasse of Sollicich-on-Ker. Trechtus' father and mother were common laborers, but his father had secretly, against the law of Lord Gyrnasse, taught himself and then Trechtus to read. Lord Gyrnasse had been advised that literate serfs were an abomination of nature and dangerous to themselves and their lords, and had closed all bookstalls within Sollicich-on-Ker. All booksellers, poets, and teachers were forbidden, except within Gyrnasse's keep. Nevertheless, a small scale smuggling operation kept a number of books and scrolls in circulation right under Gyrnasse's shadow.

When Trechtus was eight, the smugglers were found and imprisoned. Some said that Trechtus' mother, an ignorant and religious woman fearful of her husband, was the betrayer of the smugglers, but there were other rumors as well. The trial of the smugglers was nonexistent, and the punishment swift. The body of Trechtus' father was kept hanging for weeks during the hottest summer Sollicich-on-Ker had seen in centuries.

Three months later, Trechtus ran away from Lord Gyrnasse's estate. He made it as far as Alinor, half-way across Summerset Isle. A band of troubadours found him nearly dead, curled up in a ditch by the side of the road. They nursed him to health and employed him as an errand boy in return for food and shelter. One of the troubadours, a soothsayer named Heliand, began testing Trechtus' mind and found the boy, though shy, to be preternaturally intelligent and sophisticated given his circumstances. Heliand recognized in the boy a commonality, for Heliand had been trained on the Isle of Artaeum as a mystic.

When the troupe was performing in the village of Potansa on the far eastern end of Summerset, Heliand took Trechtus, then a boy of eleven, to the Isle of Artaeum. The Magister of the Isle, Iachesis, recognized potential in Trechtus and took him on as pupil, giving him the name of Vanus Galarion. Vanus trained his mind on the Isle of Artaeum, as well as his body.

Thus was the first Archmagister of the Mages Guild trained. From the Psijics of the Isle of Artaeum, he received his training. From his childhood of want and injustice, he received his philosophy of sharing knowledge.

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Sumurset".
2 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ",".
3 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Sumurset".

ESD. ESM. ESO.
Forward From The Publisher:

The history behind this letter is almost as interesting and dark as the story it tells. The original letter to the mysterious Dhaunayne was copied and began circulating around the Ashlands of Vvardenfell a few months ago. In time, a print found its way to the mainland and Prince Hlaalu Helseth's palace outside Almalexia. While the reader may conclude after reading this letter that the Prince would be furious about such a work, impugning his highness with great malevolence, quite the reverse was true. The Prince and his mother, Queen Barenziah, had it privately printed into bound copies and sent to libraries and booksellers throughout Morrowind.

As matter of record, the Prince and the Queen have not officially stated whether the letter is a work of pure imagination or based on an actual occurrence. The House Dres has publicly denounced the work, and indeed, no one named Dhaunayne, despite the suggestions in the letter, has ever been linked to the house. We leave the reader to interpret the letter as he or she believes.

-- Nerris Gan, Publisher

***

Dark Liege Dhaunayne,

You asked for a detailed description of my experience last night and the reasons for my plea to House Dres for another assignment. I hope I have served you well in my capacity as informant in the court of Prince Helseth, a man who I have stated in many previous reports could teach Molag Bal how to scheme. As you know, I've spent nearly a year now working my way into his inner circle of advisors. He was in need of friendship when he first arrived in Morrowind and eagerly took to me and a few others. Still, he was disinclined to trust any of us, which is perhaps not surprising, given his tenuous position in Morrowind society.

For your unholliness's recollection, the Prince is the eldest son of Barenziah, who was once the Queen of Morrowind and once the Queen of the High Rock kingdom of Wayrest. At the death of her husband, Prince Helseth's stepfather, King Eadwyre, there was a power struggle between the Prince and Eadwyre's daughter, the Princess Elysana. Though details of what transpired are imperfect, it is clear that Elysana won the battle and became Queen, banishing Helseth and Barenziah. Barenziah's only other child, Morgiah, had already left court to marry and become Queen of the Summurset Isle kingdom of Firsthold.

* ESM. ESO.
Barenziah and Helseth crossed the continent to return to Morrowind only last year. They were well received by Barenziah's uncle, our current king, Hlaalu Athyn Llethan, who had taken the throne after Barenziah's abdication more than forty years ago. Barenziah made it clear that she had no designs on reclaiming the throne, but merely to retire to her family estates. Helseth, as you know, has lingered in the royal court, and many have whispered that while he lost the throne of Wayrest, he does not intend to lose the throne of Morrowind at Llethan's death.

I've kept your unholiness informed of the Prince's movements, meetings, and plots, as well as the names and characters of his other advisors. As you may recall, I've often thought that I was not the only spy in Helseth's court. I told you before that a particular Dunmer counselor of Helseth looked like a fellow I had seen in the company of Tholer Saryoni, the Archcanon of the Tribunal Temple. Another, a young Nord woman, has been verified to visit the Imperial fortress in Balmora. Of course, in their cases, they might well have been on Helseth's own business, but I couldn't be certain. I had begun to think myself paranoid as the Prince himself when I found myself doubting the sincere loyalty of the Prince's chamberlain, Burgess, a Breton who had been in his employ since his days in the court of Wayrest.

That is the background on that night, last night.

Yesterday morning, I received a curt invitation to dine with the Prince. Based only on my own paranoia, I dispatched one of my servants, who is a good and loyal servant of the House Dres, to watch the palace and report back anything unusual. Just before dinner, he returned and told me what he had witnessed.

A man cloaked in rags had been given entrance into the palace, and had stayed there for some time. When he left, my servant saw his face beneath the cloak -- an alchemist of infamous repute, said to be a leading suppliers of exotic poisons. A fine observer, my servant also noticed that the alchemist entered the palace smelling of wickwheat, bittergreen, and something alien and sweet. When he left, he was odorless.

He had come to the same conclusion as I did. The Prince had procured ingredients to prepare a poison. Bittergreen alone is deadly when eaten raw, but the other ingredients suggested something far deeper. As your unholiness can doubtless imagine, I went to dinner that night, prepared for any eventuality.

All of Prince Helseth's other counselors were in attendance, and I noticed that all were slightly apprehensive. Of course, I imagined that I was in a nest of spies, and all knew of the Prince's mysterious meeting. It is just as likely that some knew of the alchemist's visit, while others were simply concerned by the nature of the Prince's invitation, and still others merely unconsciously adopted the tense disposition of their fellow, better informed counselors.

The Prince, however, was in fine mettle and soon had everyone relaxed and at ease. At nine, we were all ushered into his dining hall where the feast had been laid out. And what a feast! Honeyed gorapples, fragrant stews, roasts in various blood sauces, and every variety of fish and fowl expertly and ostentatiously prepared. Crystal and gold flagons of wine, flin, shein, and mazte were at our seats to be savored as appropriate with each course. As tantalizing as the aromas were, it occurred to me that in such a maze of spices and flavors, a discreet poison would be undetectable.
Throughout the meal, I maintained the illusion of eating the food and drinking the liquor, but I was surreptitious and swallowed nothing. Finally, the plates and food were cleared from the table, and a tureen of a spicy broth was placed in the center of the banquet. The servant who brought it then retired, closing the banquet hall door behind him.

"It smells divine, my Prince," said the Marchioness Kolgar, the Nord woman. "But I cannot eat another thing."

"Your Highness," I added, feigning a tone of friendliness and slight intoxication. "You know that every one at this table would gladly die to put you on the throne of Morrowind, but is it really necessary that we gorge ourselves to death?"

The others at the table agreed with appreciative groans. Prince Helseth smiled. I swear by Vaernima the Gifter, my dark liege, even you have never seen a smile such as this one.

"Ironic words. You see, an alchemist visited me today, as some of you already doubtless know. He showed me how to make a marvelous poison and its antidote. A most potent potion, excellent for my purposes. No Restoration spell will aid you once you've ingested it. Only the antidote in the tureen will save you from certain death. And what a death, from what I've heard. I am eager to see if the effects are all that the alchemist promised. It should be horribly painful for the afflicted, but quite entertaining."

No one said a word. I could feel my heart beating hard in my chest.

"Your Highness," said Allarat, the Dunmer I suspected of alliance with the Temple. "Have you poisoned someone at this table?"

"You are very astute, Allarat," said Prince Helseth, looking about the table, eying each of his advisors carefully. "Little wonder I value your counsel. As indeed I value all in this room. It would be perhaps easiest for me to say who I haven't poisoned. I haven't poisoned any who serve but one master, any whose loyalty to me is sincere. I haven't poisoned any person who wants to see King Helseth on the throne of Morrowind. I haven't poisoned anyone who isn't a spy for the Empire, the Temple, the House of Telvanni, the House of Redoran, the House of Indoril, the House of Dres."

Your unholiness, he looked directly at me at his last words. I know that in certainty. My face is practiced at keeping my thoughts from showing, but I immediately thought of every secret meeting I've had, every coded message I sent to you and the House, my dark liege. What could he know? What could he, even without knowing, suspect?

I felt my heart beating even faster. Was it fear, or poison? I couldn't speak, certain as I was that my voice would betray my calm facade.

"Those loyal to me who wish harm on my enemies may be wondering how can I be certain that the poison has been ingested. Is it possible that the guilty party, or dare I say, parties were suspicious and merely pretended to eat and drink tonight? Of course. But even the craftiest of pretenders would have to raise a glass to his or her lips and put empty forks or spoons in their mouths to play the charade. The food, you see, was not poisoned. The cups and cutlery were. If you did not partake out of fear, you're poisoned just the same, and sadly, missed an excellent roast."
Sweat beaded on my face and I turned from the Prince so he would not see. My fellow advisors, all of them, were frozen in their seats. From the Marchioness Kolgar, white with fear, to Kema Inebbe, visibly shaking; from the furrowed, angry brow of Allarat to the statue-like stare of Burgess.

I couldn't help thinking then, could the Prince's entire counsellorship be comprised of nothing but spies? Was there any person at the table loyal? And then I thought, what if I were not a spy myself, would I trust Helseth to know that? No one knows better than his advisors both the depth of the Prince's paranoia and the utter implacability of his ambition. If I were not a spy for the House Dres, even then would I be safe? Could a loyalist be poisoned because of a not-so-innocent misjudgment?

The others must have been thinking the same, loyalists and spies alike.

While my mind whirled, I could hear the Prince's voice, addressing all assembled: "The poison acts quickly. If the antidote is not taken within one minute from now, there will be death at the table."

I couldn't decide whether I had been poisoned or not. My stomach ached, but I reminded myself it might have been the result of sitting at a sumptuous banquet and not partaking. My heart shook in my chest and a bitter taste like Trama Root stung my lips. Again, was it fear or poison?

"These are the last words you will hear if you are disloyal to me," said Prince Helseth, still smiling that damned smile as he watched his advisors squirming in their seats. "Take the antidote and live."

Could I believe him? I thought of what I knew of the Prince and his character. Would he kill a self-confessed spy at his court, or would he rather send the vanquished back to his masters? The Prince was ruthless, but either possibility was within his manner. Surely the theatricality of this whole dinner was meant to be a presentation to instill fear. What would my ancestors say if I joined them after sitting at a table, eventually dying of poison? What would they say if I took the antidote, confessing my allegiance to you and the House Dres, and was summarily executed? And, I confess, I thought of what you might do to me even after I was dead.

I had grown so light-headed and filled with my own thoughts, that I didn't see Burgess jump from his seat. I was only suddenly aware that he had the tureen in his hands and was gulping down the liquid within. There were guards all around, though I never noticed them entering.

"Burgess," said Prince Helseth, still smiling. "You have spent some time at Ghostgate. House Redoran?"

"You didn't know?" Burgess laughed sourly. "No House. I report to your stepsister, the Queen of Wayrest. I've always been in her employ. By Akatosh, you poisoned me because you thought I was working for some damnable Dark Elves?"

"You're half right," said the Prince. "I didn't guess who you were working for, or even that you were a spy. But you're also wrong about me poisoning you. You poisoned yourself when you drank from the tureen."
Your unholiness, you don't need to hear how Burgess died. I know that you have seen much over the many, many years of your existence, but you truly don't want to know. I wish I could erase the memory of his agonies from my own mind.

The council was dismissed shortly thereafter. I do not know if Prince Helseth knows or suspects that I too am a spy. I do not know how many others that night, last night, were as close as I was from drinking from the tureen before Burgess did. I only know that if the Prince does not suspect me now, he will. I cannot win at the games he mastered long ago at the court of Wayrest, and I beg your unholiness, my dark liege Dhaunayne to use your influence in the House Dres and dismiss your loyal servant from this charge.

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Publisher's Note:

Of course, the anonymous writer's signature has not been on any reprint of the letter since the original.
The Gold Ribbon of Merit
by Ampyrian Brum

In that early springtime morning, pale sunlight flickered behind the morning mist floating through the trees as Templer and Stryngpool made their way to the clearing. Neither had been back in High Rock, let alone in their favorite woods for four years. The trees had changed little even if they had. Stryngpool had a handsome blond moustache now, stiffened and spiked with wax, and Templer seemed to be a completely alien creature to the young lad who searched for adventure in the ancient grove. He was much quieter, as if scarred within as well as without.

They each carried their bows and quivers with extra care as they maneuvered their way through the clusters of vine and branch.

"This is the path that used to lead to your house, isn't it, old boy?" asked Stryngpool.

Templer glanced at the overgrowth and nodded, before continuing on.

"I thought so," said Stryngpool and laughed: "I remember it because you used to run down it every time you got a bloody nose. I know I can't offend you, but I have to say, it's hard to believe that you ended up a soldier."

"How's your family?" asked Templer.

"The same. A bit more pompous, if that's possible. It's obvious they wish I'd come back from the academy, but there's nothing much for me here. At least not until I collect my inheritance. Did I see I got a gold ribbon of merit in archery?"

"How could I miss it?" said Templer.

"Oh yes, I nearly forgot that the family's put it in the Great Hall. Very ostentatiously. I suppose you can actually see it through the picture window. Silly, but I hope the peasants are impressed."

The clearing opened up before them, where the mist settled on the grass, enveloping it in an opaque, chilly vapor. Burlap targets were arranged around in a semi-circle, several meters apart, like sentinels.

"You've been practicing," observed Templer.

"Well, a bit. I've only been back in town for a few days." said Stryngpool with a smile. "My parents said you got here a week ago?"
"That's right. My unit's camped a few miles east, and I thought I'd visit the old haunts. A lot's changed, I could hardly recognize anything at all." Templer looked down at the valley below, to the vast empty tilled ground, stretching out for miles around. "It looks like a good planting."

"My family's rather spread out since yours left. There was some discussion I think about keeping your old house up, but it seemed a little sentimental. Especially as there was fertile ground beneath."

Stryngpool strung his bow carefully. It was a beautiful piece of art, darkest ebony and spun silver filigrees, hand-crafted for him in Wayrest. He looked over at Templer stringing his bow, and felt a twinge of pity. It was a sad, weathered utensil, bound together with strips of fabric.

"If that's how they taught you to string your bow, you need some advisors from the academy in that army of yours," said Stryngpool as gently as he could. "The untightened loop is supposed to look like an X in an O. Yours looks like a Z in a Y."

"It works for me," said Templer. "I should tell you, I won't be able to make an afternoon of this. I'm supposed to join my unit this evening."

Stryngpool began to feel annoyed by his old friend. If he was angry about his family losing their land, why couldn't he just say it? Why did he come back to the valley at all? He watched Templer nock his first arrow, taking aim at a target, and coughed.

"I'm sorry, but I can't in good faith send you back to the army without a little new wisdom. There are three types of draw, three-fingers, thumb and index, thumb and two fingers. Then there's the thumb draw which I like, but you see," Stryngpool showed Templer the small leather loop fastened on the cord of his bow, "You need to have one of these thingies or you'll tear your thumb right off."

"I think I like my stupid method best."

"Don't be pigheaded, Templer. They didn't give me the gold ribbon of merit for nothing. I had demonstrated shooting from under a shield, standing, sitting, squatting, kneeling, and sitting on horseback. This is practical information I'm imparting for the sake of our friendship which I, at least, haven't completely forgotten. Sweet Kynareth, I remember when you were just an oily little squirt, begging for this kind of honest guidance."

Templer looked at Stryngpool for a moment, and lowered his bow. "Show me."

Stryngpool relaxed, shook away the tensions that had been building. He did his exercise, drawing the bow back to his eyebrow, his moustache, his chest, his earlobe.

"There are three ways of shooting: snatching and releasing in one continuous motion, like the Bosmer do; holding with a short draw and a pause before releasing like the Khajiit; and partial draw, pause, final draw," Stryngpool fired the arrow into the center of the target with cool precision, "And release. Which I prefer."

"Very nice," said Templer.
"Now you," said Stryngpool. He helped Templer select a grip, nock his arrow correctly, and take aim. A smile grew on Templer's face -- the first time Stryngpool had seen such a childlike expression on the war-etched visage all afternoon. When Templer released the arrow, it rocketed high over the top of the target and into the valley below where it disappeared from sight.

"Not bad," said Templer.

"No, not bad," said Stryngpool, feeling friendly once again. "If you practice, you should be able to focus your aim a little bit."

The two shot a few more practice bolts before parting ways. Templer began the long trek east to his unit's camp, and Stryngpool wound his way down through the woods to the valley and his family's mansion. He hummed a little tune he learned at the academy as he passed the great lawn and walked up to the front door, pleased with himself for helping his old friend. It entirely escaped his attention that the large picture window was broken.

But he noticed right away when he came into the Great Hall, and saw Templer's wild-shot bolt sticking in his gold ribbon of merit.
I think the greatest warrior who ever lived had to be Vilus Nommenus," offered Xiomara. "Name one other warrior who conquered more territory."

"Tiber Septim, obviously," said Hallgerd.

"He wasn't a warrior. He was an administrator\{...\} a politician," said Garaz. "And besides, acreage conquered can't be final means of determining the best warrior. How about skill with a blade?"

"There are other weapons than blades," objected Xiomara. "Why not skill with an axe or a bow? Who was the greatest master of all weaponry?"

"I can't think of one greatest master of all weaponry," said Hallgerd. "Balaxes of Agia Nero in Black Marsh was the greatest wielder of a lance. Ernse Llervu of the Ashlands is the greatest master of the club I've ever seen. The greatest master of the katana is probably an Akaviri warlord we've never heard of. As far as archery goes --"

"Pelinal Whitestrake supposedly conquered all of Tamriel by himself," interrupted Xiomara.

"That was before the First Era," said Garaz. "It's probably mostly myth. But there are all sorts of great warriors of the modern eras. The Camoran Usurper? The unknown hero who brought together the Staff of Chaos and defeated Jagar Tharn?"

"We can't declare an unknown champion as the greatest warrior. What about Nandor Beraid, the Empress Katariah's champion?" suggested Xiomara. "They said he could use any weapon ever invented."

"But what happened to him?" smiled Garaz. "He was drowned in the Sea of Ghosts because he couldn't get his armor off. Call me overly particular, but I think the greatest warrior in the world should know how to take armor off."

"It's kinda hard to judge ability to wear armor as a skill," said Xiomara. "Either you have basic functionality in a suit of armor or you don't."

"That's not true," said Hallgerd. "There are masters in that as well, people who can do things while wearing armor better than we can out of armor. Have you ever heard of Hlaalu Pasoroth, the King's great grandfather?"

Xiomara and Garaz admitted that they had not.
"This was hundreds and hundreds of years ago, and Pasoroth was the ruler of a great estate which he had won by right of being the greatest warrior in the land. It's been said, and truly, that much of the House's current power is based on Pasoroth's earnings as a warrior. Every week he held games at his castle, pitting his skill against the champions of the neighboring estates, and every week, he won something.

His great skill wasn't in the use of weaponry, though he was decent enough with an axe and a long sword, but in his ability to move quickly and with great agility wearing a full suit of heavy mail. There were some who said that he moved faster while wearing armor than he did out of it.

"Some months before this story begins, he had won the daughter of one of his neighbors, a beautiful creature named Mena who he had made his wife. He loved her very much, but he was intensely jealous, and with good reason. She wasn't very pleased with his husbandly skills, and the only reason Mena never strayed was because Pasoroth kept a close eye on her. She was, to put it kindly, naturally amorous and resentful of her position as a prize. Wherever he went, he always brought her with him. At the games, she was placed in a special box so that he could see her even while he competed.

"But his real competition, though he didn't know it, was from a handsome young armorer he also had won at one of his competitions. Mena had noticed him, and the armorer, whose name was Taren, had certainly noticed her."

"This has all the makings of a dirty joke, Hallgerd," said Xiomara, with a smile.

"I swear that it's entirely true," said Hallgerd. "The problem facing the lovers was, of course, that they could never be alone. Perhaps because of this, it became a burning obsession to both of them. Taren decided that the best time for them to consummate their love was during the games. Mena feigned illness, so she didn't have to stay in the box, but Pasoroth visited the sickroom every few minutes between fights, so Taren and Mena could never get together. The sound of Pasoroth's armor clunking up the stairs to visit his sick wife gave Taren the idea.

"He crafted his lord a new suit of armor, strong, and bright, and beautifully decorated. For his purposes, Taren rubbed the leg joints with luca dust so the more he sweated and the more he moved them, the more they'd stick together. After a little while, Taren figured, Pasoroth wouldn't be able to walk very quickly, and wouldn't have enough time in between fights to visit his wife. But just in case, Taren also added bells to the legs which rung loudly when they moved, so the couple would be able to hear him coming in plenty of time.

"When the games commenced the following week, Mena feigned illness again and Taren presented his lord with the new armor. Pasoroth was delighted with it, as Taren hoped he would be, and donned it for his first fight. Taren then stole upstairs to Mena's bedchamber.

"All was silent outside as the two began to make love. Suddenly, Mena noticed a peculiar expression on Taren's face and before she had a chance to ask him about it, his head fell off at the neck. Pasoroth was standing behind him with his axe in hand."

"How did he get upstairs so quickly, with his leg joints gummed up? And didn't they hear the bells ringing?" asked Garaz.
"Well, you see, when Pasoroth realized he couldn't walk on his legs very quickly, he walked on his hands."

"I don't believe it," laughed Xiomara.

"What happened next?" asked Garaz. "Did Pasoroth kill Mena also?"

"No one knows exactly what happened next," said Hallgerd. "Pasoroth didn't return for the next game, nor for the next. Finally, at the fourth game, he returned to fight, and Mena appeared in the box to watch. She didn't appear to be sick anymore. In fact, she was smiling and had a light flush to her face."

"They did it?" cried Xiomara.

"I don't have all the salacious details, except that after the battle, it took ten squires thirteen hours to get Pasoroth's armor off because of all the luca dust mixed with sweat."

"I don't understand, you mean, he didn't take his armor off when they -- but how?"

"Like I said," replied Hallgerd. "This is a story about someone who was more agile and accomplished in his armor than out of it."

"Now, that's skill," said Garaz.

NOTES

1 ESO. ESM reads ",,".
[35] Hanging Gardens of Wasten Coridale

Hanging Gardens
of Wasten Coridale

[This book was apparently written in Dwemer and translated to Aldmeris. Only fragments of the Aldmeris is readable, but it may be enough for a scholar of Aldmeris to translate fragments of other Dwemer books.]

...guide Altmer-Estrial led with foot-flames for the town-center where lay dead the quadrangular gardens...

...asked the foundations and chains and vessels their naming places...

...why they did not use solid sound to teach escape from the Earth Bones nor nourished them with frozen flames...

....the word I shall have once written of, this "art" our lesser cousins speak of when their admirable ignorance...

...but neither words nor experience cleanses the essence of the strange and terrible ways of defying our ancestors' transient rules.

[The translation ends with a comment in Dwemer in a different hand, which you {may be translated as follows}1:

"Put down your ardent cutting-globes, Nbthld. Your Aldmeris has the correct words, but they cannot be properly misinterpreted."

NOTES

1 ESO. ESM reads "can translate".

ESM. ESO.
The Horror of Castle Xyr

A One Act Play
by Baloth-Kul

Dramatis Personae

Clavides, Captain of the Imperial Guard. Cyrodilic.
Anara, a Dunmer maid.
Ullis, a Lieutenant of the Imperial Guard. Argonian.
Zollassa, a young Argonian mage

Late evening. The play opens in the interior Great Entrance Hall of a castle in Scath Anud, replete with fine furnishings and tapestries. Torches provide the only illumination. In the center of the foyer is a great iron door, the main entrance to the castle. The staircase up to the landing above is next to this door. On stage left is the door to the library, which is currently closed. On stage right is a huge suit of armor, twenty feet tall, nearly touching the ceiling of the room. Though no one can be seen, there is the sound of a woman singing coming from the library door.

A loud thumping knock on the iron front door stops the woman's singing. The door to the library opens and ANARA, a common-looking maid, comes out and hurries to open the front door. CLAVIDES, a handsome man in Imperial garb stands there.

ANARA: Good evening to you, serjo.

CLAVIDES: Good evening. Is your master at home?

ANARA: No, serjo, it's only me here. My master Sedura Kena Telvanni Hordalf Xyr is at his winter estate. Is there something I can do for you?

CLAVIDES: Possibly. Would you mind if I came in?

ANARA: Not at all, serjo. Please. May I offer you some flin?

Clavides comes into the Hall and looks around.

CLAVIDES: No thank you. What's your name?

ANARA: Anara, serjo.

CLAVIDES: Anara, when did your master leave Scath Anud?

ANARA: More than a fortnight ago. That's why it's only me in the castle, serjo. All the other servants and slaves who tend to his lordship travel with him. Is there something wrong?
CLAVIDES: Yes, there is. Do you know an ashlander by the name of Sul-Kharifa?

ANARA: No, serjo. I don't know no one by that name.

CLAVIDES: Then you aren't likely to now. He's dead. He was found a few hours ago dying of frostbite in the ashlands. He was hysterical, nearly incomprehensible, but among his last words were "castle" and "Xyr."

ANARA: Dying of frostbite in summertide in the ashlands? B'vek, that's strange. I suppose it's possible that my master knew this man, but being an ashlander and my master being of the House of Telvanni, well, if you'll pardon me for being flippant, serjo, I don't think they coulda been friends.

CLAVIDES: That is your master's library? Would you mind if I looked in?

ANARA: Please, serjo, go wherever you want. We got nothing to hide. We're loyal Imperial subjects.

CLAVIDES: As, I hear, are all Telvanni.

(Note from the playwright: this line should be delivered without sarcasm. Trust the audience to laugh -- it never fails, regardless of the politics of the locals.)

Clavides enters the library and looks over the books.

CLAVIDES: The library needs dusting.

ANARA: Yes, serjo. I was just doing that when you knocked at the door.

CLAVIDES: I'm grateful for that. If you had finished, I wouldn't notice the space in the dust where a rather large book has recently been removed. Your master is a wizard, it seems.

ANARA: No, serjo. I mean, he studies a lot, but he don't cast no spells, if that's what you mean by wizard. He's a kena, went to college and everything. You know, now that I think about it, I know what happened to that book. One of the other kenas from the college been round yesterday, and borrowed a couple of books. He's a friend of the master, so I thought it'd be all fine.

CLAVIDES: This kena, was his name Warvim?

ANARA: Coulda been. I don't remember.

CLAVIDES: There is a suspected necromancer at the college named Kena Warvim we arrested last night. We don't know what he was doing at the college, but it was something illegal, that's for certain. Was that the kena who borrowed the book? A little fellow, a cripple with a withered leg?

ANARA: No, serjo, it weren't the kena from yesterday. He was a big fella who could walk, so I noticed.
CLAVIDES: I'm going to have a look around the rest of the house, if you don't mind.

Clavides goes up the stairs, and delivers the following dialogue from the landing and the rooms above. Anara continues straightening up the downstairs, moving a high-backed bench in front of the armor to scrub the floor.

ANARA: Can I ask, serjo, what you're looking for? Maybe I could help you.

CLAVIDES: Are these all the rooms in the castle? No secret passages?

ANARA (laughing): Oh, serjo, what would Sedura Kena Telvanni Hordalf Xyr want with secret passages?

CLAVIDES (looking at the armor): Your master is a big man.

ANARA (laughing): Oh, serjo, don't tease. That's giant armor, just for decoration. My master slew that giant ten years ago, and kind of keeps it for a souvenir.

CLAVIDES: That's right, I remember hearing something about that when I first took my post here. It was someone named Xyr who killed the giant, but I didn't think the first name was Hordalf. Memory fades I'm afraid. What was the giant's name?

ANARA: I'm afraid I don't remember, serjo.

CLAVIDES: I do. It was Torfang. "I got out of Torfang's Shield."

ANARA: I don't understand, serjo. Torfang's shield?

Clavides runs down the stairs, and examines the armor.

CLAVIDES: Sul-Kharifa said something about getting out of Torfang's shield. I thought he was just raving, out of his mind.

ANARA: But he ain't got a shield, serjo.

Clavides pushes the high-backed bench out of the way, revealing the large mounted shield at the base of the armor.

CLAVIDES: Yes, he does. You covered it up with that bench.

ANARA: I didn't do it on purpose, serjo! I was just cleaning! I see that armor ever day, serjo, and b'vek I swear I ain't never noticed the shield before!

CLAVIDES: It's fine, Anara, I believe you.

Clavides pushes on the shield and it pulls back to reveal a tunnel down.

CLAVIDES: It appears that Sedura Kena Telvanni Hordalf Xyr does have a need for a secret passage. Could you get me a torch?
ANARA: B'vek, I ain't never seen that before!

Anara takes a torch from the wall, and hands it to Clavides. Clavides enters the tunnel.

CLAVIDES: Wait here.

Anara watches Clavides disappear down the tunnel. She appears agitated, and finally runs for the front door. When she opens it, ULLIS, an Argonian lieutenant in the Imperial guard is standing at the entrance. She screams.

ULLIS: I'm sorry to frighten you.

ANARA: Not now! Go away!

ULLIS: I'm afraid the Captain wouldn't like that, miss.

ANARA: You're ... with the Captain? Blessed mother.

Clavides comes out of the tunnel, white-faced. It takes him a few moments to speak.

ULLIS: Captain? What's down there?

CLAVIDES (to Anara): Did you know your master's a necromancer? That your cellar is filled with bodies?

Anara faints. Ullis carries her to the bench and lays her down.

ULLIS: Let me see, serjo.

CLAVIDES: You'll see soon enough. We're going to need every soldier from the post here to cart away all the corpses. Ullis, I've seen enough battles, but I've never seen anything like this. No two are alike. Khajiiti, sload, dunmer, cyrodiil, breton, nord, burned alive, poisoned, electrified, melted, torn apart, turned inside out, ripped to shreds and sewn back up together.

ULLIS: You think the ashlander escaped, that's what happened?

CLAVIDES: I don't know. Why would someone do something like this, Ullis?

There is a knock on the door. Clavides answers it. A young Argonian woman, ZOLLASSA, is standing, holding a package and a letter.

ZOLLASSA: Good morning, you're not Lord Xyr, are you?

CLAVIDES: No. What do you have there?

ZOLLASSA: A letter and a package I'm supposed to deliver to him. Will he be back shortly?

CLAVIDES: I don't believe so. Who gave you the package to deliver?
ZOLLASSA: My teacher at the college, Kema Warvim. He has a bad leg, so he asked me to bring these to his lordship. Actually, to tell you the truth, I was supposed to deliver them last night, but I was busy.

ULLIS: Greetings, sistre. We'll give the package to his lordship when we see him.

ZOLLASSA: Ah, hail, brothre. I had heard there was a handsome Argonian in Scath Anud. Unfortunately, I promised Kema Warvim that I'd deliver the package directly to his lordship's hands. I'm already late, I can't just --

CLAVIDES: We're Imperial Guard, miss. We will take the package and the letter.

Zollassa reluctantly hands Clavides the letter and the package. She turns to go.

ULLIS: You're at the college, if we need to see you?

ZOLLASSA: Yes. Fare tidings, brothre.

ULLIS: Goodnight, sistre.

Clavides opens the package as Zollassa exits. It is a book with many loose sheets.

CLAVIDES: It appears we've found the missing book. Delivered to our very hands.

Clavides begins to read the book, silently to himself.

ULLIS (to himself, very pleased): Another Argonian in Scath Anud. And a pretty one, at that. I hope we weren't too rude to her. I'm tired of all these women with their smooth, wet skin, it would be wonderful if we could meet when I'm off duty.

While Ullis talks, he opens the letter and reads it.

ULLIS (continued): She looks like she's from the south, like me. You know, Argonians from northern Black Marsh are... much... less...

Ullis continues reading, transfixed by the letter. Clavides skips to the back of the book, and reads the last sentences.

CLAVIDES (reading): In black ink "The Khajiiti male showed surprisingly little fortitude to a simple lightning spell, but I've had interesting physiological results with a medium-level acid spell cast slowly over several days." In red ink on the margins, "Yes, I see. Was the acid spell cast uniformly over the entire body of the subject?" In black ink "The Nord female was subjected to sixteen hours of a frost spell which eventually crystalized her into a state of suspended animation, from which she eventually expired. Not so the Nord male, nor the Ashlander male who lapsed into their comas much earlier, but then recovered. The Ashlander then tried to escape, but I restrained him. The Nord then had an interesting chemical overreaction to a simple fire spell and expired. See the accompanying illustration." In red ink, "Yes, I see. The pattern of boils and lesions suggest some sort of internal incineration perhaps caused by the combination of a short burst of flame following a longer session with frost. It's such a shame I can't come to see the experiment personally, but I compliment you on your
excellent notation." In black ink, "Thank you for the suggestion about slowly poisoning my maid Anara. The dosages you've suggested have had fascinating results, eroding her memory very subtly. I intend to increase it exponentially and see how long it is before she notices. Speaking of which, it is a pity that I haven't any Argonian subjects, but the slave-traders promise me some healthy specimens in the autumn. I should like to test their metabolism in comparison to elves and humans. It's my theory that a medium-level lightning spell cast in a continuous wave on an Argonian wouldn't be lethal for several hours at least, similar to my results with the Cyrodilic female and, of course, the giant." In red ink, "It'd be a shame to wait until autumn to see."

ULLIS (reading the letter): In red ink, "Here is your Argonian. Please let me know the results." It's signed "Kema Warvim."

CLAVIDES: By Kynareth, this isn't necromancy. It's Destruction. Kema Warvim and Kena Telvanni Hordalf Xyr haven't been experimenting with death, but with the limits of magical torture.

ULLIS: The letter isn't addressed to Kena Telvanni Hordalf Xyr. It's addressed to Sedura Iachilla Xyr. His wife, do you think?

CLAVIDES: Iachilla. That was the Telvanni of the Xyr family who I heard about in connection with the giant slaying. We'd best get the maid out of here. She'll need to go to a healer.

Clavides wakes up Anara. She appears disoriented.

ANARA: What's happening? Who are you?

CLAVIDES: Don't worry, everything is going to be fine. We're going to take you to a healer.

ULLIS: Do you need a coat, Iachilla?

ANARA: Thank you, no, I'm not cold --

Anara/Iachilla stops, realizing that she's been caught. Clavides and Ullis unsheathe their blades.

CLAVIDES: You have black ink on your fingers, your ladyship.

ULLIS: And when you saw me at the door, you thought I was the Argonian your friend Warvim sent over. That's why you said, "Not now. Go away."

ANARA/IACHILLA: You're much more observant than Anara. She never did understand what was happening, even when I tripled the poison spell and she expired in what I observed as considerable agony.

ULLIS: What were you going to use on me first, lightning or fire?

ANANA/IACHILLA: Lightning. I find fire to be too unpredictable.
As she speaks, the flames in the torchs extinguish. The stage is utterly dark.

There is the sound of a struggle, swords clanging. Suddenly a bolt of lightning flashes out, and there is silence. From the darkness, Anana/Iachilla speaks.

ANANA/IACHILLA: Fascinating.

There are several more flashes of lightning as the curtain closes.

THE END.

NOTES

1 ESO. Not in ESM.
The year was 3E 399 and standing on a mountainside overlooking a vast tract of land between
the lands of Menevia and Wayrest was a great and learned judge, an arbitrator and magistrate,
impartial in his submission to the law.

"You have a very strong claim to the land, my lad," said the judge. "I won't lie to you about
that. But your competition has an equal claim. This is what makes my particular profession
difficult at times."

"You would call it my competition?" sneered Lord Bowyn, gesturing to the Orc. The creature,
called Gortwog gro-Nagorm, looked up with baleful eyes.

"He has ample documentation to make a claim on the land," the magistrate shrugged. "And
the particular laws of our land do not discriminate between particular races. We had a Bosmer
regency once, many generations ago."

"But what if a pig or a slaughterfish turned up demanding the property? Would they have the
same legal rights as I?"

"If they had the proper papers, I'm afraid so," smiled the judge. "The law is very clear that if
two claimants with equal titles to the property are set in deadlock, a duel must be held. Now,
the rules are fairly archaic, but I've had opportunity to look them over, and I think they're still
valid. The Imperial council agrees."

"What must we do?" asked the Orc, his voice low and harsh, unused to the tongue of the
Cyrodiils.

"The first claimant, that's you, Lord Gortwog, may choose the armor and weapon of the
duelists. The second claimant, that's you, Lord Bowyn, may choose the location. If you would
prefer, either or both you may choose a champion or you may duel yourself."

The Breton and the Orc looked at one another, evaluating. Finally, Gortwog spoke, "The
armor will be Orcish and the weapons will be common steel long swords. No enchantments.
No wizardry allowed."

"The arena will be the central courtyard of my cousin Lord Berylth's palace in Wayrest," said
Bowyn, looking Gortwog in the eye scornfully. "None of your kind will be allowed in to
witness."
So it was agreed. Gortwog declared that he would fight the duel himself, and Bowyn, who was a fairly young man and in better than average condition, felt that he could not keep his honor without competing himself as well. Still, upon arriving at his cousin's palace a week before the duel was scheduled, he felt the need to practice. A suit of Orcish armor was purchased and for the first time in his life, Bowyn wore something of tremendous weight and limited facility.

Bowyn and Berylth sparred in the courtyard. In ten minutes times, Bowyn had to stop. He was red-faced and out of breath from trying to move in the armor: to add to his exasperation, he had not scored one blow on his cousin, and had dozens of feinted strikes scored on him.

"I don't know what to do," said Bowyn over dinner. "Even if I knew someone who could fight properly in that beastly steel, I couldn't possibly send in a champion to battle Gortwog."

Berylth commiserated. As the servants cleared the plates, Bowyn stood up in his seat and pointed at one of them: "You didn't tell me you had an Orc in your household!"

"Sir?" whined the elderly specimen, turning to Lord Berylth, certain that he caused offense somehow.

"You mean Old Tunner?" laughed Berylth. "He's been with my house for ages. Would you like him to give you training on how to move in Orcish armor?"

"Would you like me to?" asked Tunner obsequiously.

Unknown to Berylth but known to him now, his servant had once ridden with the legendary Cursed Legion of High Rock. He not only knew how to fight in Orcish armor himself, but he had acted as trainer to other Orcs before retiring into domestic service. Desperate, Bowyn immediately engaged him as his full-time trainer.

"Your try too hard, sir," said the Orc on their first day in the arena. "It is easy to strain yourself in heavy mail. The joints are just so to let you to bend with only a little effort. If you fight against the joints, you won't have any strength to fight your foe."

Bowyn tried to follow Tunner's instructions, but he quickly grew frustrated. And the more frustrated he got, the more intensity he put into his work, which tired him out even quicker. While he took a break to drink some water, Berylth spoke to his servant. If they were optimistic about Bowyn's chances, their faces did not show it.

Tunner trained Bowyn hard the next two days, but her Ladyship Elysora's birthday followed hard upon them, and Bowyn enjoyed the feast thoroughly. A liquor of poppies and goose fat, and cock tinsh with buttered hyssop for a first course; roasted pike, combwort, and balls of rabbit meat for a second; sliced fox tongues, ballom pudding with oyster gravy, battaglir weed and beans for the main course; collequiva ice and sugar fritters for dessert. As Bowyn was settling back afterwards, his eyes weary, he suddenly spied Gortwog and the judge entering the room.

"What are you doing here?" he cried. "The duel's not for another two days!"
"Lord Gortwog asked that we move it to tonight," said the judge. "You were training when my emissary arrived two days ago, but his lordship your cousin spoke for you, agreeing to the change of date."

"But there's no time to assemble my supporters," complained Bowyn. "And I've just devoured a feast that would kill a lesser man. Cousin, how could you neglect to tell me?"

"I spoke to Tunner about it," said Berylith, blushing, unused to deception. "We decided that you would be best served under these conditions."

The battle in the arena was sparsely attended. Saturated with food, Bowyn found himself unable to move very quickly. To his surprise, the armor responded to his lethargy, rotating smoothly and elegantly to each stagger. The more he successfully maneuvered, the more he allowed his mind and not his body to control his defensive and offensive actions. For the first time in his life, Bowyn saw what it was to look through the helmet of an Orc.

Of course, he lost, and rather badly if scores had been tabulated. Gortwog was a master of such battle. But Bowyn fought on for more than three hours before the judge reluctantly called a winner.

"I will name the land Orsinium after the land of my fathers," said the victor.

Bowyn's first thought was that if he must lose to an Orc, it was best that the battle was largely unwatched by his friends and family. As he left the courtyard to go to the bed he had longed for earlier in the evening, he saw Gortwog speaking to Tunner. Though he did not understand the language, he could see that they knew each other. When the Breton was in bed, he had a servant bring the old Orc to him.

"Tunner," he said kindly. "Speak frankly to me. You wanted Lord Gortwog to win."

"That is true," said Tunner. "But I did not fail you. You fought better than you would have fought two days hence, sir. I did not want Orsinium to be won by its king without a fight."
A Hypothetical Treachery

A Hypothetical Treachery
A One Act Play
by Anthil Morvir

Dramatis Personae
{-} Malvasian: A High Elf battlemage
{-} Inzoliah: A Dark Elf battlemage
{-} Dolcettus: A Cyrodiil healer
{-} Schiavas: An Argonian barbarian
{-} A Ghost
{-} Some bandits

Scene: Eldenwood

As the curtain rises, we see the misty labyrinthian landscape of the legendary Eldengrove of Valenwood. All around we hear wolves howling. A bloodied reptilian figure, SCHIAVAS, breaks through the branches of one of the trees and surveys the area.

SCHIAVAS: It's clear.

INZOLIAH, a beautiful Dark Elf mage, climbs down from the tree, helped by the barbarian. There is the sound of footsteps nearby. Schiavas readies his sword and Inzoliah prepares to cast a spell. Nothing comes out.

INZOLIAH: You're bleeding. You should have Dolcettus heal that for you.

SCHIAVAS: He's still drained from all the spells he had to cast down in the caves. I'm fine. If we get out of this and no one needs it more, I'll take the last potion of healing. Where's Malvasian?

MALVASIAN, a High Elf battlemage, and DOLCETTUS, a Cyrodiil healer, emerge from the tree, carrying a heavy chest between the two of them. They awkwardly try to get down from the tree, carrying their loot.

MALVASIAN: Here I am, though why I'm carrying the heavy load is beyond me. I always thought that the advantage of dungeon delving with a great barbarian was that he carried all the loot.

MALVASIAN: Here I am, though why I'm carrying the heavy load is beyond me. I always thought that the advantage of dungeon delving with a great barbarian was that he carried all the loot.

SCHIAVAS: If I carried that, my hands would be too full to fight. And tell me if I'm wrong, but not one of the three of you has enough magicka reserved to make it out of here alive. Not after you electrified and blasted all those homunculuses down below ground.

DOLCETTUS: Homunculi.

* ESM. ESO.
SCHIAVAS: Don't worry, I'm not going to do what you think I'm going to do.

INZOLIAH (innocently): What's that?

SCHIAVAS: Kill you all and take the Ebony Mail for myself. Admit it -- you thought I had that in mind.

DOLCETTUS: What a perfectly horrible thought. I never thought anyone, no matter how vile and degenerate --

INZOLIAH: Why not?

MALVASIAN: He needs porters, like he said. He can't carry the chest and fight off the inhabitants of Eldengrove both.

DOLCETTUS: By Stendarr, of all the mean, conniving, typically Argonian --

INZOLIAH: And why do you need me alive?

SCHIAVAS: I don't necessarily. Except that you're prettier than the other two, for a smoothskin that is. And if something comes after us, it might go for you first.

There is a noise in some bushes nearby.

SCHIAVAS: Go check that out.

INZOLIAH: It's probably a wolf. These woods are filled with them. You check it out.

SCHIAVAS: You have a choice, Inzoliah. Go and you might live. Stay here, and you definitely won't.

Inzoliah considers and then goes to the bushes.

SCHIAVAS (to Malvasian and Dolcettus): The king of Silvenar will pay good money for the Mail, and we can divide it more nicely between three than four.

INZOLIAH: You're so right.

Inzoliah suddenly levitates up to the top of the stage. A semi-transparent Ghost appears from the bush and rushes at the next person, who happens to be Schiavas. As the barbarian screams and thrashes at it with his sword, it levels blasts of whirling gas at him. He crumbles to the ground. It turns next to Dolcettus, the healer, and as the Ghost focuses its feasting chill on the hapless Dolcettus, Malvasian casts a ball of flame at it that causes it to vaporize into the misty air.

Inzoliah floats back down to the ground as Malvasian examines the bodies of Dolcettus and Schiavas, who are both white-faced from the draining power of the ghost.

MALVASIAN: You had some magicka reserved after all.
INZOLIAH: So did you. Are they dead?

Malvasian takes the potion of healing from Dolcettus's pack.

MALVASIAN: Yes. Fortunately, the potion of healing wasn't broken when he fell. Well, I guess this leaves just the two of us to collect the reward.

INZOLIAH: We can't get out of this place without each other. Like it or not.

The two battlemages pick up the chest and begin plodding carefully through the undergrowth, pausing from time to time at the sound of footsteps or other eerie noises.

MALVASIAN: Let me make sure I understand. You have a little bit of magicka left, so you elected to use it to make Schiavas the ghost's target, forcing me to use most of my limited reserve to destroy the creature so I wouldn't be more powerful than you. That's first-rate thinking.

INZOLIAH: Thank you. It's only logical. Do you have enough power to cast any other spells?

MALVASIAN: Naturally. An experienced battlemage always knows a few minor but highly effective spells for just such a trial. I take it you, too, have a few tricks up your sleeve?

INZOLIAH: Of course, like you said.

They pause for a moment before continuing as a fearful wail pierces the air. When it dies away, they slowly trudge on.

INZOLIAH: Just as an intellectual exercise, I wonder what spell you would cast at me if we made it out of here without any more combat.

MALVASIAN: I hope you're not implying that I would dream of killing you so I would keep the treasure all to myself.

INZOLIAH: Of course not, nor would I do that to you. It is merely an intellectual exercise.

MALVASIAN: Well, in that case, purely as an intellectual exercise, I would probably cast a leech spell on you, to take away your life force and heal myself. After all, there are brigands on the road between here and Silvenar, and a wounded battlemage with a valuable artifact would make a tempting target. I'd hate to survive Eldengrove merely to die in the open.

INZOLIAH: That's a well-reasoned response. As for myself, again, not saying I would ever do this, but I think a simple, sudden electrical bolt would serve my purposes admirably. I agree about the danger of brigands, but don't forget, we also have a potion of healing. I could easily slay you and heal myself to full capacity.

MALVASIAN: Very true. It would end up a question then of whose spell was more effective at that instant. If our spells counteracted one another and I leech your life energy only to be crippled by your lightning bolt, then we could both be killed. Or so near death that a mere potion of healing would scarcely help either one of us, let alone both. How ironic it would be if two scheming battlemages, not saying we are scheming but for the purpose of this
intellectual exercise, were left on the brink of death, completely drained of magicka, with one healing potion to choose from. Who would get it then?

INZOLIAH: Logically, whoever drank it first, which in this case would be you since you're holding it. Now, what if one of us were injured, but not killed?

MALVASIAN: Logic would dictate that a scheming battlemage would take the potion, leaving the injured party to the mercy of the elements, I suppose.

INZOLIAH: That does seem most sensible. But suppose that the battlemages, while certainly scheming types, had a certain respect for one another. Perhaps in that case, the victorious one might, for instance, put the potion up a tree near his or her gravely wounded victim. Then when the wounded party had enough magicka replenished, he or she would be able to levitate to the tree branches and recover the potion. By that time, the victorious battlemage would have already collected the reward.

They pause for a moment at the sound of something in the bushes nearby. Carefully, they climb across the branches of a tree to bypass it.

MALVASIAN: I understand what you're saying, but it seems out of character for our hypothetic scheming battlemage to allow his or her victim to live.

INZOLIAH: Perhaps. But it's been my observation that most scheming battlemages enjoy the feeling of having bested someone in combat, and having that person alive to live with the humiliation.

MALVASIAN: These hypothetical scheming battlemages sound ... (excitedly) Daylight! Do you see it?

The two scurry across the branch dropping behind a bush, so we can no longer see them. We can, however, see the shimmering halo of sunlight.

MALVASIAN (behind the tall bush): We made it.

INZOLIAH (likewise, behind the tall bush): Indeed.

There is a sudden explosion of electrical energy and a wild howling aura of red light, and then silence. After a few moment's pause, we hear someone climbing up the tree. It is Malvasian, putting the potion high up in the bough. He chuckles as he climbs back down and the curtain drops.

Epilogue.

The curtain rises on a road to Silvenar. A gang of bandits have surrounded Malvasian, who is propped up on his staff, barely able to stand. They pull his chest away from him with ease.

BANDIT #1: What have we got here? Don't you know it ain't safe to be out on the road, all sick like you are? Why don't we help you with your load?

MALVASIAN (weakly): Please ... Let me be ...
BANDIT #2: Go on, spellcaster, fight us for it!

MALVASIAN: I can't ... too weak ...
Suddenly, Inzoliah flies in, casting lightning bolts from her fingers at the bandits, who quickly scramble away. She lands on the ground and picks up the chest. Malvasian collapses, dying.

MALVASIAN: Hypothetically, what if ... a battlemage cast a spell on another which didn't harm him at once, but ... drained his life force and his magicka, bit by bit, so he wouldn't know at the time, but ... feel confident enough to leave the potion of healing behind?

INZOLIAH: A most treacherous battlemage she'd be.

MALVASIAN: And ... hypothetically ... would she be likely to help her fallen foe ... so that she could enjoy the humiliation of him continuing ... to live?

INZOLIAH: From my experience, hypothetically, no. She doesn't sound like a fool.

As Inzoliah lugs the chest off toward Silvenar, and Malvasian expires on the stage, we drop the curtain.

NOTES

1 ESO. Not in ESM.
The tale dates to the year 855 of the Second Era, after General Talos had taken the name Tiber Septim and begun his conquest of Tamriel. One of his commanding officers, Beatia of Yliiilos, had been surprised in an ambush while returning from a meeting with the Emperor. She and her personal guard of five soldiers barely escaped, and were separated from their army. They fled across the desolate, sleet-painted rocky cliffs by foot. The attack had been so sudden, they had not even the time to don armor or get to their horses.

"If we can get to the Gorvigh Ridge," hollered Lieutenant Ascutus, gesturing toward a peak off in the mist, his voice barely discernible over the wind. "We can meet the legion you stationed in Porhnak."

Beatia looked across the craggy landscape, through the windswept hoary trees, and shook her head: "Not that way. We'll be struck down before we make it halfway to the mountain. You can see their horses' breath through the trees."

She directed her guard toward a ruined old keep on the frozen isthmus of Nerone, across the bay from Gorvigh Ridge. Jutting out on a promontory of rock, it was like many other abandoned castles in northern Skyrim, remnants of Reman Cyrodiil's protective shield against the continent of Akavir. As they reached their destination and made a fire, they could hear the army of the warchiefs of Danstrar behind them, making camp on the land southwest, blocking the only escape but the sea. The soldiers assessed the stock of the keep while Beatia looked out to the fog-veiled water through the casements of the ruin.

She threw a stone, watching it skip across the ice trailing puffs of mist before it disappeared with a splash into a crack in the surface.

"No food or weaponry to be found, commander," Lieutenant Ascutus reported. "There's a pile of armor in storage, but it's definitely taken on the elements over the years. I don't know if it's salvageable at all."

"We won't last long here," Beatia replied. "The Nords know that we'll be vulnerable when night falls, and this old rock won't hold them off. If there's anything in the keep we can use, find it. We have to make it across the ice floe to the Ridge."

After a few minutes of searching and matching pieces, the guards presented two very grimy, scuffed and cracked suits of chitin armor. Even the least proud of the adventurers and pirates who had looted the castle over the years had thought the shells of chitin beneath their notice. The soldiers did not dare to clean them: the dust looked to be the only adhesive holding them together.
"They won't offer us much protection, just slow us down," grimaced Ascutus. "If we run across the ice as soon as it gets dark--"

"Anyone who can plan and execute an ambush like the warchiefs of Danstrar will be expecting that. We need to move quickly, now, before they're any closer." Beatia drew a map of the bay in the dust, and then a semicircular path across the water, an arc stretching from the castle to the Gorvigh Ridge. "The men should go the long way across the bay like so. The ice is thick there a ways from the shoreline, and there are a lot of rocks for cover."

"You're not staying behind to hold the castle!"

"Of course not," Beatia shook her head and drew a straight line from the castle to the closest shore across the Bay. "I'll take one of the chitin suits, and try to cross the water here. If you don't see or hear me when you've made it to land, don't wait -- just get to Porhnak."

Lieutenant Ascutus tried to dissuade his commander, but he knew that she was would never order one of her men to perform the suicidal act of diversion, that all would die before they reached Gorvigh Ridge if the warlords' army was not distracted. He could find only one way to honor his duty to protect his commanding officer. It was not easy convincing Commander Beatia that he should accompany her, but at last, she relented.

The sun hung low but still cast a diffused glow, illuminating the snow with a ghostly light, when the five men and one woman slipped through the boulders beneath the castle to the water's frozen edge. Beatia and Ascutus moved carefully and precisely, painfully aware of each dull crunch of chitin against stone. At their commander's signal, the four unarmored men dashed towards the north across the ice.

When her men had reached the first fragment of cover, a spiral of stone jutting a few yards from the base of the promontory, Beatia turned to listen for the sound of the army above. Nothing but silence. They were still unseen. Ascutus nodded, his eyes through the helm showing no fear. The commander and her lieutenant stepped onto the ice and began to run.

When Beatia had surveyed the bay from the castle ramparts, the crossing closest to shore had seemed like a vast, featureless plane of white. Now that she was down on the ice, it was even more flat and stark: the sheet of mist rose only up their ankles, but it billowed up at their approach like the hand of nature itself was pointing out their presence to their enemies. They were utterly exposed. It came almost as a relief when Beatia heard one of the warchiefs' scouts whistle a signal to his masters.

They didn't have to turn around to see if the army was coming. The sound of galloping hoofs and the crash of trees giving way was very clear over the whistling wind.

Beatia wished she could risk a glance to the north to see if her men were hidden from view, but she didn't dare. She could hear Ascutus running to her right, keeping pace, breathing hard. He was used to wearing heavier armor, but the chitin joints were so brittle and tight from years of disuse, it was all he could do to bend them.

The rocky shore to the Ridge still looked at eternity away when Beatia felt and heard the first volley of arrows. Most struck the ice at their feet with sharp cracking sounds, but a few nearly found home, ricocheting off their backs. She silently offered a prayer of thanks to whatever
anonymous shellsmith, now long dead, had crafted the armor. They continued to run, as the first rain of arrows was quickly followed by a second and a third.

"Thank Stendarr," Ascutus gasped. "If there was only leather in the keep, we'd be pierced through and through. Now if only it weren't... so rigid..."

Beatia felt her own armor joints begin to set, her knees and hips finding more and more resistance with every step. There could be no denying it: they were drawing closer toward the shore, but they were running much more slowly. She heard the first dreadful galloping crunch of the army charging across the floe toward them. The riders were cautious on the slippery ice, not driving their horses at full speed, but Beatia knew that they would be upon the two of them soon.

The old chitin armor could withstand the bite of a few arrows, but not a lance driven with the force of a galloping horse. The only great unknown was time.

The thunder of beating hooves was deafening behind them when Ascutus and Beatia reached the edge of the shore. The giant, jagged stones that strung around the beach blockaded the approach. Beneath their feet, the ice sighed and crackled. They could not stand still, run forward, nor run back. Straining against the tired metal in the armor joints, they took two bounds forward and flew at the boulders.

The first landing on the ice sounded an explosive crack. When they rose for the final jump, it was on a wave of water so cold it felt like fire through the thin armor. Ascutus's right hand found purchase in a deep fissure. Beatia gripped with both hands, but her boulder was slick with frost. Faces pressed to the stone, they could not turn to face the army behind them.

But they heard the ice splintering, and the soldiers cry out in terror for just an instant. Then there was no sound but the whining of the wind and the purring lap of the water. A moment later, there were footsteps on the cliff above.

The four guardsmen had crossed the bay. There were two to pull Beatia up from the face of the boulder, and another two for Ascutus. They strained and swore at the weight, but finally they had their commander and her lieutenant safely on the edge of Gorvigh Ridge.

"By Mara, that's heavy for light armor."

"Yes," smiled Beatia wearily, looking back over the empty broken ice floe, the cracks radiating from the parallel paths she and Ascutus had run. "But sometimes that's good."
[40] Imperial Charter of the Guild of Mages*

Imperial Charter of the Guild of Mages

I. Purpose

The Guild of Mages provides benefits to scholars of magic and established laws regarding the proper use of magic. The Guild is dedicated to the collection, preservation, and distribution of magical knowledge with an emphasis on ensuring that all citizens of Tamriel benefit from this knowledge.

II. Authority

The Guild of Mages was established on Summerset Isle in the year 230 of the Second Era by Vanus Galerion and Rilis XII. It was later confirmed by the "Guilds Act" of Potentate Versidue-Shaie.

III. Rules and Procedures

Crimes against fellow members of the Guild are treated with the harshest discipline. Whether a member may regain their status in the Guild is determined by the Arch-Mage.

{ADDENDUM: Effective 3E 431, any guild member committing a crime against the guild is to be suspended immediately. The suspension may be lifted at the discretion of the Steward of the Council of Mages. Any guild member receiving multiple suspensions may, at the determination of the council, be summarily and permanently dismissed from the guild.}¹

IV. Membership Requirements

The Guild of Mages only accepts candidates of keen intelligence and dominant will. Candidates must exhibit mastery in the great schools of magic: Destruction, Alteration, Illusion, and Mysticism. Candidates must also display practical knowledge of enchantments and alchemical processes.

V. Applications for Membership

Candidates must present themselves to the Steward of the Guild Hall for examination and approval.

{ATTACHMENT A: Mages Guild Chapters in Vvardenfell District, Province of Morrowind

Chapters are established in Guild-owned, free-standing guildhalls in the towns of Ald'ruhn, Balmora, and Caldera. The chapter in Sadrith Mora is established in Wolverine Hall under lease from the Telvanni Council. The chapter in Vivec is established in the Foreign Quarter under lease from the Tribunal Temple.}²

¹ ESM. ESO.
ADDENDUM: Effective 3E 431, as per Arch-Mage Traven, all candidates for membership in the Guild of Mages must be approved by all presiding Guild Hall stewards, with said approval submitted in writing to the Council of Mages in a timely manner.

ADDENDUM: Effective 3E 431, as per Council mandate, sale of spells in the Imperial Province is to be re-distributed across guild halls. The following halls are to be responsible for each School of Magic:

- Alteration: Cheydinhal
- Conjuration: Chorrol
- Destruction: Skingrad
- Illusion: Bravil
- Mysticism: Leyawiin
- Restoration: Anvil

NOTES

1 ESO. Not in ESM.
2 ESM. Not in ESO.
3 ESO. Not in ESM.
The chieftain of Othrobar gathered his wise men together and said, "Every morning a tenfold of my flock are found butchered. What is the cause?"

Fangbith the Warleader said, "A Monster may be coming down from the Mountain and devouring your flock."

Ghorick the Healer said, "A strange new disease perhaps is to blame."

Beran the Priest said, "We must sacrifice to the Goddess for her to save us."

The wise men made sacrifices, and while they waited for their answers from the Goddess, Fangbith went to Mentor Joltereg and said, "You taught me well how to forge the cudgel of Zolia, and how to wield it in combat, but I must know now when it is wise to use my skill. Do I wait for the Goddess to reply, or the medicine to work, or do I hunt the Monster which I know is in the Mountain?"

"When is not important," said Joltereg. "Where is all that is important."

So Fangbith took his Zolic cudgel in hand and walked far through the dark forest until he came to the base of the Great Mountain. There he met two Monsters. One bloodied with the flesh of the chieftain of Othrobar's flock fought him while its mate fled. Fangbith remembered what his master had taught him, that "where" was all that was important.

He struck the Monster on each of its five vital points: head, groin, throat, back, and chest. Five blows to the five points and the Monster was slain. It was too heavy to carry with him, but still triumphant, Fangbith returned to Othrobar.

"I say I have slain the Monster that ate your flock," he cried.

"What proof have you that you have slain any Monster?" asked the chieftain.

"I say I have saved the flock with my medicine," said Ghorick the Healer.

"I say The Goddess has saved the flock by my sacrifices," said Beran the Priest.

Two mornings went by and the flocks were safe, but on the morning of the third day, another tenfold of the chieftain's flock was found butchered. Ghorick the Healer went to his study to find a new medicine. Beran the Priest prepared more sacrifices. Fangbith took his Zolic

* ESM. ESO.
cudgel in hand, again, and walked far through the dark forest until he came to the base of the Great Mountain. There he met the other Monster, bloodied with the flesh of the chieftain of Othrob's flock. They did battle, and again Fangbith remembered what his master had taught him, that "where" was all that was important.

He struck the Monster five times on the head and it fled. Chasing it along the mountain, he struck it five times in the groin and it fled. Running through the forest, Fangbith overtook the Monster and struck it five times in the throat and it fled. Entering into the fields of Othrobar, Fangbith overtook the Monster and struck it five times in the back and it fled. At the foot of the stronghold, the chieftain and his wise men emerged to the sound of the Monster wailing. There they beheld the Monster that had slain the chieftain's flock. Fangbith struck the Monster five times in the chest and it was slain.

A great feast was held in Fangbith's honor, and the flock of Othrobar was never again slain. Joltereg embraced his student and said, "You have at last learned the importance of where you strike your blows."

Publisher's Note

This tale is another, which has an obvious origin among the Ashlander tribes of Vvardenfell and is one of their oldest tales. "Marobar Sul" merely changed the names of the character to sound more "Dwarven" and resold it as part of his collection. The Great Mountain in the tale is clearly "Red Mountain," despite its description of being forested. The Star-Fall and later eruptions destroyed the vegetation on Red Mountain, giving it the wasted appearance it has today.

This tale does have some scholarly interest, as it suggests a primitive Ashlander culture, but it talks of living in "strongholds" much like the ruined strongholds on Vvardenfell today. There are even references to a stronghold of "Othrobar" somewhere between Vvardenfell and Skyrim, but few strongholds outside of sparsely-settled Vvardenfell have survived to the present. Scholars do not agree on who built these strongholds or when, but I believe it is clear from this story and other evidence that the Ashlander tribes used these strongholds in the ancient past instead of making camps of wickwheat huts as they do today.

The play on words that forms the lesson of the fable -- that it is as important to know where the monster should be slain, at the stronghold, as it is to know where the monster must be struck on its body to be slain -- is typical of many Ashlander tales. Riddles, even ones as simple as this one, are loved by both the Ashlanders and the vanished Dwemer. Although the Dwemer are usually portrayed as presenting the riddles, rather than being the ones who solve it as in Ashlander tales.
The situation simply is this," said Phlaxith, his face as chiseled and resolute as any statue. "Everyone knows that the cemetery west of the city is haunted by some malevolent beings, and has been for many years now. The people have come to accept it. They bury their dead by daylight, and are away before Masser and Secunda have risen and the evil comes forth. The only victims to fall prey to the devils within are the very stupid and the outsiders."

"It sounds like a natural solution to filtering out the undesirables then," laughed Nitrah, a tall, middle-aged woman with cold eyes and thin lips. "Where is the gold in saving them?"

"From the Temple. They're re-opening a new monastery near the cemetery, and they need the land cleansed of evil. They're offering a fortune, so I accepted the assignment with the caveat that I could assemble my own team to split the reward. That's why I've sought you each out. From what I've heard, you, Nitrah, are the best bladesman in Morrowind."

Nitrah smiled her unpleasant best.

"And you, Osmic, are a renowned burglar, though never once imprisoned."

The bald-pated young man stammered as if to refute the charges, before grinning back, "I'll get you in where you need to go. But then it's up to you to do what you need to do. I'm no combatter."

"Anything Nitrah and I can't handle, I'm sure Massitha will prove her mettle," Phlaxith said, turning to the fourth member of the party. "She comes on very good references as a sorceress of great power and skill."

Massitha was the picture of innocence, round-faced and wide-eyed. Nitrah and Osmic looked at her uncertainly, particularly watching her fearful expressions as Phlaxith described the nature of the creatures haunting the cemetery. It was obvious she had never faced any adversary other than man and mer before. If she survived, they thought to themselves, it would be very surprising.

As the foursome trudged toward the graveyard at dusk, they took the opportunity to quiz their new teammate.

"Vampires are filthy creatures," said Nitrah. "Disease-ridden, you know. They say off to the west, they'll indiscriminately pass on their curse together with a number of other afflictions. They don't do that here so much, but still you don't want to leave their wounds untreated. I take it you know something of the spells of Restoration if one of us gets bit?"

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* ESM. ESO.
"I know a little, but I'm no Healer," said Massitha meekly.

"More of a Battlemage?" asked Osmic.

"I can do a little damage if I'm really close, but I'm not very good at that either. I'm more of an illusionist, technically."

Nitrah and Osmic looked at one another with naked concern as they reached the gates of the graveyard. There were moving shadows, stray specters among the wrack and ruins, crumbled paths stacked on top of crumbled paths. It wasn't a maze of a place; it could have been any dilapidated graveyard but even without looking at the tombstones, it did have one very noticeable feature. Filling the horizon was the mausoleum of a minor Cyrodilic official from the 2nd Era, slightly exotic but still harmonizing with the Dunmer graves in a complimentary style called decay.

"It's a surprisingly useful School," whispered Massitha defensively. "You see, it's all concerned with magicka's ability to alter the perception of objects without changing their physical compositions. Removing sensual data, for example, to cast darkness or remove sound or smell from the air. It can help by--"

A red-haired vampire woman leapt out of the shadows in front of them, knocking Phlaxith on his back. Nitrah quickly unsheathed her sword, but Massitha was faster. With a wave of her hand, the creature stopped, frozen, her jaws scant inches from Phlaxith's throat. Phlaxith pulled out his own blade and finished her off.

"That's illusion?" asked Osmic.

"Certainly," smiled Massitha. "Nothing changed in the vampire's form, except its ability to move. Like I said, it's a very useful School."

The four climbed up over the paths to the front gateway to the crypt. Osmic snapped the lock and disassembled the poison trap. The sorceress cast a wave of light down the dust-choked corridors, banishing the shadows and drawing the inhabitants out. Almost immediately they were set on by a pair of vampires, howling and screaming in a frenzy of bloodlust.

The battle was joined, so no sooner were the first two vampires felled than their reinforcements attacked. They were mighty warriors of uncanny strength and endurance, but Massitha's paralysis spell and the weaponry of Phlaxith and Nitrah clove through their ranks. Even Osmic aided the battle.

"They're crazy," gasped Massitha when the fight finally ended and she could catch her breath.

"Quarra, the most savage of the vampire bloodlines," said Phlaxith. "We have to find and exterminate each and every one."

Delving into the crypts, the group hounded out more of the creatures. Though they varied in appearance, each seemed to rely on their strength and claws for attacking, and subtlety did not seem to be the style of any. When the entire mausoleum had been searched and every creature within destroyed, the four finally made their way to the surface. It was only an hour until sunrise.
There was no frenzied scream or howl. Nothing rushed forward towards them. The final attack when it happened was so unlike the others that the questors were taken utterly by surprise.

The ancient creature waited until the four were almost out of the cemetery, talking amiably, making plans for spending their share of the reward. He judged carefully who would be the greatest threat, and then launched himself at the sorceress. Had Phlaxith not turned his attention back from the gate, she would have been ripped to shreds before she had a chance to scream.

The vampire knocked Massitha across a stone, its claws raking across her back, but stopped its assault in order to block a blow from Phlaxith's sword. It accomplished this maneuver in its own brutal way, by tearing the warrior's arm from its socket. Osmic and Nitrah set on it, but they found themselves in a losing battle. Only when Massitha had pulled herself back up from behind the pile of rocks, weak and bleeding, that the fight turned. She cast a magickal ball of flame at the creature, which so enraged it that it turned back to her. Nitrah saw her opening and took it, beheading the vampire with a stroke of her sword.

"So you do know some spells of destruction, like you said," said Nitrah.

"And a few spells of healing too," she said weakly. "But I can't save Phlaxith."

The warrior died in the bloodied dust before them. The three were quiet as they traveled across the dawn-lit countryside back toward Necrom. Massitha felt the throb of pain on her back intensify as they walked and then a gradual numbness like ice spread through her body.

"I need to go to a healer and see if I've been diseased," she said as they reached the city.

"Meet us at the Moth and Fire tomorrow morning," said Nitrah. "We'll go to the Temple and get our reward and split it there."

Three hours later, Osmic and Nitrah sat in their room at the tavern, happily counting and recounting the gold marks. Split three ways, it was a very comfortable sum.

"What if the healers can't do anything for Massitha?" smiled Osmic dreamily. "Some diseases can be insidious."

"Did you hear something in the hall?" asked Nitrah quickly, but when she looked, there was no one there. She returned, shutting the door behind her. "I'm sure Massitha will survive if she went straight to the healer. But we could leave tonight with the gold."

"Let's have one last drink to our poor sorceress," said Osmic, leading Nitrah out of the room toward the stairs down.

Nitrah laughed. "Those spells of illusion won't help her track us down, as useful as she keeps saying they are. Paralysis, light, silence -- not so good when you don't know where to look."

They closed the door behind them.
"Invisibility is another spell of illusion," said Massitha's disembodied voice. The gold on the table rose in the air and vanished from sight as she slipped it into her purse. The door again opened and closed, and all was silent until Osmic and Nitrah returned a few minutes later.
For three hundred years I have been a priestess of Azura, the Daedric Princess of Moonshadow, Mother of the Rose, and Queen of the Night Sky. Every Hogithum, which we celebrate on the 21st of First Seed, we summon her for guidance, as well as to offer things of worth and beauty to Her Majesty. She is a cruel but wise mistress. We do not invoke her on any Hogithum troubled by thunderstorms, for those nights belong to the Mad One, Sheogorath, even if they do coincide with the occasion. Azura at such times understands our caution.

We may summon her on other dates also, and she quite often responds. The only days we are forbidden to invoke her are those prescribed to one of the other fifteen Princes: the 1st and the 13th of Morning Star, the 2nd and the 16th of Suns Dawn, the 5th of First Seed, the 9th of Rains Hand, the 9th of Second Seed, the 5th of Mid Year, the 10th of Suns Height, the 3rd of Hearth Fire, the 8th and the 13th of Frost Fall, the 2nd and 20th of Suns Dusk, and the 20th of Evening Star. I know who is summoned on the 3rd of Hearth Fire, the 2nd of Suns Dusk, and the 20th of Evening Star, but I am not certain of the others. It is enough that Azura has forbidden those dates.

Azura's invocation is a very personal one. I have been priestess to three other Daedric Princes, but Azura values the quality of her worshippers, and the truth behind our adoration of her. When I was a Dark Elven maid of sixteen, I joined my grandmother's coven, worshippers of Molag Bal, the Schemer Princess. Blackmail, extortion, and bribery are as much the weapons of the Witches of Molag Bal as dark magic. The Invocation of Molag Bal is held on the 20th of Evening Star, except during stormy weather. This ceremony is seldom missed, but Molag Bal often appears to her cultists in mortal guise on other dates. When my grandmother died in an attempt to poison the heir of Firewatch, I re-examined my faith in the cult.

My brother was a warlock of the cult of Boethiah - and from what he told me, the Dark Warrior was closer to my spirit than the treacherous Molag Bal. Boethiah is a Warrior Princess who acts more overtly than any other Daedra. After years of skulking and scheming, it felt good to perform acts for a mistress which had direct immediate consequences. Besides, I liked it that Boethiah was a Daedra of the Dark Elves. Our cult would summon her on the day we called the Gauntlet, the 2nd of Sun's Dusk. Bloody competitions would be held in her honor, and the duels and battles would continue until nine cultists were killed at the hands of other cultists. Boethiah cared little for her cultists - she only cared for our blood. I do think I saw her smile when I accidentally slew my brother in a sparring session. My horror, I think, greatly pleased her.

I left the cult soon after that. Boethiah was too impersonal for me, too cold. I wanted a mistress of greater depth. For the next eighteen years of my life, I worshipped...
no one. {Instead} I read and researched. It was in an old and profane tome {that} I came upon the name of Nocturnal - Nocturnal the Night Mistress, Nocturnal the Unfathomable. As the book prescribed, I called to her on her holy day, the 3rd of Hearth Fire. At last I had found the personal mistress I had so long desired. I strove to understand her labyrinthine philosophy, the source of her mysterious pain. Everything about her was dark and shrouded, even the way she spoke and the acts she required of me. It took years for me to understand the simple fact that I could never understand Nocturnal. Her mystery was as essential to her as savagery was to Boethiah or treachery was to Molag Bal. To understand Nocturnal is to negate her, to pull back the curtains {cloaking} her realm of darkness. As much as I loved her, I recognized the futility of unraveling her enigmas. I turned instead to her sister, Azura.

Azura is the only Daedra {Princess} I have ever worshipped who seems to care about her {followers}. Molag Bal wanted my mind, Boethiah wanted my arms, and Nocturnal {--} perhaps my curiosity. Azura wants all of that, and our love {above all}. Not our abject slavering, but our honest and genuine {caring} in all its forms. It is important to her that our emotions {be} engaged {in her worship}. And our love must also be directed inward. If we love her and hate ourselves, she feels our pain. I will{, for all time,} have no other mistress.

NOTES

1 ESM. ESD reads "and to give up beautiful things to her majesty".
2 ESM. ESD reads "thunder storms".
3 ESM. ESD reads "Hogithum".
4 ESM. Not in ESD.
5 ESD. Not in ESM.
6 ESD. Not in ESM.
7 ESM. ESD reads "of".
8 ESM. Not in ESD.
9 According to http://til.gamingsource.net/dfbooks/b080_azura.shtml and http://www.izhtex.com/tes2/equipment/books/bok00080.htm, the paragraph continues with the words ", and them" or ", and the" respectively, but more is not given on either site. In both cases, the words "When I was a Dark Elven maiden" introduce the next paragraph.
10 ESM. ESD reads "magic is".
11 ESM. ESD reads "in".
12 ESM. ESD reads "his".
13 ESM. ESD reads "Prince".
14 ESM. ESD reads "avertly".
15 ESM. ESD reads "Daedra".
16 ESM. ESD reads "my".
17 ESM. Not in ESD.
18 ESM. Not in ESD.
19 ESM. ESD reads "is".
20 ESM. ESD reads "about".
21 ESM. ESD reads "spar".
22 ESM. ESD reads "master".
23 ESD. Not in ESM.
24 ESM. Not in ESD.
25 ESM. Not in ESD.
26 ESM. ESD reads "in".
27 ESM. ESD reads "Prince".
28 ESM. ESD reads "cultists".
29 ESD. Not in ESM.
30 ESM. Not in ESD.
31 ESM. ESD reads "love".
32 ESM. ESD reads "are".
ESM. Not in ESD.
ESM. Not in ESD.
Lady Allena Benoch, former master of the Valenwood Fighter's Guild and head of the Emperor's personal guard in the Imperial City, has been leading a campaign to reacquaint the soldiers of Tamriel with the sword. I met with her on three different occasions for the purposes of this book. The first time was at her suite in the palace, on the balcony overlooking the gardens below.

I was early for the interview, which had taken me nearly six months to arrange, but she gently chided me for not being even earlier.

"I've had time to put up my defenses now," she said, her bright green eyes smiling.

Lady Benoch is a Bosmer, a Wood Elf, and like her ancestors, took to the bow in her early years. She excelled at the sport, and by the age of fourteen, she had joined the hunting party of her tribe as a Jaqspur, a long distance shooter. During the black year of 396, when the Parikh tribe began their rampage through southeastern Valenwood with the aid of powers from the Summerset Isle, Lady Benoch fought the futile battle to keep her tribe's land.

"I killed someone for the first time when I was sixteen," she says now. "I don't remember it very well -- he or she was just a blur on the horizon where I aimed my bow. It meant no more to me than shooting animals. I probably killed a hundred people like that during that summer and fall. I didn't really feel like a killer until that wintertide, when I learned what it was like to look into a man's eyes as you spilled his blood.

"It was a scout from the Parikh tribe who surprised me while I was on camp watch. We surprised each other, I suppose. I had my bow at my side, and I just panicked, trying to string an arrow when he was half a yard away from me. It was the only thing I knew to do. Of course, he struck first with his blade, and I just fell back in shock.

"You always remember the mistakes of your first victim. His mistake was assuming because he had drawn blood and I had fallen, that I was dead. I rushed at him the moment he turned from me towards the sleeping camp of my tribesmen. He was caught off guard, and I wrested his blade away from him.

"I don't know how many times I stabbed at him. By the time I stopped, when the next watch came to relieve me, my arms were black and blue with strain, there was not a solid piece of him left. I had literally cut him into pieces. You see, I had no concept of how to fight or how much it took to kill a man."

Lady Benoch, aware of this deficiency in her education, began teaching herself swordsmanship at once.

* ESM. ESO.
"You can't learn how to use a sword in Valenwood," she says. "Which isn't to say Bosmer can't use blades, but we're largely self-taught. As much as it hurt when my tribe found itself homeless, pushed to the north, it did have one good aspect: it afforded me the opportunity to meet Redguards."

Studying all manners of weapon wielding under the tutelage of Warday A'kor, Lady Benoch excelled. She became a freelance adventurer, traveling through the wilds of southern Hammerfell and northern Valenwood, protecting caravans and visiting dignitaries from the various dangers indigenous to the population.

Unfortunately, before we were able to pursue her story of her early years any further, Lady Benoch was called away on urgent summons from the Emperor. Such is often the case with the Imperial Guard, and in these troubled times, perhaps, more so than in the past. When I tried to contact her for another talk, her servants informed me than their mistress was in Skyrim. Another month passed, and when I visited her suite, I was told she was in High Rock.

To her credit, Lady Benoch actually sought me out for our second interview on Sun's Dusk of that year. I was in a tavern in the City called the Blood and Rooster, when I felt her hand on my shoulder. She sat down at the rude table and continued her tale as if it had never been interrupted.

She returned to the theme of her days as an adventurer, and told me about the first time she ever felt confident with a sword.

"I owned at that time an enchanted daikatana, quite a good one, of daedric metal. It wasn't an original Akaviri, not even of design. I didn't have that kind of money, but it served my primary purpose of delivering as much damage with as little effort on my part as possible. A'kor had taught me how to fence, but when faced with a life or death situation, I always fell back on the old overhand wallop.

"A pack of orcs had stolen some gold from a local chieftain in Meditea, and I went looking for them in one of the ubiquitous dungeons that dot the countryside in that region. There were the usual rats and giant spiders, and I was enough of a veteran by then to dispatch them with relative ease. The problem came when I found myself in a pitch black room, and all around me, I heard the grunts of orcs nearing in.

"I waved my sword around me, connecting with nothing, hearing their footsteps coming ever nearer. Somehow, I managed to hold back my fear and to remember the simple exercises Master A'kor had taught me. I listened, stepped sideways, swung, twisted, stepped forward, swung a circle, turned around, side-stepped, swung.

"My instinct was right. The orcs had gathered in a circle around me, and when I found a light, I saw that they were all dead.

"That's when I focused on my study of swordplay. I'm stupid enough to require a near death experience to see the practical purposes, you see."

Lady Benoch spent the remainder of the interview, responding in her typically blunt way to the veracity of various myths that surrounded her and her career. It was true that she became the master of the Valenwood Fighter's Guild after winning a duel with the former master, who
was a stooge of the Imperial Battlemage, the traitor Jagar Tharn. It was not true that she was
the one responsible for the Valenwood Guild's disintegration two years later ("Actually, the
membership in the Valenwood chapter was healthy, but in Tamriel overall the mood was not
conducive for the continued existence of a nonpartisan organization of freelance warriors.")
It was true that she first came to the Emperor's attention when she defended Queen Akorithi of
Sentinel from a Breton assassin. It was not true that the assassin was hired by someone in the
high court of Daggerfall ("At least," she says wryly, "That has never been proven."). It was
also true that she married her former servant Urken after he had been in her service for eleven
years ("No one knows how to keep my weaponry honed like he does," she says. "It's a
practical business. I either had to give him a raise or marry him.").

The only story I asked her that she would neither admit nor refute was the one about Calaxes,
the Emperor's bastard. When I brought up the name, she shrugged, professing no knowledge
of the affair. I pressed on with the details of the story. Calaxes, though not in line for
succession, had been given the Archbishopric of The One: a powerful position in the Imperial
City, and indeed over all Tamriel where that religion is honored. Whispering began
immediately that Calaxes believed that the Gods were angered with the secular governments
of Tamriel and the Emperor specifically. It was even said that Calaxes advocated full-scale
rebellion to establish a theocracy over the Empire.

It is certainly true, I pressed on, that the Emperor's relationship with Calaxes had become very
stormy, and that legislation had been passed to limit the Church's authority. That is, up until
the moment when Calaxes disappeared, suddenly, without notice to his closest of friends.
Many said that Lady Benoch and the Imperial Guard assassinated the Archbishop Calaxes in
the sacristy of his church -- the date usually given was the 29th of Sun's Dusk 3E 498.

"Of course," responds Lady Benoch with one of her mysterious grins. "I don't need to tell you
that the Imperial Guard's position is as protectors of the throne, not assassins."

"But surely, no one is more trusted that the Guard for such a sensitive operation," I say,
carefully.

Lady Benoch acknowledges that, but merely says that such details of her duties must remain
secret as a matter of Imperial security. Unfortunately, her ladyship had to leave early the next
morning, as the Emperor had business down south -- of course, I couldn't be told more
specifics. She promised to send me word when she returned so we could continue our
interview.

As it turned out, I had business of my own in the Summurset Isle, compiling a book on the
Psijic Order. It was therefore with surprise that I met her ladyship three months later in
Firsthold. We managed to get away from our respective duties to complete our third and final
interview, on a walk along the Diceto, the great river that passes through the royal parks of
the city.

Steering away from questions of her recent duties and assignments, which I guessed rightly
she was loath to answer, I returned to the subject of swordfighting.

"Frandar Hunding," she says. "Lists thirty-eight grips, seven hundred and fifty offensive and
eighteen hundred defensive positions, and nearly nine thousand moves essential to sword
mastery. The average hack-and-slasher knows one grip, which he uses primarily to keep from
dropping his blade. He knows one offensive position, facing his target, and one defensive
position, fleeing. Of the multitudinous rhythms and inflections of combat, he knows less than
one.

"The ways of the warrior were never meant to be the easiest path. The archetype of the idiot
fighter is as solidly ingrained as that of the brilliant wizard and the shrewd thief, but it was not
always so. The figure of the philosopher swordsman, the blade-wielding artist are creatures of
the past, together with the swordsinger of the Redguards, who was said to be able to create
and wield a blade with but the power of his mind. The future of the intelligent blade-wielder
looks bleak in comparison to the glories of the past."

Not wanting to end our interviews on a sour note, I pressed Lady Allena Benoch for advice
for young blade-swingers just beginning their careers.

"When confronted with a wizard," she says, throwing petals of Kanthleaf into the Diceto.
"Close the distance and hit 'im hard."
The Last Scabbard of Akrash

by Tabar Vunqidh

For several warm summer days in the year 3E 407, a young, pretty Dunmer woman in a veil regularly visited one of the master armorers in the city of Tear. The locals decided that she was young and pretty by her figure and her poise, though no one ever saw her face. She and the armorer would retire to the back of his shop, and he would close down his business and dismiss his apprentices for a few hours. Then, at mid-afternoon, she would leave, only to return at precisely the same time the next day. As gossip goes, it was fairly meager stuff, though what the old man was doing with such a well dressed and attractively proportioned woman was the source of several crude jokes. After several weeks, the visits stopped, and life returned to normal in the slums of Tear.

It was not until a month or two after the visits had stopped, that in one of the many taverns in the neighborhood, a young local tailor, having imbibed too much sauce, asked the armorer, "So whatever happened to your lady friend? You break her heart?"

The armorer, well aware of the rumors, simply replied, "She is a proper young lady of quality. There was nothing between her and the likes of me."

"What was she doing at your shop every day for?" asked the tavern wench, who had been dying to get the subject open.

"If you must know," said the armorer. "I was teaching her the craft."

"You're putting us on," laughed the tailor.

"No, the young lady had a particular fascination with my particular kind of artistry," the armorer said, with a hint of pride before getting lost in the reverie. "I taught her how to mend swords specifically, from all kinds of nicks and breaks, hairline fissures, cracked pommels, quillons, and grips. When she first started, she had no idea how to secure the grips to the tang of the blade... Well, of course she was green to start off with, why wouldn't she be? But she weren't afraid to get her hands dirty. I taught her how to patch the little inlaid silver and gold filigree you find on really fine blades, and how to polish it all to a mirror sheen so the sword looks like the gods just pulled it from their celestial anvil."

The tavern wench and the tailor laughed out loud. No matter what he alleged, the armorer was speaking of the young lady's training as another man speaks of a long lost love.

More of the locals in the tavern would have listened to the armorer's pathetic tale, but more important gossip had taken precedence. There was another murdered slave-trader found in the center of town, gutted from fore to aft. That made six of them total in barely a fortnight. Some called the killer "The Liberator," but that sort of anti-slavery zeal was rare among the

* ESM. ESO.
common folk. They preferred calling him "The Lopper," as several of the earlier victims had been completely beheaded. Others had been simply perforated, sliced, or gutted, but "The Lopper" still kept his original sobriquet.

While the enthusiastic hooligans made bets about the condition of the next slave-trader's corpse, several dozen of the surviving members of that trade were meeting at the manor house of Serjo Dres Minegaur. Minegaur was a minor houseman of House Dres, but a major member of the slave-trading fraternity. Perhaps his best years were behind him, but his associates still counted on him for wisdom.

"We need to take what we know of this Lopper and search accordingly," said Minegaur, seated in front of his opulent hearth. "We know he has an unreasonable hatred of slavery and slave-traders. We know he is skilled with a blade. We know he has the stealth and finesse to execute our most well-secured brethren in their most secure abodes. It sounds to me to be an adventurer, an Outlander. Surely no citizen of Morrowind would strike at us like this."

The slave-traders nodded in agreement. An Outlander seemed most likely for their troubles. It was always true.

"Were I fifty years younger, I would take down my blade Akrash from the hearth," Minegaur made an expansive gesture to the shimmering weapon. "And join you in seeking out this terror. Search him out where adventurers meet -- taverns and guildhalls. Then show him a little lopping of my own."

The slave-traders laughed politely.

"You wouldn't let us borrow your blade for the execution, I suppose, would you, Serjo?" asked Soron Jeles, a young toadying slaver enthusiastically.

"It would be an excellent use for Akrash," sighed Minegaur. "But I vowed to retire her when I retired."

Minegaur called for his daughter Peliah to bring the slavers more flin, but they waved the girl away. It was to be a night for hunting the Lopper, not drinking away their troubles. Minegaur heartily approved of their devotion, particular as expensive as the liquor was getting to be.

When the last of the slavers had left, the old man kissed his daughter on the head, took one last admiring look at Akrash, and toddled off to his bed. No sooner had he done so then Peliah had the blade off the mantle, and was flying with it across the field behind the manor house. She knew Kazagh had been waiting for her for hours in the stables.

He sprung out at her from the shadows, and wrapping his strong, furry arms around her, kissed her long and sweet. Holding him as long as she dared to, she finally broke away and handed him the blade. He tested its edge.

"The finest Khajiiti swordsman couldn't hone an edge this keen," he said, looking at his beloved with pride. "And I know I nicked it up good last night."

"That you did," said Peliah. "You must have cut through an iron cuirass."
"The slavers are taking precautions now," he replied. "What did they say during their meeting?"

"They think it's an Outlander adventurer," she laughed. "It didn't occur to any of them that a Khajiiti slave would possess the skill to commit all these 'loppings.'"

"And your father doesn't suspect that it's his dear Akrash that is striking into the heart of oppression?"

"Why would he, when every day he finds it fresh as the day before? Now I must go before anyone notices I'm gone. My nurse sometimes comes in to ask me some detail about the wedding, as if I had any choice in the matter at all."

"I promise you," said Kazagh very seriously. "You will not be forced into any marriage to cement your family's slave-dealing dynasty. The last scabbard Akrash will be sheathed into will be your father's heart. And when you are an orphan, you can free the slaves, move to a more enlightened province, and marry who you like."

"I wonder who that will be," Peliah teased, and raced out of the stables.

Just before dawn, Peliah awoke and crept out to the garden, where she found Akrash hidden in the bittergreen vines. The edge was still relatively keen, but there were scratches vertically across the blade's surface. Another beheading, she thought, as she took pumice stone and patiently rubbed out the marks, finally polishing it with a solution of salt and vinegar. It was up on the mantle in pristine condition when her father came into the sitting room for his breakfast.

When the news came that Kemillith Torom, Peliah's husband-to-be, had been found outside of a canton, his head on a spike some feet away, she did not have to pretend to grieve. Her father knew she did not want to marry him.

"It is a shame," he said. "The lad was a good slaver. But there are plenty of other young men who would appreciate an alliance with our family. What about young Soron Jeles?"

Two days nights later, Soron Jeles was visited by the Lopper. The struggle did not take long, but Soron had had armed himself with one small defense -- a needle dipped in the ichor of poisonplant, hidden up his sleeve. After the mortal blow, he collapsed forward and stuck Kazagh in the calf with the pin. By the time he made it back to the Minegaur manorhouse, he was dying.

Vision blurring, he climbed up to the eaves of the house to Peliah's window and rapped. Peliah did not answer immediately, as she was in a deep, wonderful sleep, dreaming about her future with her Khajiiti lover. He rapped louder, which woke up not only Peliah, but also her father in the next room.

"Kazagh!" she cried, opening up the window. The next person in the bedroom was Minegaur himself.

As he saw it, this slave, his property, was about to lop off the head of his daughter, his property, with his sword, his property. Suddenly, with the energy of a young man, Minegaur
rushed at the dying Khajiit, knocking the sword out of his hand. Before Peliah could stop him, her father had thrust the blade into her lover's heart.

The excitement over, the old man dropped the sword and turned to the door to call the Guard. As an after thought, it occurred to him to make certain that his daughter hadn't been injured and might require a Healer. Minegaur turned to her. For a moment, he felt simply disoriented, feeling the force of the blow, but not the blade itself. Then he saw the blood and then felt the pain. Before he fully realized that his daughter had stabbed him with Akrash, he was dead. The blade, at last, found its scabbard.

A week later, after the official investigations, the slave was buried in an unmarked grave in the manor field, and Serjo Dres Minegaur found his resting place in a modest corner of the family's opulent mausoleum. A larger crowd of curious onlookers came to view the funeral of the noble slaver whose secret life was as the savage Lopper of his competitors. The audience was respectfully quiet, though there was not a person there not imagining the final moments of the man's life. Attacking his own daughter in his madness, luckily defended by the loyal, hapless slave, before turning the blade on himself.

Among the viewers was an old armorer who saw for one last time the veiled young lady before she disappeared forever from Tear.
"Not till the very evening they came," answered he, and then told of his dealings with Mehrunes Dagon's thralls, saying that Mackkan would find it easier to whistle on the wind's tracks and go on a fool's errand than to fight his toads. Then said Mackkan:

"Now see to thy safety henceforward,
And stick to thy parts and thy pride;
Or this mallet of mine, Malacath's Scourge,
Will meet with thine ear of a surety.
For quick as I can cry "Equality",
Though eight arms thou couldst boast of,
Such bumps thou shalt comb on thy brainpan,
Thou that breakest the howes of the dead.

EXPLICATION: The mace Scourge, Blessed of Malacath, Mackkan's legendary weapon, forged from sacred ebony in the Fountains of Fickledire, has ever been the bane of the Dark Kin, and many a black spirit has been hurled back into Oblivion with a single blow of this bold defender of the friendless. Scourge now hangs within the armory of Battlespire, ready to take up in the name of the Emperor against the Daedric Lords.
[47] A Less Rude Song

A Less Rude Song
by Anonymous

They say
The Iliac Bay
Is the place to barrel around
Without a bit of apparel on,
As advertised in that carol song
A tune that's sung as the west wind blows
About it's lovely not wearing any clothes.
Ladies singing high notes, men singing lows,
Implying that the most luscious depravity
And complete absence of serious gravity
Can only be found in the waterous cavity
Of Iliac Bay.

If you are the type who is more a sinner than a sinned,
You'll find it all in Morrowind.

But the truth, my child,
Is that nothing more wild
That an ordinary fashion
Kind of slightly mad passion
Can be detected if at all
In Sentinel and Daggerfall.

Whatever your odd needs: feathered, scaled, or finned,
You'll find it all in Morrowind

It's an invention of bards
That Bretons and Redguards
Have more than some staid fun
And suffer deviant fornication.
For the most of madness, not the least,
The wise debaucher heads out east.

Where your once steely reserve is now merely tinned,
You'll find it all in Morrowind.

In Morrowind,
There is sin.
But, pray, do not confuse Dunmer variety
With that found in tepid Western society

* ESM. ESO.
Compared to which, it nearly is piety.
It isn't terribly ingenious calling it prudery
Observing the Dark Elf aversion to nudity.
After all, the preferred sort of lewdity
In these parts is far more pernicious.
From the Ashlanders to the wettest fishes
You'll find pleasure and pain quite delicious
In Morrowind.

If you find yourself with unkind kinship with your kin
You'll find it all in Morrowind.
Yana was precisely the kind of student her mentor Arthcamu despised: the professional amateur. He enjoyed all the criminal types who were his usual pupils at the stronghold, from the common burglar to the more sophisticated blackmailers, children and young people with strong career ambitions which the art and science of lockpicking could facilitate. They were always interested in simple solutions, the easy way, but people like Yana were always looking for exceptions, possibilities, exotica. For pragmatists like Arthcamu, it was intensely vexing.

The Redguard maiden would spend hours in front of a lock, prodding at it with her wires and picks, flirting with the key pins and driver pins, exploring the hull with a sort of casual fascination that no delinquent possesses. Long after her fellow students had opened their test locks and moved on, Yana was still playing with hers. The fact that she always opened it eventually, no matter how advanced a lock it was, irked Arthcamu even further.

"You are making things much too difficult," he would roar, boxing her ears. "Speed is of the essence, not merely technical know-how. I swear that if I put the key to the lock right in front of you, you'd still never get around to opening it."

Yana would bear Arthcamu's abuse philosophically. She had, after all, paid him in advance. Speed was doubtless an important factor for the picker trying to get somewhere he wasn't supposed to go with the city guard on patrol behind him, but Yana knew it wouldn't apply to her. She merely wanted the knowledge.

Arthcamu did everything he could think of to encourage Yana to move faster. She seemed to perversely thrive on his physical and verbal blows, spending more and more time on each lock, learning its idiosyncrasies and personality. Finally, he could bear it no longer. Very late one afternoon after Yana had dawdled over a perfectly ordinary lock, he grabbed the girl by her ear and dragged her to a room in the stronghold far from the other students, an area they had always been forbidden to visit.

The room was completely barren, except for one large crate in the center. There were no windows and no other door except for the one leading in. Arthcamu slammed his student against the crate and closed the door behind her. There was a distinct click of the lock.

"This is the test for my advanced students," he laughed behind the door. "See if you can escape."

Yana smiled and began her usual slow process of massaging the lock, gaining information. After a few minutes had gone by, she heard Arthcamu's voice again call out from behind the door.
"Perhaps I should mention that this is a test of speed. You see the crate behind you? It contains a vampire ancient who has been locked in here for many months. It is absolutely ravenous. In a few minutes' time, the sun will have completely set, and if you have not opened the door, you will be nothing but a bloodless husk."

Yana considered only for a moment whether Arthcamu was joking or not. She knew he was an evil, horrible man, but to resort to murder to teach his pupil? The moment she heard a rustling in the crate, any doubts she had were erased. Ignoring all her usual explorations, she jammed her wire into the lock, thrust the pegs against the pressure plate, and shoved open the door.

Arthcamu stood in the hallway beyond, laughing cruelly, "So, now you've learned the value of fast work."

Yana fled from Arthcamu's stronghold, fighting back her tears. He was certain that she would never return to his tutelage, but he considered that he had taught her at last a very valuable lesson. When she did return the next morning, Arthcamu registered no surprise, but inside he was seething.

"I'll be leaving shortly," she explained, quietly. "But I believe I've developed a new type of lock, and I'd be grateful if you'd give me your opinion of it."

Arthcamu shrugged and asked her to present her design.

"I was wondering if I might use the vampire room and install the lock. I think it would be better if I demonstrated it."

Arthcamu was dubious, but the prospect of the tiresome girl leaving at last put him in an excellent and even indulgent mood. He agreed to give her access to the room. For all morning and most of the afternoon, she worked near the slumbering vampire, removing the old lock and adding her new prototype. Finally, she asked her old master to take a look.

He studied the lock with an expert eye, and found little to be impressed with.

"This is the first and only pick-proof lock," Yana explained. "The only way to open it is to have the right key."

Arthcamu scoffed and let Yana close the door, shutting him in the room. The door clicked and he began to go to work. To his dismay, the lock was much more difficult than he thought it would be. He tried all his methods to force it, and found that he had to resort to his hated student's method of careful and thorough exploration.

"I need to leave now," called Yana from the other side of the door. "I'm going to bring the city guard to the stronghold. I know that it's against the rules, but I really think it's for the welfare of the villagers not to have a hungry vampire on the loose. It's getting dark, and even though you aren't able to unlock the door, the vampire might be less proud about using the key to escape. Remember when you said 'If I put the key to the lock right in front of you, you'd still never get around to opening it'?"

"Wait!" Arthcamu yelled back. "I'll use the key! Where is it? You forgot to give it to me!"
But there was no reply, only the sound of footfall disappearing down the corridor beyond the
door. Arthcamu began to work harder on the lock, but his hands were shaking with fear. With
no windows, it was impossible to tell how late it was getting to be. Were minutes that were
flying by or hours? He only knew that the vampire ancient would know.

The tools could not stand very much twisting and tapping from Arthcamu's hysterical hands.
The wire snapped in the keyhole. Just like a student. Arthcamu screamed and pounded on the
door, but he knew that no one could possibly hear him. It was while sucking in his breath to
scream again, he heard the distinct creak of the crate opening behind him.

The vampire ancient regarded the master locksmith with insane, hungry eyes, and flew at him
in a frenzy. Before Arthcamu died, he saw it: on a chain that had been placed around the
vampire's neck while it had been sleeping was a key.
Lord Jornibret's Last Dance

(Traditional)

Women's Verse I:
Every winter season,
Except for the reason
Of one war or another
(Really quite a bother),
The Queen of Rimmen and her consort
Request their vassals come and cavort.
On each and every ball,
The first man at the Hall
Is Lord Ogin Jornibret of Gaer,
The Curse of all the Maidens Fair.

Women's Refrain:
Oh, dear ladies, beware.
Dearest, dearest ladies, take care.
Though he's a very handsome man,
If you dare to take his handsome hand,
The nasty little spell will be cast
And your first dance with him will be the last.

Men's Verse I:
At this social event
Everyone who went
Knew the bows and stances
And steps to all the dances.
The Queen of Rimmen and her consort
Would order a trumpet's wild report,
And there could be no indecision
As the revelers took position.
The first dance only ladies, separate
Away from such men as Lord Jornibret.

Men's Refrain:
Oh, dear fellows, explain.
Brothers, can you help make it plain:
The man's been doing this for years,
Leaving maidens fair in tears
Before the final tune's been blast.
And her first dance with him will be the last.

* ESM. ESO.
Women's Verse II:
Lord Ogin Jornibret of Gaer
Watched the ladies dance on air
The loveliest in the realm.
A fellow in a ursine-hide helm
Said, "The Queen of Rimmen and her consort
Have put together quite a sport.
Which lady fair do you prefer?"
Lord Jornibret pointed, "Her.
See that bosom bob and weave.
Well-suited for me to love and leave."

Women's Refrain.

Men's Verse II:
The man in the mask of a bear
Had left the Lord of Gaer
Before the ladies' dance was ending.
Then a trumpet sounded, portending
That the Queen of Rimmen and her consort
Called for the men to come to court.
Disdainful, passing over all the rest,
Ogin approached she of bobbing breast.
She was rejected, saved a life of woe,
For a new maiden as fair as snow.

Men's Refrain.

Women's Verse III:
At the first note of the band,
The beauty took Ogin's hand.
She complimented his stately carriage
Dancing to the tune about the marriage
Of the Queen of Rimmen and her consort.
It is very difficult indeed to comport
With grace, neither falling nor flailing,
Wearing ornate hide and leather mailing,
Dancing light as the sweetest of dreams
Without a single squeak of the seams.

Women's Refrain.

Men's Verse III:
The rhythms rose and fell
No one dancing could excel
With masculine grace and syncopation,
Lord Jornibret even drew admiration
From the Queen of Rimmen and her consort.
Like a beauteous vessel pulling into port,
He silently slid, belying the leather's weight.
She whispered girlishly, "The hour is late,  
But I've never seen such grace in hide armor."  
It 'twas a pity he knew he had to harm her.

Men's Refrain

Women's Verse IV
The tune beat was furious  
He began to be curious  
Where had the maiden been sequest'ed.  
"Before this dance was requested  
By the consort and his Queen of Rimmen  
I didn't see you dance with the women."
"My dress was torn as I came to the dance,"  
She said smiling in a voice deep as a man's,  
"My maids worked quickly to repair,  
While I wore a suit of hide, a helm of a bear."

Women's Refrain.

-- End
The Lunar Lorkhan

by Fal Droon

I will not go into the varying accounts of what happened at Adamantine Tower, nor will I relate the War of Manifest Metaphors that rendered those stories unable to support most qualities of what is commonly known as "narrative." We all have our favorite Lorkhan story and our favorite Lorkhan motivation for the creation of Nirn and our favorite story of what happened to His Heart. But the Theory of the Lunar Lorkhan is of special note.

In short, the Moons were and are the two halves of Lorkhan's 'flesh-divinity'. Like the rest of the Gods, Lorkhan was a plane(t) that participated in the Great Construction... except where the Eight lent portions of their heavenly bodies to create the mortal plane(t), Lorkhan's was cracked asunder and his divine spark fell to Nirn as a shooting star "to impregnate it with the measure of its existence and a reasonable amount of selfishness."

Masser and Secunda therefore are the personifications of the dichotomy-- the "Cloven Duality," according to Artaeum-- that Lorkhan legends often rail against: ideas of the anima/animus, good/evil, being/nothingness, the poetry of the body, throat, and moan/silence-as-the-abortive, and so on -- set in the night sky as Lorkhan's constant reminder to his mortal issue of their duty.

Followers of this theory hold that all other "Heart Stories" are mythical degradations of the true origin of the moons (and it needn't be said that they observe the "hollow crescent theory" as well).

* ESM. ESO.
Act IV, Scene III, continued

Lifts-Her-Tail: Certainly not, kind sir! I am here but to clean your chambers.

Crantius Colto: Is that all you have come here for, little one? My chambers?

Lifts-Her-Tail: I have no idea what it is you imply, master. I am but a poor Argonian maid.

Crantius Colto: So you are, my dumpling. And a good one at that. Such strong legs and shapely tail.

Lifts-Her-Tail: You embarrass me, sir!

Crantius Colto: Fear not. You are safe here with me.

Lifts-Her-Tail: I must finish my cleaning, sir. The mistress will have my head if I do not!

Crantius Colto: Cleaning, eh? I have something for you. Here, polish my spear.

Lifts-Her-Tail: But it is huge! It could take me all night!

Crantius Colto: Plenty of time, my sweet. Plenty of time.

END OF ACT IV, SCENE III

NOTES

1 In-game information of ESM.
[52] The Madness of Pelagius

The Madness of Pelagius
By Tsathenes

The man who would be Emperor of all Tamriel was born Thoriz Pelagius Septim, a prince of the royal family of Wayrest in 3E 119 at the end of the glorious reign of his uncle, Antiochus I. Wayrest had been showered by much preference during the years before Pelagius' birth, for King Magnus was Antiochus' favorite brother.

It is hard to say when Pelagius' madness first manifested itself, for, in truth, the first ten years of his life were marked by much insanity in the land itself. When Pelagius was just over a year old, Antiochus died and a daughter, Kintyra, assumed the throne to the acclaim of all. Kintyra II was Pelagius' cousin and an accomplished mystic and sorceress. If she had sufficient means to peer into the future, she would have surely fled the palace.

The story of the War of the Red Diamond has been told in many other scholarly journals, but as most historians agree, Kintyra II's reign was usurped by her and Pelagius' cousin Uriel, by the power of his mother, Potema -- the so-called wolf queen of Solitude. The year after her coronation, Kintyra was trapped in Glenpoint and imprisoned in the Imperial dungeons there.

All of Tamriel exploded into warfare as Prince Uriel took the throne as Uriel III, and High Rock, because of the imprisoned Empress' presence there, was the location of some of the bloodiest battles. Pelagius' father, King Magnus, allied himself with his brother Cephorus against the usurper Emperor, and brought the wrath of Uriel III and Queen Potema down on Wayrest. Pelagius, his brothers and sisters, and his mother Utheilla fled to the Isle of Balfiera. Utheilla was of the line of Direnni, and her family manse is still located on that ancient isle even to this day.

There is thankfully much written record of Pelagius' childhood in Balfiera recorded by nurses and visitors. All who met him described him as a handsome, personable boy, interested in sport, magic, and music. Even assuming diplomats' lack of candor, Pelagius seemed like; if anything, a blessing to the future of the Septim Dynasty.

When Pelagius was eight, Cephorus slew Uriel III at the Battle of Ichidag and proclaimed himself Emperor Cephorus I. For the next ten years of his reign, Cephorus battled Potema. Pelagius' first battle was the Siege of Solitude, which ended with Potema's death and the final end of the war. In gratitude, Cephorus placed Pelagius on the throne of Solitude.

As king of Solitude, Pelagius' eccentricities of behavior began to be noticeable. As a favorite nephew of the Emperor, few diplomats to Solitude made critical commentary about Pelagius. For the first two years of his reign, Pelagius was at the very least noted for his alarming shifts in weight. Four months after taking the throne, a diplomat from Ebonheart called Pelagius "a hale and hearty soul with a heart so big, it widens his waist"; five months after that, the

* ESD. ESM. ESO.
visiting princess of Firsthold wrote to her brother that "the king's gripped my hand and it felt like I was being clutched by a skeleton. Pelagius is greatly emaciated, indeed."

Cephorus never married and died childless three years after the Siege of Solitude. As the only surviving sibling, Pelagius' father Magnus left the throne of Wayrest and took residence at the Imperial City as the Emperor Magnus I. Magnus was elderly and Pelagius was his oldest living child, so the attention of Tamriel focused on Sentinel. By this time, Pelagius' {eccentricities} were becoming infamous.

There are many legends about his acts as King of Sentinel, but few well-documented cases exist. It is known that Pelagius locked the young princes and princesses of Silvenar in his room with him, only releasing them when an unsigned Declaration of War was slipped under the door. When he tore off his clothes during a speech he was giving at a local festival, his advisors apparently decided to watch him more carefully. On the orders of Magnus, Pelagius was married to the beautiful heiress of an ancient Dark Elf noble family, Katariah Ra'athim.

Nordic kings who marry Dark Elves seldom improve their popularity. There are two reasons most scholars give for the union. Magnus was trying to cement relations with Ebonheart, where the Ra'athim clan hailed. Ebonheart's neighbor, Mournhold, had been a historical ally of the Empire since the very beginning, and the royal consort of Queen Barenziah had won many battles in the War of the Red Diamond. Ebonheart had a poorly-kept secret of aiding Uriel III and Potema.

The other reason for the marriage was more personal: Katariah was as shrewd a diplomat as she was beautiful. If any creature was capable of hiding Pelagius' madness, it was she.

On the 8th of Second Seed, 3E 145, Magnus I died quietly in his sleep. Jolethe, Pelagius' sister took over the throne of Solitude, and Pelagius and Katariah rode to the Imperial City to be crowned Emperor and Empress of Tamriel. It is said that Pelagius fainted when the crown was placed on his head, but Katariah held him up so only those closest to the thrones could see what had happened. Like so many Pelagius stories, this cannot be verified.

Pelagius III never truly ruled Tamriel. Katariah and the Elder Council made all the decisions and only tried to keep Pelagius from {embarrassing} all. Still, stories of Pelagius III's reign exist.

It was said that when the Argonian ambassador from Blackrose came to court, Pelagius insisted on speaking in all grunts and squeaks, as that was the Argonian's natural language.

It is known that Pelagius was obsessed with cleanliness, and many guests reported waking to the noise of an early-morning scrubdown of the Imperial Palace. The legend of Pelagius while inspecting the servants' work, suddenly defecating on the floor to give them something to do, is probably apocryphal.

When Pelagius began actually biting and attacking visitors to the Imperial Palace, it was decided to send him to a private asylum. Katariah was proclaimed regent two years after Pelagius took the throne. For the next six years, the Emperor stayed in a series of institutions and asylums.
Traitors to the Empire have many lies to spread about this period. Whispered stories of hideous experiments and tortures performed on Pelagius have almost become accepted as fact. The noble lady Katariah became pregnant shortly after the Emperor was sent away, and rumors of infidelity and, even more absurd, conspiracies to keep the sane Emperor locked away, ran amok. As Katariah proved, her pregnancy came about after a visit to her husband's cell. With no other evidence, as loyal subjects, we are bound to accept the Empress' word on the matter. Her second child, who would reign for many years as Uriel IV, was the child of her union with her consort Lariate, and publicly acknowledged as such.

On a warm night in Suns Dawn, in his 34th year, Pelagius III died after a brief fever in his cell at the Temple of Kynareth in the Isle of Betony. Katariah I reigned for another forty six years before passing the scepter onto the only child she had with Pelagius, Cassynder.

Pelagius' wild behavior has made him perversely dear to the province of his birth and death. The 2nd of Suns Dawn, which may or may not be the anniversary of his death (records are not very clear) is celebrated as Mad Pelagius, the time when foolishness of all sorts is encouraged. And so, one of the least desirable Emperors in the history of the Septim Dynasty, has become one of the most famous ones.

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "such".
2 ESD only.
3 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "bizarrities".
4 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "embarassing".
5 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "at".
The Temple of Two-Moons Dance in Torval has for many hundreds of years been the finest training ground in all Tamriel for warriors of foot and fist. The masters teach students of all ages from all parts of the Empire the most ancient techniques and the most modern variations, and many a former pupil has graduated to great fame. I myself trained there, and as a young child I remember asking my first master, Zoaraym, which former student he felt had best learned the lessons of the Temple.

"I was not a teacher when I met this man, but a student myself," he said, smiling in reminiscence, his great wrinkled face becoming even more like the withered fruit of the bathrum tree. "This was long ago, before your parents were born. For many years I had trained at the Temple, rising to study in more difficult and demanding classes taught by the wisest and most learned Masters of the Two-Moons Dance.

"Gi'Nanth, you will come to understand that the tempering of your body must attend the tempering of your mind, and there is a prescribed order of training we at the Temple have designed over the years in concordance with the way of Riddle'Thar. I had reached the highest level, where my power and skill were such that even by supernatural, magical means, few could ever could ever best me in weaponless combat.

"There was a servant at the Temple at the time, a Dunmer a few years older than myself and those in my class. We had never noticed him but in passing over the years, for he would enter the training chambers quietly, clean for a few minutes' time, and leave without saying a word. Not that we would have listened if he spoke, so enraptured were we in our exercises and lessons.

"When our last Master told some of us, myself included, that the time had come for us to leave the Temple or become teachers, there was a great festival of celebration. The Mane itself deigned to visit and observe our ceremony. As we were and are a Temple of philosophy and combat, there were contests of debate and competitions in the Temple's war arena, not only among the elite few, but open to all students.

"On the first day of the festival, I was examining the gladiatorial roster to see who I would fight with first, when I heard a conversation behind me: the servants speaking to the archpriest of the Temple. It was the first time I heard the Dunmer's voice, and the first time I heard his name.

"'I understand you wish to rejoin your people's struggle in Morrowind, Taren,' the archpriest was saying. 'I am sorry to hear it. You have been an institution here for many, many years, and you will be missed. If there's anything I can do for you, please name it.'}
"'Thank you for your kindness,' the Dunmer replied. 'I do have a request, but I fear you would be loath to grant it. Ever since I first came to the Temple, I have been watching the students learn, and practiced myself when my duties allowed for it. I know I am but a servant here, but I would be honored if you would allow me to compete in the war arena.'

"I stifled back my gasp at the mer's impertinence, to even suggest that he would be worthy to fight with those of us who had trained so hard. To my surprise, the archpriest agreed, adding the name Taren Omathan to the roster at the beginners' level. I was eager to whisper the news to my fellow elite students, but my first bout was scheduled to begin in a few minutes' time.

"I fought eighteen competitions in a row, besting all. The crowd gathered in the arena knew of my prowess, and gave polite, unsurprised applause at the end of each fight. As much as I focused on my own battles, I could not help noticing that other competitions were receiving more and more attention in the arena. The spectators whispered among themselves, and more began drifting away to see something that was evidently more spectacular and unusual than my unbroken string of victories.

"One of the most important lessons we teach from the Two-Moons Dance is the lesson of rejecting one's vanity. I understood then the importance of achieving a personal synchronicity with one's body and mind, of rebuffing outside influences of no importance, but I admit I had not accepted the lesson in my heart. I knew I was good, but my pride was hurt.

"It came down to a contest of champions, and I was one of the two. When I saw who the other fighter would be, my mood turned from one of wounded dignity to complete disbelief. My adversary was the servant, Taren.

"It must be a joke, or some final philosophical test, I reasoned. Then I looked into the crowd, and saw anticipation of a great battle to come in every eye. We gave one another the sign of respect, I stiffly and he with great elegance and modesty. The fight began.

"Initially, I sought to end it quickly, still thinking that he was unworthy to be cleaning the arena, let alone fighting in it. In retrospect, I was being illogical, as I must have known he had bested as many students as I to had reach that final level. He offered simple counterblows to my attacks, and responded in kind. His style was expansive, encompassing sophisticated arcane foot play one moment and simple jabs and kicks the next. I tried assailments intended to dazzle, but his face never showed either fear or contempt of my abilities.

"The fight lasted for a long time. I don't recall when I realized I was destined to lose, but when it ended, I was not surprised with the outcome. With a sense of unusual and true modesty, I bowed to him. But I could not resist asking him as we left the arena to the sound of thunderous applause how he had so secretly grown to become a Master.

"'I never had a choice to rise in the Temple,' Taren replied. 'Every day, I cleaned the training chambers of the elite classes and then the beginners'. So you see, I never had the misfortune to forget those early mistakes, lessons, and techniques while observing and learning the ways of the Masters.'

"He left Torval early the next morning to return to his homeland, and I never saw him again, though I've heard people saw that he's become a priest and a teacher. I became a teacher as well, for children just beginning their training in the Two-Moons, as well as the elite. And I
make certain to bring my best pupils to see the how the unlearned fight, so that they might never forget."
The wind blew over the open plain, jostling the few trees within to move back and forth with the irritation of it. A young man in bright green turban approached the army and gave his chieftain's terms for peace to the commander. He was refused. It was to be battle, the battle of Ain-Kolur.

So the chief Iymbez had decreed his open defiance and his horsemen were at war once again. Many times the tribe had moved into territory that was not theirs to occupy, and many times the diplomatic approach had failed. It had come to this, at long last. It was just as well with Mindothrax. His allies may win or lose, but he would always survive. Though he had occasionally been on the losing side of a war, never once in all his thirty-four years had he lost in hand-to-hand combat.

The two armies poured like dual frothing streams through the dust, and when they met a clamor rang out, echoing into the hills. Blood, the first liquor the clay had tasted in many a month, danced like powder. The high and low battle cries of the rival tribes met in harmony as the armies dug into one another's flesh. Mindothrax was in the element he loved.

After ten hours of fighting with no ground given, both commanders called a mutual and honorable withdrawal from the field.

The camp was positioned in a high-walled garden of an old burial ground, adorned by springtide blossoms. As Mindothrax toured the grounds, he was reminded of his childhood home. It was a happy and a sad recollection, the purity of childhood ambition, all of his schooling in the ways of battle, but tinged with memories of his poor mother. A beautiful woman looking down at her son with both pride and unspoken sorrow. She never talked about what troubled her, but it came as no surprise to any when she took the walk across the moors and was found days later, her throat slit open by her own hand.

The army itself was like a colony of ants, newly shaken. Within a half hour's time after the end of the battle, they had reorganized as if by instinct. As the medicos looked to the wounded, someone remarked, with a measure of admiration and astonishment, "Look at Mindothrax. His hair isn't even out of place."

"He is a mighty swordsman," said the attending physician.

"The sword is a greatly overvalued article," said Mindothrax, nevertheless pleased with the attention. "Warriors pay too much attention to striking and not enough in defending strikes. The proper way to go into battle is to defend yourself, and to hit your opponent only when the ideal moment arises."

* ESM. ESO.
"I prefer a more straight-forward approach," smiled one of the wounded. "It is the way of the horse men."

"If it is the way of the Bjouralsae tribes to fail, then I renounce my heritage," said Mindothrax, making a quick sign to the spirits that he was being expressive not blasphemous. "Remember what the great blademaster Gaiden Shinji said, 'The best techniques are passed on by the survivors.' I have been in thirty-six battles, and I haven't a scar to show for them. That is because I rely on my shield, and then my blade, in that order."

"What is your secret?"

"Think of melee as a mirror. I look to my opponent's left arm when I am striking with my right. If he is prepared to block my blow, I blow not. Why exert undue force?" Mindothrax cocked an eyebrow, "But when I see his right arm tense, my left arm goes to my shield. You see, it takes twice as much power to send force than it does to deflect it. When your eye can recognize whether your opponent is striking from above, or at angle, or in an uppercut from below, you learn to pivot and place your shield just so to protect yourself. I could block for hours if need be, but it only takes a few minutes, or even seconds, for your opponent, used to battering, to leave a space open for your own strike."

"What was the longest you've ever had to defend yourself?" asked the wounded man.

"I fought a man once for an hour's time," said Mindothrax. "He was tireless with his bludgeoning, never giving me a moment to do aught but block his strikes. But finally, he took a moment too long in raising his cudgel and I found my mark in his chest. He struck my shield a thousand times, and I struck his heart but once. But that was enough."

"So he was your greatest opponent?" asked the medico.

"Oh, indeed not," said Mindothrax, turning his great shield so the silvery metal reflected his own face. "There is he."

The next day, the battle recommenced. Chief Iymbez had brought in reinforcements from the islands to the south. To the horror and disgrace of the tribe, mercenaries, renegade horsemen and even some Reachmen witches were included in the war. As Mindothrax stared across the field at the armies assembling, putting on his helmet and readying his shield and blade, he thought again of his poor mother. What had tortured her so? Why had she never been able to look at her son without grief?

Between sunrise and sundown, the battle raged. A bright blue-sky overhead burned down on the combatants as they rushed against one another over and over again. In every melee, Mindothrax prevailed. A foe with an ax rained a series of strokes against his shield, but every one was deflected until at last Mindothrax could best the warrior. A spear maiden nearly pierced the shield with her first strike, but Mindothrax knew how to give with the blow, throwing her off balance and leaving her open for his counterstrike. Finally, he met a mercenary on the field, armed with shield and sword and a helm of golden bronze. For an hour and a half they battled.

Mindothrax tried every trick he knew. When the mercenary tensed his left arm, he held back his strike. When his opponent rose his sword, his shield rose too and expertly blocked. For the
first time in his life, he was battling another defensive fighter. Stationary, reflective, with energy to battle for days if need be. Occasionally, another warrior would enter into the fray, sometimes from Mindothrax's army, sometimes from his opponent's. These distractions were swiftly dispatched, and the champions returned to their fight.

As they fought, circling one another, matching block for blow and blow for block, it dawned on Mindothrax that here at last he was fighting the perfect mirror.

It became more a game, almost a dance, than a battle of blood. It was not until Mindothrax missed his own step, striking too soon, throwing himself off balance, that the promenade was ended. He saw, rather than felt, the mercenary's blade rip across him from throat to chest. A good strike. The sort he himself might have delivered.

Mindothrax fell to the ground, feeling his life passing. The mercenary stood over him, prepared to give his worthy adversary the killing blow. It was a strange, honorable deed for an outsider to do, and Mindothrax was greatly moved. Across the battlefield, he heard someone call a name, similar to his own.

"Jurrifax!"

The mercenary removed his helmet to answer the call. As he did so, Mindothrax saw through the slits of his helmet his own reflection in the man. It was his own close-set eyes, red and brown hair, thin and wide mouth, and blunt chin. For a moment he marveled at the mirror, before the stranger turned back to him and delivered the death stroke.

Jurrifax returned to his commander and was well paid for his part in the day's victory. They retired for a hot meal under the stars in a garden by an old cairn that had previously been occupied by their foes. The mercenary was strangely quiet as he observed the land.

"Have you been here before, Jurrifax?" asked one of the tribesmen who had hired him.

"I was born a horseman just like you. My mother sold me when I was just a babe. I have always wondered how my life might have been different had I not been bartered away. I might never have been a mercenary."

"There are many things that decide our fate," said the witch. "It is madness to try to see how you might have taken this turn or that in the world. There are none exactly like yourself, so it is foolish to compare."

"But there is one," said Jurrifax, looking to the stars. "My master, before he set me free, said that my mother had twin sons when I was born. She could only afford to raise but one child, but somewhere out there, there is a man just like me. My brother. I hope to meet him."

The witch saw the spirits before her and knew the truth that the twins had met already. She remained silent and stared into the fire, banishing the thoughts from her head, too wise to tell all.
The Legions could learn from the unconventional tactics used by the Khajiit in the Five Years War against Valenwood. I was stationed at the Sphinxmoth Legion Fort on the border near Dune and witnessed many of the northern skirmishes firsthand.

The war started with the so-called "Slaughter of Torval." The Khajiit claim that the Bosmer invaded the city without provocation and killed over a thousand citizens before being driven off by reinforcements from a nearby jungle tribe. The Bosmer claim that the attack was in retaliation for Khajiti bandits who were attacking wood caravans headed for Valenwood.

In the spring of 3E 396 the war moved closer to Fort Sphinxmoth. I was posted on lookout and saw parts of the conflict. I later spoke with both Khajiit and Bosmer who fought in the battle, and it will serve as an excellent example of how the Khajiit used a mixture of ground and tree units to win the war.

The Khajiit began the fight in an unusual way by sending tree-cutting teams of Cathay-raht and the fearsome Senche-raht or "Battlecats" into the outskirts of Valenwood's forests. When word reached the Bosmer that trees were being felled (allegedly a crime in the strange Bosmeri religion), a unit of archers were dispatched from larger conflicts in the south. The Bosmer were thus goaded into splitting their forces into smaller groups.

The Bosmer archers took up positions in the remaining trees whose branches were now twenty or more feet apart, allowing some light into the forest floor. The Bosmer bent the remaining trees with their magics into small fortifications from which to fire their bows.

When the tree-cutters arrived the next morning, a half dozen Khajiit fell to the Bosmer arrows in the first volley. After that the Khajiit took large wooden shields from the backs of the Senche-raht and made a crude shelter. The Khajiit, even the enormous Senche-raht, were able to hide between this shelter and one of the larger trees. When it became apparent that the Khajiit would not leave their shelter, some Bosmer choose to descend and engage the Khajiit sword-to-claw.

When the Bosmer were nearly upon the shelter, one of the Khajiit began playing on a native instrument of plucked metal bars. This was a signal of some kind, and a small group of the man-like Ohmes and Ohmes-raht emerged from covered holes on the forest floor. Although outnumbered, they were attacking from behind by surprise and won the ground quickly.

* ESM. ESO.
The Bosmer archers in the trees would have still won the battle were they not having troubles of their own. A group of Dagi and Dagi-raht, two of the less common forms of Khajiit who live in the trees of the Tenmar forest, jumped from one tree to another under a magical cover of silence. They took up positions in the higher branches that could not hold a Bosmer's weight. When the signal came, they used their claws and either torches or spells of fire (accounts from the two survivors I spoke with vary on this point) to distract the archers while the battle on the ground took place. A few of the archers were able to flee, but most were killed.

Apparently the Dagi and Dagi-raht have more magical ability than is widely believed if they were able to keep themselves magically silenced for so long. One of the surviving Bosmer told me that he saw a few ordinary cats among the Dagi and even claimed that these ordinary cats are known as 'Alfiq' and that they were the spellcasters, but Bosmer are almost as unreliable as the Khajiit when it comes to the truth, and I cannot believe that a housecat can cast spells.

At the end of the day the Khajiit lost perhaps a half-dozen fighters out a force of no more than four dozen, while the Bosmer lost nearly an entire company of archers. The survivors were unable to report back before a second company of archers arrived and this strategy was repeated again, with similar results. Finally, a much larger force was sent and the Bosmer won that battle with the help of the native animals of Valenwood. That third skirmish and the Khajiit response I will discuss in the second volume of this series.
Mysterious Akavir

Akavir means "Dragon Land". Tamriel means "Dawn's Beauty." Atmora means "Elder Wood". Only the Redguards know what Yokuda ever meant.

Akavir is the kingdom of the beasts. No Men or Mer live in Akavir, though Men once did. These Men, however, were eaten long ago by the vampiric Serpent Folk of Tsaesci. Had they not been eaten, these Men would have eventually migrated to Tamriel. The Nords left Atmora for Tamriel. Before them, the Elves had abandoned Aldmeris for Tamriel. The Redguards destroyed Yokuda so they could make their journey. All Men and Mer know Tamriel is the nexus of creation, where the Last War will happen, where the Gods unmade Lorkhan and left their Adamantine Tower of secrets. Who knows what the Akaviri think of Tamriel, but ask yourself: why have they tried to invade it three times or more?

There are four major nations of Akavir: Kamal, Tsaesci, Tang Mo, and Ka Po' Tun. When they are not busy trying to invade Tamriel, they are fighting with each other.

Kamal is "Snow Hell". Demons live there, armies of them. Every summer they thaw out and invade Tang Mo, but the brave monkey-folk always drive them away. Once Ada'Soom Dir-Kamal, a king among demons, attempted to conquer Morrowind, but Almalexia and the Underking destroyed him at Red Mountain.

Tsaesci is "Snake Palace", once the strongest power in Akavir (before the Tiger-Dragon came). The serpent-folk ate all the Men of Akavir a long time ago, but still kind of look like them. They are tall, beautiful (if frightening), covered in golden scales, and immortal. They enslave the goblins of the surrounding isles, who provide labor and fresh blood. The holdings of Tsaesci are widespread. When natives of Tamriel think of the Akaviri they think of the Serpent-Folk, because one ruled the Cyrodilic Empire for four hundred years in the previous era. He was Potentate Versidue-Shaie, assassinated by the Morag Tong.

Tang Mo is the "Thousand Monkey Isles". There are many breeds of monkey-folk, and they are all kind, brave, and simple (and many are also very crazy). They can raise armies when they must, for all of the other Akaviri nations have, at one time or another, tried to enslave them. They cannot decide who they hate more, the Snakes or the Demons, but ask one, and he will probably say, "Snakes". Though once bitter enemies, the monkey-folk are now allies with the tiger-folk of Ka Po' Tun.

Ka Po' Tun is the "Tiger-Dragon's Empire". The cat-folk here are ruled by the divine Tosh Raka, the Tiger-Dragon. They are now a very great empire, stronger than Tsaesci (though not at sea). After the Serpent-Folk ate all the Men, they tried to eat all the Dragons. They managed to enslave the Red Dragons, but the black ones had fled to (then) Po Tun. A great war was raged, which left both the cats and the snakes weak, and the Dragons all dead. Since

* ESM. ESO.
that time the cat-folk have tried to become the Dragons. Tosh Raka is the first to succeed. He is the largest Dragon in the world, orange and black, and he has very many new ideas.

"First," Tosh Raka says, "is that we kill all the vampire snakes." Then the Tiger-Dragon Emperor wants to invade Tamriel.
The year was 3E 405. The occasion was the millennial celebration of the founding of the Breton Kingdom of Camlorn. Every grand boulevard and narrow alley was strung with gold and purple banners, some plain, some marked with the heraldic symbols of the Royal Family or the various principalities and dukedoms which were vassals of the King. Musicians played in the plazas great and small, and on every street corner was a new exotic entertainer: Redguard snake charmers, Khajiiti acrobats, magicians of genuine power and those whose flamboyant skill was equally impressive if largely illusion.

The sight that drew most of the male citizens of Camlorn was the March of Beauty. A thousand comely young women, brightly and provocatively dressed, danced their way down the long, wide main street of the city, from the Temple of Sethiete to the Royal Palace. The menfolk jostled one another and craned their necks, picking their favorites. It was no secret that they were all prostitutes, and after the March and the Flower Festival that evening, they would be available for more intimate business.

Gyna attracted much of the attention with her tall, curvaceous figure barely covered by strips of silk and her curls of flaxen hair specked with flower petals. In her late twenties, she wasn't the youngest of the prostitutes, but she was certainly one of the most desirable. It was clear by her demeanor that she was used to the lascivious glances, though she was far from jaded at the sight of the city in splendor. Compared to the squalid quarter of Daggerfall where she made her home, Camlorn at the height of celebration seemed so unreal. And yet, what was even stranger was how, at the same time, familiar it all looked, though she had never been there before.

The King's daughter Lady Jyllia rode out of the palace gates, and immediately cursed her misfortune. She had completely forgotten about the March of Beauty. The streets were snarled, at a standstill. It would take hours to wait for the March to pass, and she had promised her old nurse Ramke a visit in her house south of the city. Jyllia thought for a moment, picturing in her mind the arrangement of streets in the city, and devised a shortcut to avoid the main street and the March.

For a few minutes she felt very clever as she wound her way through tight, curving side streets, but presently she came upon temporary structures, tents and theaters set up for the celebration, and had to improvise a new path. In no time at all, she was lost in the city where she had lived all but five years of her life.
Peering down an alley, she saw the main avenue crowded with the March of Beauty. Hoping that it was the tale end, and desirous not to be lost again, Lady Jyllia guided her horse toward the festival. She did not see the snake-charmer at the mouth of the alley, and when his pet hissed and spread its hood, her charge reared up in fear.

The women in the parade gasped and surged back at the sight, but Lady Jyllia quickly calmed her stallion down. She looked abashed at the spectacle she had caused.

"My apologies, ladies," she said with a mock military salute.

"It's all right, madam," said a blonde in silk. "We'll be out of your way in a moment."

Jyllia stared as the March passed her. Looking at that whore had been like looking in a mirror. The same age, and height, and hair, and eyes, and figure, almost exactly. The woman looked back at her, and it seemed as if she was thinking the same thing.

And so Gyna was. The old witches who sometimes came in to Daggerfall had sometimes spoke of doppelgangers, spirits that assumed the guise of their victims and portended certain death. Yet the experience had not frightened her: it seemed only one more strangely familiar aspect of the alien city. Before the March had danced it way into the palace gates, she had all but forgotten the encounter.

The prostitutes crushed into the courtyard, as the King himself came to the balcony to greet them. At his side was his chief bodyguard, a battlemage by the look of him. As for the King himself, he was a handsome man of middle age, rather unremarkable, but Gyna was awed at the sight of him. A dream, perhaps. Yes, that was it: she could see him as she had dreamt of him, high above her as he was now, bending now to kiss her. Not a one of lust as she had experienced before, but one of small fondness, a dutiful kiss.

"Dear ladies, you have filled the streets of the great capitol of Camlorn with your beauty," cried the King, forcing a silence on the giggling, murmuring assembly. He smiled proudly. His eyes met Gyna's and he stopped, shaken. For an eternity, they stayed locked together before His Highness recovered and continued his speech.

Afterwards, while the women were all en route back to their tents to change into their costumes for the evening, one of the older prostitutes approached Gyna: "Did you see how the King looked at you? If you're smart, you'll be the new royal mistress before this celebration ends."

"I've seen looks of hunger before, and that wasn't one of them," laughed Gyna. "I'd wager he thought I was someone else, like that lady who tried to run us over with her horse. She's probably his kin, and he thought she had dressed up like a courtesan and joined the March of Beauty. Can you imagine the scandal?"

When they arrived at the tents, they were greeted by a stocky, well-dressed young man with a bald pate and a commanding presence of authority. He introduced himself as Lord Strale, ambassador to the Emperor himself, and their chief patron. It was Strale who had hired them, on the Emperor's behalf, as a gift to the King and the kingdom of Camlorn.
"The March of Beauty is but a precursor to the Flower Festival tonight," he said. Unlike the King, he did not have to yell to be heard. His voice was loud and precise in its natural modulations. "I expect each of you to perform well, and justify the significant expense I've suffered bringing you all the way up here. Now hurry, you must be dressed and in position on Cavilstyr Rock before the sun goes down."

The ambassador needn't have worried. The women were all professionals, experts at getting dressed and undressed with none of the time-consuming measures less promiscuous females required. His manservant Gnorbooth offered his assistance, but found he had little to do. Their costumes were simplicity itself: soft, narrow sheets with a hole for their heads. Not even a belt was required, so the gowns were open at the sides exposing the frame of their skin.

So it was long before the sun had set that the prostitutes turned dancers were at Cavilstyr Rock. It was a great, wide promontory facing the sea, and for the occasion of the Festival of Flowers, a large circle of unlit torches and covered baskets had been arranged. As early as they were, a crowd of spectators had already arrived. The women gathered in the center of the circle and waited until it was time.

Gyna watched the crowd as it grew, and was not surprised when she saw the lady from the March approaching, hand-in-hand with a very old, very short white-haired woman. The old woman was distracted, pointing out islands out at sea. The blonde lady seemed nervous, unsure of what to say. Gyna was used to dealing with uneasy clients, and spoke first.

"Good to see you again, madam. I am Gyna of Daggerfall."

"I'm glad you bear me no ill will because of the whores, I mean horse," the lady laughed, somewhat relieved. "I am Lady Jyllia Raze, daughter of the King."

"I always thought that daughters of kings were called princess," smiled Gyna.

"In Camlorn, only when they are heirs to the throne. I have a younger brother from my father's new wife whom he favors," Jyllia replied. She felt her head swim. It was madness, speaking to a common prostitute, talking of family politics so intimately. "Relative to that subject, I must ask you something very peculiar. Have you ever heard of the Princess Talara?"

Gyna thought a moment: "The name sounds somewhat familiar. Why would I have?"

"I don't know. It was a name I just thought you might recognize," sighed Lady Jyllia. "Have you been to Camlorn before?"

"If I did, it was when I was very young," said Gyna, and suddenly she felt it was her turn to be trusting. Something about the Lady Jyllia's friendly and forthcoming manner touched her. "To be honest, I don't remember anything at all of my childhood before I was nine or ten. Perhaps I was here with my parents, whoever they were, when I was a little girl. I tell you, I think perhaps I was. I don't recall ever being here before, but everything I've seen, the city, you, the King himself, all seem ... like I've been here before, long ago."

Lady Jyllia gasped and took a step back. She gripped the old woman, who had been looking out to sea and murmuring, by the hand. The elderly creature looked to Jyllia, surprised, and then turned to Gyna. Her ancient, half-blind eyes sparkled with recognition and she made a
sound like a grunt of surprise. Gyna also jumped. If the King had seemed like something out of a half-forgotten dream, this woman was someone she knew. As clear and yet indistinct as a guardian spirit.

"I apologize," stammered Lady Jyllia. "This is my childhood nursemaid, Ramke."

"It's her!" the old woman cried, wild-eyed. She tried to run forward, arms outstretched, but Jyllia held her back. Gyna felt strangely naked, and pulled her robe against her body.

"No, you're wrong," Lady Jyllia whispered to Ramke, holding the old woman tightly. "The Princess Talara is dead, you know that. I shouldn't have brought you here. I'll take you back home." She turned back to Gyna, her eyes welling with tears. "The entire royal family of Camlorn was assassinated over twenty years ago. My father was Duke of Oloine, the King's brother, and so he inherited the crown. I'm sorry to have bothered you. Goodnight."

Gyna gazed after Lady Jyllia and the old nurse as they disappeared into the crowd, but she had little time to consider all she had heard. The sun was setting, and it was time for the Flower Festival. Twelve young men emerged from the darkness wearing only loincloths and masks, and lit the torches. The moment the fire blazed, Gyna and all the rest of the dancers rushed to the baskets, pulling out blossoms and vines by the handful.

At first, the women danced with one another, sprinkling petals to the wind. The crowd then joined in as the music swelled. It was a mad, beautiful chaos. Gyna leapt and swooned like a wild forest nymph. Then, without warning, she felt rough hands grip her from behind and push her.

She was falling before she understood it. The moment the realization hit, she was closer to the bottom of the hundred foot tall cliff than she was to the top. She flailed out her arms and grasped at the cliff wall. Her fingers raked against the stone and her flesh tore, but she found a grip and held it. For a moment, she stayed there, breathing hard. Then she began to scream.

The music and the festival were too loud up above: no one could hear her - she could scarcely hear herself. Below her, the surf crashed. Every bone in her body would snap if she fell. She closed her eyes, and a vision came. A man was standing below her, a King of great wisdom, great compassion, looking up, smiling. A little girl, golden-haired, mischievous, her best friend and cousin, clung to the rock beside her.

"The secret to falling is making your body go limp. And with luck, you won't get hurt," the girl said. She nodded, remembering who she was. Eight years of darkness lifted.

She released her grip and let herself fall like a leaf into the water below.

NOTES

1 ESO. ESM has no break within the title, but instead of the comma.
She felt nothing, darkness enveloping her body and mind. Pain surged through her leg and with that sensation, a great feeling of cold washed over her. She opened her eyes and saw that she was drowning.

Her left leg would not move at all, but using her right one and her arms, she pulled herself up toward the moons above. It was long way through the swirling currents that wrenched back at her. At last she broke the surface and sucked in the cold night air. She was still close to the rocky shoreline of the capitol city of the kingdom of Camlorn, but the water had carried her quite a ways from the point where she fell at Cavilstyr Rock.

Not fell, she thought, correcting herself. She had been pushed.

Further down current, she allowed herself to drift. There the steep cliff walls sloped lower until they were close to the water's edge. The silhouette of a large house on the shore loomed ahead, and as she neared it, she could see smoke rising from the chimney and the flicker of firelight within. The pain in her leg was great, but greater still was the chill of the water. The thought of a warm hearth fire was all the motivation she needed to begin swimming again.

At the shore's edge, she tried to stand but found she couldn't. Her tears mixed with the sea water as she began to crawl across the sand and rock. The simple white sheet which had been her costume at the Flower Festival was tattered and felt like a weight of lead across her back. Beyond the point of exhaustion, she fell forward and began to sob.

"Please!" she cried. "If you can hear me, please help!"

A moment later, the door to the house opened and a woman stepped out. It was Ramke, the old lady she had met at the Flower Festival. The one who had started and cried "It's her!" even before she herself knew who she was. By contrast, when the old woman came to her, this time there was no glimmer of recognition in her eyes.

"By Sethiete, are you hurt?" Ramke whispered, and helped her up, acting as her crutch. "I've seen that gown before. Were you one of the dancers at the Flower Festival tonight? I was there with Lady Jyllia Raze, the daughter of the King."

"I know, she introduced us," she groaned. "I called myself Gyna of Daggerfall?"

"Of course, I knew you looked familiar somehow," the old woman chuckled, and led her hop by hop across the beach and into the front door. "My memory isn't as good as it used to be. Let's get you warm and have a look at that leg."
Ramke took Gyna's soaking rags and covered her with a blanket as she sat at the fire. As the numbness of the chill water began to leave her, it cruelly abandoned her to the intense agony of her leg. Until then, she had not dared to look at it. When she did, she felt vomit rise at the sight of the deep gash, fish-white dead flesh, plump and swollen. Thick arterial blood bubbled up, splashing on the floor in streams.

"Oh dear," said the old woman, returning to the fire. "That must rather sting. You're lucky that I still remember a little of the old healing spells."

Ramke seated herself on the floor and pressed her hands on either side of the wound. Gyna felt a flare of pain, and then a cool soft pinching and prickle. When she looked down, Ramke was slowly sliding her wrinkled hands towards one another. At their approach, the lesion began to mend before her eyes, flesh binding and bruises fading.


"Not only that, you won't have an ugly scar on your pretty leg," Ramke chuckled. "I had to use that spell so many times when Lady Jyllia was little. You know, I was her nursemaid."

"I know," Gyna smiled. "But that was a long time ago, and you still remember the spell."

"Oh, when you're learning anything, even the School of Restoration, there's always a lot of study and mistakes, but once you're as old as I am, there's no longer any need to remember things. You just know. After all, I've probably cast it a thousand times before. Little Lady Jyllia and the little Princess Talara was always getting cut and bruised. Small wonder, the way they was always climbing all over the palace."

Gyna sighed. "You must have loved Lady Jyllia very much."

"I still do," Ramke beamed. "But now she's all grown and things are different. You know, I didn't notice it before because you were all wet from the sea, but you look very much like my lady. Did I mention that before when we met at the Festival?"

"You did," said Gyna. "Or rather I think you thought I looked like Princess Talara."

"Oh, it would be so wonderful if you were the Princess returned," the old woman gasped. "You know, when the former royal family was killed, and everyone said the Princess was killed though we never found the body, I think the real victim was Lady Jyllia. Her little heart just broke, and for a while, it looked like her mind did too."

"What do you mean?" asked Gyna. "What happened?"

"I don't know if I should tell a stranger this, but it's fairly well-known in Camlorn, and I really feel like I know you," Ramke struggled with her conscience and then released. "Jyllia saw the assassination, you see. I found her afterwards, hiding in that terrible blood-stained throne room, and she was like a little broken doll. She wouldn't speak, she wouldn't eat. I tried all my healing spells, but it was quite beyond my power. So much more than a scraped knee. Her father who was then Duke of Oloine sent her to a sanitarium in the country to get well."

"That poor little girl," cried Gyna.
"It took her years to be herself again," said Ramke, nodding. "And, in truth, she never really returned altogether. You wonder why her father when he was made king didn't make her his heir? He thought that she was still not exactly right, and in a way, as much as I would deny it, he's correct to think so. She remembered nothing, nothing at all."

"Do you think," Gyna considered her words carefully. "That she would be better if she knew that her cousin the Princess Talara was alive and well?"

Ramke considered it. "I think so. But maybe not. Sometimes it's best not to hope."

Gyna stood up, finding her leg to be as strong as it looked to be. Her gown had dried, and Ramke gave her a cloak, insisting she protect herself against the cold night air. At the door, Gyna kissed the old woman's cheek and thanked her. Not only for the healing spell and for the cloak, but for everything else of kindness she had ever done.

The road close to the house went north and south. To the left was the way back to Camlorn, where secrets lay to which she alone held the key. To the south was Daggerfall, her home for more than twenty years. She could return there, back to her profession on the streets, very easily. For a few seconds, she considered her options, and then made her choice.

She had not been walking for very long, when a black carriage drawn by three horses bearing the Imperial Seal, together with eight mounted horses, passed her. Before it rounded the wooded pass ahead, it stopped suddenly. She recognized one of the soldiers as Gnorbooth, Lord Strale's manservant. The door opened and Lord Strale himself, the Emperor's ambassador, the man who had hired her and all the other women to entertain at court, stepped out.

"You!' he frowned. "You're one of the prostitutes, aren't you? You're the one who disappeared during the Flower Festival? Gyna, am I right?"

"All that is true," she smiled sourly. "Except my name I've discovered is not Gyna."

"I don't care what it is," said Lord Strale. "What are you doing on the south road? I paid for you to stay and make the kingdom merry."

"If I went back to Camlorn, there are a great many who wouldn't be merry at all."

"Explain yourself," said Lord Strale.

So she did. And he listened.

NOTES

1 ESO. ESM has no break within the title, but instead of the comma.
Gnorbooth was leaving his favorite pub in Camlorn, The Breaking Branch, when he heard someone calling his name. His was not the sort of a name that could be mistaken for another. He turned and saw Lord Eryl, the Royal Battlemage from the palace, emerge from the darkness of the alley.

"Milord," said Gnorbooth with a pleasant smile.

"I'm surprised to see you out this evening, Gnorbooth," grinned Lord Eryl with a most unpleasant smile. "I have not seen you and your master very much since the millennial celebration, but I understand you've been very busy. What I've been wondering is what you've been busy doing."

"Protecting the Imperial interests in Camlorn is busy work, milord. But I cannot imagine you would be interested in the minutiae of the ambassador's appointments."

"But I am," said the battlemage. "Especially as the ambassador has begun acting most mysteriously, most undiplomatically lately. And I understand that he has taken one of the whores from the Flower Festival into his house. I believe her name is Gyna?"

Gnorbooth shrugged: "He's in love, I would imagine, milord. It can make men act very strangely, as I'm sure you've heard before."

"She is a most comely wench," laughed Lord Eryl. "Have you noticed how much she resembles the late Princess Talara?"

"I have only been in Camlorn for fifteen years, milord. I never saw her late majesty."

"Now I could understand it if he had taken to writing poetry, but what man in love spends his days in the kitchens of the palace, talking to old servants? That hardly sounds like molten passion to me, even based on my limited experience." Lord Eryl rolled his eyes. "And what is this business he has now in - oh, what is the name of that village?"

"Umbington?" replied Gnorbooth, and immediately wished he hadn't. Lord Eryl was too canny an actor to reveal it, but Gnorbooth knew at the pit of his stomach that the battlemage did not even know Lord Strale had left the capitol. He had to get away to let the ambassador know, but there was still a game to be carefully played. "He's not leaving for there until tomorrow. I believe it's just to put a stamp on some deed that needs the Imperial seal."

"Is that all? How tedious for the poor fellow. I suppose I'll see him when he returns then," Lord Eryl bowed. "Thank you for being so informative. Farewell."
The moment the royal battlemage turned the corner, Gnorbooth leapt onto his horse. He had drunk one or two ales too many, but he knew he must find his way to Umbington before Lord Eryl's agents did. He galloped east out of the capitol, hoping there were signs along the road.

Seated in a tavern that smelled of mildew and sour beer, Lord Strale marveled at how the Emperor's agent Lady Brisienna always found the most public of places for her most private of conferences. It was harvest time in Umbington, and all of the field hands were drinking away their meager wages in the noisiest of fashions. He was dressed appropriately for the venue, rough trousers and a simple peasant's vest, but he still felt conspicuous. In comparison to his two female companions, he certainly was. The woman to his right was used to frequenting the low places of Daggerfall as a common prostitute. Lady Brisienna to his left was even more clearly in her element.

"By what name would you prefer I call you?" Lady Brisienna asked solicitously.

"I am used to the name Gyna, though that may have to change," was her reply. "Of course, it may not. Gyna the Whore may be the name writ on my grave."

"I will see to it that there is no attempt on your life like that the Flower Festival," Lord Strale frowned. "But without the Emperor's help, I won't be able to protect you forever. The only permanent solution is to capture those who would do you harm and then to raise you to your proper station."

"Do you believe my story?" Gyna turned to Lady Brisienna.

"I have been the Emperor's chief agent in High Rock for many years now, and I have heard few stranger tales. If your friend the ambassador hadn't investigated and discovered what he has, I would have dismissed you outright as a madwoman," Brisienna laughed, forcing a smile onto Gyna's face to match. "But now, yes, I do believe you. Perhaps that makes me the madwoman."

"Will you help us?" asked Lord Strale simply.

"It is a tricky business interfering in the affairs of the provincial kingdoms," Lady Brisienna looked into the depths of her mug thoughtfully. "Unless there is a threat to the Empire itself, we find it is best not to meddle. What we have in your case is a very messy assassination that happened twenty years ago, and its aftermath. If His Imperial Majesty involved itself in every bloody hiccup in the succession in each of his thousand vassal kingdoms, he would never accomplish anything for the greater good of Tamriel."

"I understand," murmured Gyna. "When I remembered everything, who I was and what happened to me, I resolved to do nothing about it. In fact, I was leaving Camlorn and going back home to Daggerfall when I saw Lord Strale again. He was the one who began this quest to resolve this, not me. And when he brought me back, I only wanted to see my cousin to tell her who I was, but he forbade me."

"It would have been too dangerous," growled Strale. "We still don't know yet the depths of the conspiracy. Perhaps we never will."
"I'm sorry, I always find myself giving long explanations to short questions. When Lord Strale asked if I would help, I should have begun by saying 'yes,'" Lady Brisienna laughed at the change in Lord Strale and Gyna's expressions. "I will help you, of course. But for this to turn out well, you must accomplish two things to the Emperor's satisfaction. First, you must prove with absolute certainty who is the power behind this plot you've uncovered. You must get someone to confess."

"And secondly," said Lord Strale, nodding. "We must prove that this is a matter worthy of His Imperial Majesty's consideration, and not merely a minor local concern."

Lord Strale, Lady Brisienna, and the woman who called herself Gyna discussed how to accomplish their goals for a few hours more. When it was agreed what had to be done, Lady Brisienna took her leave to find her ally Proseccus. Strale and Gyna set off to the west, toward Camlorn. It was not long after beginning their ride through the woods that they heard the sound of galloping hoof beats far up ahead. Lord Strale unsheathed his sword and signaled for Gyna to position her horse behind him.

At that moment, they were attacked on all sides. It was an ambush. Eight men, armed with axes, had been lying in wait.

Lord Strale quickly yanked Gyna from her horse, pulling her behind him. He made a brief, deft motion with his hands. A ring of flame materialized around them, and rushed outward, striking their assailants. The men roared in pain and dropped to their knees. Lord Strale jumped the horse over the closest one, and galloped at full speed westward.

"I thought you were an ambassador not a mage!" laughed Gyna.

"I still believe there are times for diplomacy," replied Lord Strale.

The horse and rider they had heard before met them on the road. It was Gnorbooth. "Milord, it's the royal battlemage! He found out you two were in Umbington!"

"With considerable ease, I might add," Lord Eryl's voice boomed out of the woods. Gnorbooth, Gyna, and Lord Strale scanned the dark trees, but they showed nothing. The battlemage's voice seemed to emanate from everywhere and nowhere.

"I'm sorry, milord," groaned Gnorbooth. "I tried to warn you as soon as I could."

"In your next life, perhaps you'll remember not to trust your plans to a drunkard!" laughed Lord Eryl. He had them in his sight, and the spell was unleashed.

Gnorbooth saw him first, by the light of the ball of fire that leapt from his fingertips. Later, Lord Eryl was to wonder to himself what the fool had intended to do. Perhaps he was rushing forward to pull Lord Strale out of the path. Perhaps he was trying to flee the path of destruction, and had simply moved left when he should have moved right. Perhaps, as unlikely as it seemed, he was willing to sacrifice himself to save his master. Whatever the reason, the result was the same.

He got in the way.
There was an explosion of energy that filled the night, and an echoing boom that shook birds from the trees for a mile around. On the few square feet where Gnorbooth and his horse had stood was nothing but black glass. They had been reduced to less than vapor. Gyna and Lord Strale were thrown back. Their horse, when it recovered its senses, galloped away as fast as it could. In the lingering glowing aura of the spell's detonation, Lord Strale looked straight into the woods and into the wide eyes of the battlemage.

"Damn," said Lord Eryl and began to run. The ambassador jumped to his feet and pursued.

"That was an expensive use of magicka, even for you," said Lord Strale as he ran. "Don't you know well enough not to use ranged spells unless you are certain your target won't be blocked?"

"I never thought - that idiot -" Lord Eryl was struck from behind and knocked to the wet forest floor before he had a chance to finish his lamentation.

"It doesn't matter what you thought," said Lord Strale calmly, flipping the battlemage around and pinning his arms to the ground with his knees. "I'm not a battlemage, but I knew enough not to use my entire reserve on your little ambush. Perhaps it's a matter of philosophy, as a government agent, I feel inclined toward conservatism."

"What are you going to do?" whimpered Lord Eryl.

"Gnorbooth was a good man, one of the best, and so I'm going to hurt you quite a lot," the ambassador made a slight movement and his hands began to glow brightly. "That's a certainty. How much more I'm going to hurt you after that depends on what you tell me. I want to hear about the former Duke of Oloine."

"What do you want to know?" Lord Eryl screamed.

"Let's start with everything," replied Lord Strale with perfect patience.

NOTES

1 ESO. ESM has no break within the title, but instead of the comma.
Gyna never saw the Emperor's agent Lady Brisienna again, but she kept her promise. Proseccus, a nightblade in the service of the Empire, arrived at Lord Strale's house in disguise. She was an apt pupil, and within days, he had taught what she needed to know.

"It is a simple charm, not the sort of spell that could turn a raging daedroth into a love-struck puppy," said Proseccus. "If you do or say anything that would normally anger or offend your target, the power will weaken. It will alter temporarily his perception of you, as spells of the school of illusion do, but his feelings of respect and admiration for you must be supported by means of a charm of a less magickal nature."

"I understand," smiled Gyna, thanking her tutor for the two spells of illusion he had taught her. The time had come to use her new-found skill.

The Prostitutes Guildhouse of Camlorn was a great palace in an affluent northern quarter of the city. Prince Sylon could have found his way there blindfolded, or blind drunk as he often was. Tonight, however, he was only lightly inebriated and he resolved to drink no more. Tonight he was in the mood for pleasure. His kind of pleasure.

"Where is my favorite, Grigia?" he demanded of the Guildmistress upon entering.

"She is still healing from your appointment with her last week," she smiled serenely. "Most of the other women are in with clients as well, but I saved a special treat for you. A new girl. One you will certainly enjoy."

The Prince was guided to a sumptuously decorated suite of velvet and silk. As he entered, Gyna stepped from behind a screen and cast her spell quickly, with her mind open to belief as Proseccus had instructed. It was hard to tell if it worked at first. The Prince looked at her with a cruel smile and then, like sun breaking through clouds, the cruelty left. She could tell he was hers. He asked her her name.

"I am between names right now," she teased. "I've never made love to a real prince before. I've never even been inside a palace. Is yours very ... big?"

"It's not mine yet," he shrugged. "But someday I'll be king."

"It would be wonderful to live in such a place," Gyna cooed. "A thousand years of history. Everything must be so old and beautiful. The paintings and books and statues and tapestries. Does your family hold onto all their old treasures?"

"Yes, hoarded away with a lot of boring old junk in the archive rooms in the vaults. Please, may I see you naked now?"
"First a little conversation, though you may feel free to disrobe whenever you like," said Gyna. "I had heard there was an archive room, but it's quite hidden away."

"There's a false wall behind the family crypt," said the Prince, gripping her wrist and pulling her towards him for a kiss. Something in his eyes had changed.

"Your Highness, you're hurting my arm," Gyna cried.

"Enough talk, you bewitching whore," he snarled. Holding back a sharp jab of fear, Gyna let her mind cool and perceptions whirl. As his angry mouth touched her lips, she cast the second spell she had learned her illusionist mentor.

The Prince felt his flesh turn to stone. He remained frozen, watching Gyna pull together her clothing and leave the room. The paralysis would only last for a few more minutes, but it was all the time she needed.

The Guildmistress had already left with all her girls, just as Gyna and Lord Strale had told her to. They would tell her when it was safe to return. She had not even accepted any gold for her part in the trap. She said it was enough that her girls would not be tortured anymore by that most perverse and cruel Prince.

"What a terrible boy," thought Gyna as she raised the hood on her cloak and raced through the streets toward Lord Strale's house. "It is good that he will never be king."

The following morning, the King and Queen of Camlorn held their daily audience with various nobles and diplomats, a sparse gathering. The throne room was largely empty. It was a terribly dull way to begin the day. In between petitions, they yawned regally.

"What has happened to all the interesting people?" the Queen murmured. "Where's our precious boy?"

"I've heard he was raging through the north quarter in search of some harlot who robbed him," the King chuckled fondly. "What a fine lad."

"And what of the Royal Battlemage?"

"I've sent him to take care of a delicate matter," the King knit his brow. "But that was nearly a week ago, and I haven't heard one word from him. It's somewhat troubling."

"Indeed it is, Lord Eryl should not be gone so long," the Queen frowned. "What if a rogue sorcerer came and threatened us? Husband, don't laugh at me, that is why all the royal houses of High Rock keep their mage retainers close to their side. To protect their court from evil enchantments, like the one that our poor Emperor suffered so recently."

"At the hand of his own battlemage," chuckled the King.

"Lord Eryl would never betray you like that, and you well know it. He has been in your employ since you were Duke of Oloine. To even make that comparison between he and Jagar Tharn, really," the Queen waved her hands dismissively. "It is that sort of lack of trust that is ruining kingdoms all over Tamriel. Now, Lord Strale tells me -"
"There's another man that's gone missing," mused the King.

"The ambassador?" the Queen shook her head. "No, he's here. He was desirous to visit the crypts and pay homage to your noble ancestors, so I directed him there. I can't think what's keeping him so long. He must be more pious than I thought."

She was surprised to see the King rise up, alarmed. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Before she had a chance to reply, the subject of their conversation was coming through the open door to the throne room. At on his arm was a beautiful fair-haired woman in a stately gown of scarlet and gold, worthy of the highest nobility. The queen followed her startled husband's gaze, and was likewise amazed.

"I had heard he was taken with one of the harlots from the Flower Festival, not a lady," she whispered. "Why, she looks remarkably like your daughter, the Lady Jyllia."

"That she does," the King gasped. "Or her cousin, the Princess Talara."

The nobles in the room also whispered amongst themselves. Though few had been at court twenty years ago when the Princess had disappeared, presumed murdered like the rest of the royal family, there were still a few elder statesmen who remembered. It was not only on throne that the word "Talara" passed through the air like an enchantment.

"Lord Strale, will you introduce us to your lady?" the Queen asked with a polite smile.

"In a moment, your highness, but I'm afraid I must first discuss pressing matters," Lord Strale replied with a bow. "Might I request a private audience?"

The King looked at the Imperial ambassador, trying to read into the man's expression. With a wave of his hand, he dismissed the assembled and had the doors shut behind them. No one remained in the audience room but the King, the Queen, the ambassador, a dozen royal guards, and the mysterious woman.

The ambassador pulled from his pocket a sheaf of old yellowed parchment. "Your Highness, when you ascended the throne after your brother and his family were murdered, anything that seemed important, deeds and wills, were of course kept with the clerks and ministers. His entire incidental, unimportant personal correspondence was sent to archive which is standard protocol. This letter was among them."

"What is this all about, sir?" the King boomed. "What does it say?"

"Nothing about you, your majesty. In truth, at the time of your majesty's ascension, no one reading it could have understood its significance. It was a letter to the Emperor the late king your brother was penning at the time of his assassination, concerning a thief who had once been a mage-priest at the Temple of Sethiete here in Camlorn. His name was Jagar Tharn."

"Jagar Tharn?" the Queen laughed nervously. "Why, we were just talking about him."

"Tharn had stolen many books of powerful and forgotten spells, and lore about such artifacts as the Staff of Chaos, where it was hidden and how it could be used. News travels slowly to..."
westernmost High Rock, and by the time the King your brother had heard that the Emperor's new battlemage was a man named Jagar Tharn, many years had passed. The king had been writing a letter to warn the Emperor of the treachery of his Imperial Battlemage, but it was never completed." Lord Strale held up the letter. "It is dated on the day of his assassination in the year 385. Four years before Jagar Tharn betrayed his master, and began the ten years of tyranny of the Imperial Simulacrum."

"This is all very interesting," the King barked. "But what has it to do with me?"

"The late King's assassination is now a matter of Imperial concern. And I have a confession from your Royal Battlemage Lord Eryl."

The King's face lost all color: "You miserable worm, no man may threaten me. Neither you, nor that whore, nor that letter will ever see the light of day again. Guards!"

The royal guards unsheathed their blades and pressed forward. As they did so, there was a sudden shimmering of light and the room was filled with Imperial nightblades, led by Proseccus. They had been there for hours, lurking invisibly in the shadows.

"In the name of His Imperial Majesty, Uriel Septim VII, I arrest you," said Strale.

The doors were opened, and the King and Queen were led out, heads bowed. Gyna told Proseccus where he would most likely find their son, Prince Sylon. The courtiers and nobles who had been in the audience chamber stared at the strange, solemn procession of their King and Queen to their own royal prison. No one said a word.

When at last a voice was heard, it startled all. The Lady Jyllia had arrived at court. "What is happening? Who dares to usurp the authority of the King and Queen?"

Lord Strale turned to Proseccus: "We would speak with the Lady Jyllia alone. You know what needs to be done."

Proseccus nodded and had the doors to the throne room closed once again. The courtiers pressed against the wood, straining to hear everything. Though they could not say it, they wanted an explanation almost as much as her Ladyship did.

NOTES

1 ESO. ESM has no break within the title, but instead of the comma.
By what right do you arrest my father?" cried the Lady Jyllia. "What has he done?"

"I arrest the King of Camlorn, the former Duke of Oloine, by my right as an Imperial Commanding Officer and Ambassador," said Lord Strale. "By the right of law of the Emperor of Tamriel which supercedes all provincial royal authority."

Gyna came forward and tried to put her hand on Jyllia's arm, but she was coldly rebuffed. Quietly, she sat down at the foot of the throne in the now empty audience chamber.

"This young lady came to me, having completely recovered her memory, but the story she told was beyond incredible, I simply couldn't believe it," said Lord Strale. "But she was so convinced of it, I had to investigate. So I talked to everyone who was here at the palace twenty years ago to see if there could be any truth to it. Of course, at the time of the King and Queen's murder, and the Princess's disappearance, there was a full inquiry made, but I had different questions to ask this time. Questions about the relationship between the two little cousins, Lady Jyllia Raze and the Princess."

"I've told everyone over and over again, I don't remember anything at all about that time in my life," said Jyllia, tears welling up.

"I know you don't. There has never been a question in my mind that you witnessed a horrible murder, and that your memory lapse and hers," said Lord Strale, gesturing toward Gyna "Are both very real. The story I heard from the servants and other people at the palace was that the little girls were inseparably close. There were no other playmates, and as the Princess's place was to be close to her parents, so the little Lady Jyllia was always there as well. When the assassin came to murder the Royal Family, the King and Queen were in their bedroom, and the girls were playing in the throne room."

"When my memory came back to me, it was like opening a sealed box," said Gyna solemnly. "Everything was so clear and detailed, like it all happened yesterday not twenty years ago. I was on the throne, playing Empress, and you were hiding behind the dais, pretending you were in a dungeon I had sent you to. A man I had never seen burst into the room from the Royal bedchamber, his blade soaked in blood. He came at me, and I ran for my life. I remember starting to run for the dais, but I saw your face, frozen in fear, and I didn't want to lead him to you. So I ran for the window."

"We had climbed on the outside of the castle before, just for fun, that was one of the first memories that came back to me when I was holding onto that cliff. You and I on the castle wall, and the King calling up to me, telling me how to get down. But that day, I couldn't hold on, I was trembling so much. I just fell, and landed in the river."
"I don't know if it was entirely the horror of what I had seen, or that combined with the impact of the fall and the coldness of the water, but everything just went blank in my mind. When I finally pulled myself out of the river, many miles away, I had no idea who I was. And so it stayed," Gyna smiled. "Until now."

"So you are the Princess Talara?" cried Jyllia.

"Let me explain further before she answers that, because the simple answer would just confuse you, as it did me," said Lord Strale. "The assassin was caught before he managed to escape the palace - in truth, he had to know he was going to be caught. He confessed immediately to the murders of the Royal Family. The Princess, he said, he had thrown out the window to her death. A servant down below heard the scream, and saw something fly past his window, so he knew it to be true.

"It was not for several hours that little Lady Jyllia was found by her nursemaid Ramke hiding behind the dais, coated with dust, shivering with fear, and unable to speak at all. Ramke was very protective of you," Strale said, nodding to Jyllia. "She insisted on putting you to your room right away, and sent word the Duke of Oloine that the Royal Family was dead, and that his daughter had witnessed the murders but survived."

"I'm beginning to remember a little of that," said Jyllia, wonderingly. "I remember lying in bed, with Ramke comforting me. I was so muddled and I couldn't concentrate. I remember I just wanted it all to be play time still, I don't know why. And then, I remember being bundled up and taken to that asylum."

"It'll all come back to you soon," Gyna smiled. "I promise. That's how I began to remember. I just caught one detail, and the whole flood began."

"That's it," Jyllia began to sob in frustration. "I don't remember anything else except confusion. No, I also remember Daddy not even looking at me as I was taken away. And I remember not caring about that, or anything else."

"It was a confusing time for all, so particularly so for little girls. Especially little girls who went through what you two did," said Lord Strale sympathetically. "From what I understand, as soon as he received the message from Ramke, the Duke left his palace at Oloine, gave orders for you to be sent to a private sanatorium until you'd recovered from your ordeal, and set to work with his private guard torturing the assassin for information. When I heard that, that no one but the Duke and his personal guard saw the assassin after he gave his initial confession, and that no one was present but the Duke and his guards when the assassin was killed trying to escape, I thought that very significant.

"I spoke with Lord Eryl, who I knew was one of those present, and I had to bluff him, pretending I had more evidence than I did. I got the reaction I was hoping for, though it was a dangerous gambit. At last he confessed to what I already knew to be true.

"The assassin," Lord Strale paused, and reluctantly met Jyllia's eyes, "Had been hired by the Duke of Oloine to kill the Royal Family, including the Princess as heir, so that the crown might be passed to him and to his children."

Jyllia stared at Lord Strale, aghast. "My father -"
"The assassin had been told that once the Duke had him in custody, he would be paid and a prison break would be arranged. The thug picked the wrong time to be greedy and try to get more gold. The Duke decided that it would be cheaper to silence him, so he murdered him then and there, so the man would never tell anyone what really happened," Lord Strale shrugged. "No tragic loss as far as murders go. In a few years' time, you returned from the sanitarium, a little shaken but back to normal, except for a complete absence of memory about your childhood. And in that time, the former Duke of Oloine had taken his brother's place as the King of Camlorn. It was no small maneuver."

"No," said Jyllia, quietly. "He must have been very busy. He remarried and had another child. No one ever came to visit me in the sanitarium but Ramke."

"If he had visited and seen you," said Gyna. "This story might have turned out very differently."

"What do you mean?" asked Jyllia.

"This is the most amazing part," said Lord Strale. "The question has long been whether Gyna is the Princess Talara. When her memory returned, and she told me what she remembered, I put several pieces of evidence together. Consider these facts.

"The two of you look remarkably alike now after twenty years of living very different lives, and as little girls and constant playmates, you looked nearly identical.

"At the time of the assassination, the murderer who had never been there before, only saw one girl on the throne, who he assumed to be his quarry.

"The woman who found Lady Jyllia was her nursemaid Ramke, a creature of unstable mind and fanatical devotion to her charge - the type would never accept the possibility that her beloved little girl had been the one who disappeared. The nursemaid was the only single person who knew both Princess Talara and the Lady Jyllia who visited you while you were in the sanitarium.

"Finally," said Lord Strale, "Consider the fact that when you returned to court from the sanitarium, five years had past, and you had grown from a child to a young lady. You looked familiar, but not quite the same as your family remembered you, which is only natural."

"I don't understand," cried the poor girl, her eyes wide, because she did understand. Here memory was falling together like a terrible flood.

"Let me explain it like this," said her cousin, wrapping her in her arms. "I know who I am now. My real name is Jyllia Raze. That man who was arrested was my father, the man who murdered the King - your father. YOU are the Princess Talara."

NOTES

1 ESO. ESM has no break within the title, but instead of the comma.
Mysticism is the school of sorcery least understood by the magical community (and the) most difficult to explain to novice mages. The spell effects commonly ascribed to the School of Mysticism are as extravagantly disparate as Soul Trap, the creation of a cell that would hold a victim's spirit after death, to Telekinesis, the manipulation of objects at a distance. But these effects are simply that: effects. The sorcery behind them is veiled in a mystery that goes back to the oldest civilizations of Tamriel, and perhaps beyond.

The Psijics of the Isle of Artaeum have a different term for Mysticism: the Old Way. The phrase becomes bogged in semantic quagmire because the Old Way also refers to the religion and customs of the Psijics, which may or may not be part of the magic of Mysticism.

There are few mages who devote their lives to the study of Mysticism. The other schools are far more predictable and ascertainable. Mysticism seems to derive its power from its conundrums and paradoxes; the act of experimentation, no matter how objectively implemented, can influence the magicka by its very existence. Therefore, the Mystic mage must consign himself to finding dependable patterns within a roiling imbroglio of energy. In the time it takes him to devise an enchantment with a consistent trigger and result, his peers researching in other schools may have researched and documented dozens of new spells and effects. The Mystic mage must thus be a patient and relatively uncompetitive philosopher.

For centuries, mostly during the Second Era, scholarly journals published theory after theory about the aspect or aspects of magicka lumped together under Mysticism. In the Mages Guild's tradition of finding answers to all things, respected researchers suggested that Mysticism's penultimate energy source was the Aetherius itself, or else Daedric Beings of unimaginable power -- either rationale would explain the seemingly random figurations of Mysticism. Some even ventured that Mysticism arose from unused elements of successfully, or even unsuccessfully, cast spells. Discussion within the Order of Psijics after Artaeum's reappearance has led some scholars to postulate that Mysticism is spiritual in nature as was originally supposed, and that either the intellect or the emotional state of the believer is sufficient to influence its energy configuration and flow.

None of these explanations is truly satisfactory. For the beginning student of Mysticism, it is best simply to learn the patterns distinguishable in the maelstrom of centuries past. The more patterns are discovered, the clearer the remaining ones become. Until, of course, they change. For inevitably they have to. And then the journey begins anew.

ESD. ESM. ESO.
NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Mysticism: The Unfathomable Voyage".
2 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "magic".
3 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ",".
4 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "wildly".
5 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "for".
6 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Silence - the extinction of sound".
7 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "may go".
8 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
9 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Order of Artaeum's term for Mysticism is".
10 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "fathomable".
11 ESD only.
12 ESD only.
13 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "existance".
14 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Thus,".
15 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "regulate".
16 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "consistant".
17 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "in an".
18 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "find a source".
19 ESD only.
20 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
21 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "is".
22 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
23 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "publishes".
24 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "that we call".
25 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "tradition of the Mages Guild to find".
26 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the".
27 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "as coming from".
28 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
29 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the Daedra themselves to".
30 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "patterns".
31 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ", some ventured to guess".
32 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "comes".
33 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
34 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
35 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "with".
36 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Artaeum after its".
37 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "more".
38 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
39 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "emotion".
40 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "influences the energy pattern".
41 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
42 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "to simple".
43 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "distinguished".
44 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "in the".
45 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "found".
46 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
[59] Nerevar Moon-and-Star

Nerevar Moon-and-Star

[This is a selection from a series of monographs by various Imperial scholars on Ashlander legends.]

In ancient days, the Deep Elves and a great host of outlanders from the West came to steal the land of the Dunmer. In that time, Nerevar was the great khan and warleader of the House People, but he honored the Ancient Spirits and the Tribal law, and became as one of us.

So, when Nerevar pledged upon his great Ring of the Ancestors, One-Clan-Under-Moon-and-Star, to honor the ways of the Spirits and rights of the Land, all the Tribes joined the House People to fight a great battle at Red Mountain.

Though many Dunmer, Tribesman and Houseman, died at Red Mountain, the Dwemer were defeated and their evil magicks destroyed, and the outlanders driven from the land. But after this great victory, the power-hungry khans of the Great Houses slew Nerevar in secret, and, setting themselves up as gods, neglected Nerevar's promises to the Tribes.

But it is said that Nerevar will come again with his ring, and cast down the false gods, and by the power of his ring will make good his promises to the Tribes, to honor the Spirits and drive the outsiders from the land.

* ESM. ESO.
[60] N'Gasta! Kvata! Kvakis!

N'GASTA! KVATA! KVAKIS!

[an obscure text in the language of the Sload, purportedly written by the Second Era Western necromancer, N'Gasta.]

N'Gasta! Kvata! Kvakis!

N'Gasta! Kvata! Kvakis! ahkstas so novajxletero (oix jhemile) so Ranetauw. Ricevas gxin pagintaj membraw kaj aliaj individuauss, kiujn iamanierex tusxas so raneta aktivado. En gxi aperas informauw unuavice pri so lokauw so exumonataj kunvenauw, sed nature ankoix pri aliaj aktuasoj aktivecauw so societo. Ne malofte enahkstas krome plej diversaspekta materialo eduka oix distra.

So interreta Kvako (retletera kaj verjheauw) ahkstas unufsonke alternativaj kanasouw por distribui so enhavon so papera Kva! Kvak!. Sed alifsonke so enhavauw so diversaj verjheauw antoixvible ne povas kaj eex ne vus exiam ahksti centprocente so sama. En malvaste cirkusonta paperfolio ekzemple ebsos publikigi ilustrajxauwn, kiuj pro kopirajtaj kiasouw ne ahkstas uzebsoj en so interreto. Alifsonke so masoltaj kostauw reta distribuo forigas so spacajn limigauwn kaj permahksas pli ampleksan enhavon, por ne paroli pri gxishora aktualeco.

Tiuj cirkonstancauw rahkspeguligxos en so aspekto so Kvakoa, kiu ja cetere servos ankoix kiel gxeneraso retejo so ranetauw.

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* ESM. ESO.
Night Falls On Sentinel
By Boali

No music played in the Nameless Tavern in Sentinel, and indeed there was very little sound except for discreet, cautious murmurs of conversation, the soft pad of the barmaid's feet on stone, and the delicate slurping of the regular patrons, tongues lapping at their flagons, eyes focused on nothing at all. If anyone were less otherwise occupied, the sight of the young Redguard woman in a fine black velvet cape might have aroused surprise. Even suspicion. As it were, the strange figure, out of place in an underground cellar so modest it had no sign, blended into the shadows.

"Are you Jomic?"

The stout, middle-aged man with a face older than his years looked up and nodded. He returned to his drink. The young woman took the seat next to him.

"My name is Haballa," she said and pulled out a small bag of gold, placing it next to his mug.

"Sure it be," snarled Jomic, and met her eyes again. "Who d'you want dead?"

She did not turn away, but merely asked, "Is it safe to talk here?"

"No one cares about nobody else's problems but their own here. You could take off your cuirass and dance bare-breasted on the table, and no one'd even spit," the man smiled. "So who d'you want dead?"

"No one, actually," said Haballa. "The truth is, I only want someone ... removed, for a while. Not harmed, you understand, and that's why I need a professional. You come highly recommended."

"Who you been talking to?" asked Jomic dully, returning to his drink.

"A friend of a friend of a friend of a friend."

"One of them friends don't know what he's talking about," grumbled the man. "I don't do that any more."

Haballa quietly took out another purse of gold and then another, placing them at the man's elbow. He looked at her for a moment and then poured the gold out and began counting. As he did, he asked, "Who d'you want removed?"
"Just a moment," smiled Haballa, shaking her head. "Before we talk details, I want to know that you're a professional, and you won't harm this person very much. And that you'll be discreet."

"You want discreet?" the man paused in his counting. "Awright, I'll tell you about an old job of mine. It's been - by Arkay, I can hardly believe it - more 'n twenty years, and no one but me's alive who had anything to do with the job. This is back afore the time of the War of Betony, remember that?"

"I was just a baby."

"'Course you was," Jomic smiled. "Everyone knows that King Lhotun had an older brother Greklith what died, right? And then he's got his older sister Aubki, what married that King fella in Daggerfall. But the truth's that he had two elder brothers."

"Really?" Haballa's eyes glistened with interest.

"No lie," he chuckled. "Weedy, feeble fella called Arthago, the King and Queen's first born. Anyhow, this prince was heir to the throne, which his parents wasn't too thrilled about, but then the Queen she squeezed out two more princes who looked a lot more fit. That's when me and my boys got hired on, to make it look like the first prince got took off by the Underking or some such story."

"I had no idea!" the young woman whispered.

"Of course you didn't, that's the point," Jomic shook his head. "Discretion, like you said. We bagged the boy, dropped him off deep in an old ruin, and that was that. No fuss. Just a couple fellas, a bag, and a club."

"That's what I'm interested in," said Haballa. "Technique. My... friend who needs to be taken away is weak also, like this Prince. What is the club for?"

"It's a tool. So many things what was better in the past ain't around no more, just 'cause people today prefer ease of use to what works right. Let me explain: there're seventy-one prime pain centers in an average fella's body. Elves and Khajiiti, being so sensitive and all, got three and four more respectively. Argonians and Sloads, almost as many at fifty-two and sixty-seven," Jomic used his short stubby finger to point out each region on Haballa's body. "Six in your forehead, two in your brow, two on your nose, seven in your throat, ten in your chest, nine in your abdomen, three on each arm, twelve in your groin, four in your favored leg, five in the other."

"That's sixty-three," replied Haballa.

"No, it's not," growled Jomic.

"Yes, it is," the young lady cried back, indignant that her mathematical skills were being question: "Six plus two plus two plus seven plus ten plus nine plus three for one arm and three for the other plus twelve plus four plus five. Sixty-three."
"I must've left some out," shrugged Jomic. "The important thing is that to become skilled with a staff or club, you gotta be a master of these pain centers. Done right, a light tap could kill, or knock out without so much as a bruise."

"Fascinating," smiled Haballa. "And no one ever found out?"

"Why would they? The boy's parents, the King and Queen, they're both dead now. The other children always thought their brother got carried off by the Underking. That's what everyone thinks. And all my partners are dead."

"Of natural causes?"

"Ain't nothing natural that ever happens in the Bay, you know that. One fella got sucked up by one of them Selenu. Another died a that same plague that took the Queen and Prince Greklith. 'Nother fella got hisself beat up to death by a burglar. You gotta keep low, outta sight, like me, if you wanna stay alive." Jomic finished counting the coins. "You must want this fella out of the way bad. Who is it?"

"It's better if I show you," said Haballa, standing up. Without a look back, she strode out of the Nameless Tavern.

Jomic drained his beer and went out. The night was cool with an unrestrained wind surging off the water of the Iliac Bay, sending leaves flying like whirling shards. Haballa stepped out of the alleyway next to the tavern, and gestured to him. As he approached her, the breeze blew open her cape, revealing the armor beneath and the crest of the King of Sentinel.

The fat man stepped back to flee, but she was too fast. In a blur, he found himself in the alley on his back, the woman's knee pressed firmly against his throat.

"The King has spent years since he took the throne looking for you and your collaborators, Jomic. His instructions to me what to do when I found you were not specific, but you've given me an idea."

From her belt, Haballa removed a small sturdy cudgel.

A drunk stumbling out of the bar heard a whimpered moan accompanied by a soft whisper coming from the darkness of the alley: "Let's keep better count this time. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven..."
After much analysis of living specimens, the Council long ago determined that all "races" of elves and humans may mate with each other and bear fertile offspring. Generally the offspring bear the racial traits of the mother, though some traces of the father's race may also be present. It is less clear whether the Argonians and Khajiit are interfertile with both humans and elves. Though there have been many reports throughout the Eras of children from these unions, as well as stories of unions with daedra, there have been no well documented offspring. Khajiit differ from humans and elves not only their skeletal and dermal physiology -- the "fur" that covers their bodies -- but their metabolism and digestion as well. Argonians, like the dreugh, appear to be a semi-aquatic trogophile form of humans, though it is by no means clear whether the Argonians should be classified with dreugh, men, mer, or (in this author's opinion), certain tree-dwelling lizards in Black Marsh.

The reproductive biology of orcs is at present not well understood, and the same is true of goblins, trolls, harpies, dreugh, tsaesci, imga, various daedra and many others. Certainly, there have been cases of intercourse between these "races," generally in the nature of rape or magickal seduction, but there have been no documented cases of pregnancy. Still the interfertility of these creatures and the civilized hominids has yet to be empirically established or refuted, likely due to the deep cultural differences. Surely any normal Bosmer or Breton impregnated by an orc would keep that shame to herself, and there's no reason to suppose that an orc maiden impregnated by a human would not be likewise ostracized by her society. Regrettably, our oaths as healers keep us from forcing a coupling to satisfy our scientific knowledge. We do know, however, that the sload of Thras are hermaphrodites in their youth and later reabsorb their reproductive organs once they are old enough to move about on land. It can be safely assumed that they are not interfertile with men or mer.

One might further wonder whether the proper classification of these same "races," to use the imprecise but useful term, should be made from the assumption of a common heritage and the differences between them have arisen from magickal experimentation, the manipulations of the so-called "Earth Bones," or from gradual changes from one generation to the next.

* ESM. ESO.
[63] Oghma Infinium*

{[The Oghma Infinium is a tome of knowledge written by the Ageless One, the wizard-sage Xarses. All who read the Infinium are filled with the energy of the artifact which can be manipulated to raise one's abilities to near demi-god proportions. Once used, legend has it, the Infinium will disappear from its wielder.]}

* ESA. ESO,
NOTES

1 Introductory ESA paraphrase. Not in ESO. The following illustrations appear only in ESO.
We who know the Old Ways are well aware of the existence of a spiritual world invisible to the unenlightened. Just as one living in a kingdom but unaware of the political machinations may see a new tax or battle preparation as fortune, many observe floods, famines, and madness with helpless incomprehension. This is deplorable. As the great Cuilean Darnizhaan moaned, "The power of ignorance can shatter like glass."

What, after all, is the origin of these spiritual forces that move the invisible strings of Mundus? Any neophyte of Artaeum knows that these spirits are our ancestors -- and that, while living, they too were bewildered by the spirits of their ancestors, and so on to the original Acharyai. The Daedra and gods to whom the common people turn are no more than the spirits of superior men and women whose power and passion granted them great influence in the [afterworld].

Certainly this is our truth and our religion. But how does it help us in our sacred duty of self-defrsae, or providing grave and faithful counsel to lesser men? Primarily, it is easy to grasp the necessity of both endowing good men with great power and making powerful men good. We recognize the multiple threats that a strong tyrant represents -- breeds cruelty which feeds the Daedra Boethiah and hatred which feeds the Daedra Vaernima; if he should die a particularly malevolent act, he may go to rule in Oblivion; worst of all, he inspires other villains to thirst after power and other rulers to villainy. Knowing this, we have developed patience in our dealings with such despot. They should be crippled, humiliated, impoverished, imprisoned. Other than we may advocate assassination or warfare -- which, aside from its spiritual insignificance, is expensive, aleatic, and likely to inflict at least as much pain innocents as the brutish dictator was inflicting.

No, we are intelligence gatherers, dignified diplomats -- not revolutionaries.

How, then, are our counsellors "faithful"? We are faithful only to the Old Ways -- it is essential always to remember the spiritual world while keeping our eyes open in the physical one. Performing the Rites of Moawita on the 2nd of Hearth Fire and the Vigyld on the 1st of Second Seed are essential means of empowering salutary spirits and debilitating unclean ones. How, then, are we faithful to those we counsel and to the Isle of Artaeum? Perhaps the sage Taheritae said it best: "In Mundus, conflict disparity what bring change, and change is the most sacred of the Eleven Forces. Change is the force without focus or origin. It is the duty of the disciplined Psijic to dilute change where it brings greed, gluttony, sloth, ignorance, prejudice, cruelty... [here Taheritae lists the rest of the 111 Prodigalities], and to encourage change where it brings excellence, beauty, happiness, and enlightenment. As such, the faithful
counsel has but one master: His mind. If the man the Psijic counsels acts wickedly and brings oegnithr ["bad change"] and will {otherwise} not be counselled, it is the Psijic's duty to counterbalance the oegnithr by any means necessary {[emphasis mine]}.

A student of the Old Ways may indeed {ally} himself to a lord -- but it is a risky relationship. {It cannot be stressed enough that the choice be wisely made.} Should the lord refuse wise counsel and order the Psijic (to use Taheritae's outmoded word) to perform an act contrary to the teachings of the Old Ways, there are few available options. {The Psijic may obey, albeit unwillingly, and fall prey to the dark forces against which he has devoted his life.} {The Psijic may abandon his lord, which will bring shame on him and the Isle of Artaeum, and so may never be allowed home again.} {Or the Psijic may simply kill himself}.

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
2 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "capricious".
3 ESD only.
4 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "mithril".
5 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
6 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
7 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "phantom world".
8 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "provide".
9 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
10 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Firstly, we can easily".
11 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "bringing".
12 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
13 ESD only.
14 ESD only.
15 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "performing".
16 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
17 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
18 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
19 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "counsellors".
20 ESD only.
21 ESD only.
22 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "cause".
23 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "to".
24 ESD only.
25 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "gatherers".
26 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "counselors".
27 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "in watching our world".
28 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the salutary ghosts".
29 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the unclean spirits".
30 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
31 ESM, ESO. ESD reads ", ".
32 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "is".
33 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "brings".
34 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD:
35 ESD only.
36 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "origin, and it".
37 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "(enlightened one)".
38 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "(Taheritae lists the 111 Prodigalities) ...".
39 ESM, ESO. ESD does not have brackets.
40 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
41 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
42 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "vassal".
43 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
44 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
45 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "The Psijic may also kill himself".
The Isle of Artaeum (ar-TAY-um) is the third largest island in the {Summurset} archipelago, located south of the Moridunon village of Potansa and west of the mainland village of Runcibae. It is best known for being {the} home to the Psijic Order, perhaps the oldest monastic group in Tamriel.

The earliest written record of Psijics is from the 20th year of the First Era and tells the tale of the ‘author, the’ renowned Breton sage {and author} Voernet, traveling to the Isle of Artaeum to meet with {Iachesis, the Ritemaster of the Psijics}. Even then, the Psijics were {counsellors} of kings and proponents of the "Elder Way," taught to them by the original {race that inhabited} Tamriel. The Elder Way is a philosophy of meditation and study said to bind the forces of nature to the individual will. It differs from magicka in origin, but the effects are much the same.

That {being} said, it is perhaps more than coincidence that the Isle of Artaeum literally vanished from the shores of {Summurset} at the beginning of the Second Era at about the time of the founding of the Mages Guild {in} Tamriel. Various historians and scholars have published theories about this, but perhaps none but Iachesis and his own could shed light on {the matter}.

Five hundred years passed and Artaeum returned. The Psijics on the Isle consisted of persons, mostly Elves, who had disappeared and were presumed dead {in} the Second Era. They could not or would not offer {any} explanation for Artaeum's whereabouts during that time, or the fate of Iachesis and the original council of Artaeum.

Currently, the Psijics are led by the {Loremaster} Celarus, who has presided over the Council of Artaeum for the last two hundred and fifty years. The Council's influence in {Tamrielan} politics is tidal. The kings of Sumurset, particularly those of Moridunon, have often sought the Psijics' opinion. Emperor Uriel V was much influenced by the Council in the early, most glorious parts of his reign, before his disastrous attack on Akavir. It has even been suggested that the fleet of King Orghum of Pyandonea was destroyed by a joint effort of Emperor Antiochus and the Psijic Order. The last four emperors, Uriel VI, Morihatha, Pelagius IV, and Uriel VII, have been suspicious of the Psijics, even enough to refuse ambassadors {from} the Isle of Artaeum {within} the Imperial City.

The Isle of Artaeum is difficult to chart geographically. It is said that {it shifts continuously} either at random or by decree of the Council. Visitors to the island are so rare {as} to be almost unheard of. Anyone desirous of a meeting with a Psijic may find contacts in Potansa and Runcibae as well as many of the kingdoms of {Summurset}.

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* ESD. ESM. ESO.
Were it more accessible, Artaeum would be a favored destination for {travelers}. I have been to the Isle once and still dream of its idyllic orchards and {clear} pastures, {its} still and silent lagoons, {its} misty woodlands, and the unique Psijic architecture that seems to be as natural {as its surroundings as well as wondrous in its own right}. The Ceporah Tower in particular I would study, for it is a {relic} from a civilization that predates the High Elves by several hundred years and is still used in certain rites by the Psijics. Perhaps one day I might return.

[Note: The author is currently on the Isle of Artaeum by gracious consent of Master Sargenius of the Council of Artaeum.]

NOTES

1 ESD only.
2 ESM, ESO. In ESD, "The Isle of Artaeum (ar-TAY-um)" is used as a header, with the first paragraph beginning with "Artaeum."
3 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Sumurset".
4 ESD only.
5 ESD only.
6 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
7 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the Rite Master of the Psijics, Iachesis".
8 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "counselors".
9 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "people of".
10 ESD only.
11 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Sumurset".
12 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "of".
13 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "this".
14 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "over".
15 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "an".
16 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Lore Master".
17 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "world".
18 ESD only.
19 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "for".
20 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "in".
21 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "parts of it exist simultaneously in multiple dimensions and continuously shift".
22 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
23 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Sumurset".
24 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "travellers".
25 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
26 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the".
27 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the".
28 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "but wondrous as the surroundings".
29 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "ruin".
30 ESM, ESO. ESD does not have the brackets.
After the conquest of Hammerfell, Imperial legions massed along the northeastern borders of Cyrodiil, and invasion fleets prepared in Skyrim.

Initially, though the Imperial legions and navy were widely considered undefeatable, House Indoril and the Temple hierarchy proposed to resist to the death. Redoran and Dres stood by Indoril, with Telvanni remaining neutral. Hlaalu proposed accommodation.

Contrived border incidents in Black Marsh ended inconclusively, but the swampy terrain did not favor legion and navy coordination. Against the legions massed west of Silgrad Tower and Kragenmoor, and the legions west of Blacklight and Cormaris View, Morrowind had pitifully small militias stiffened by small companies of Redoran mercenaries and elite units of house nobles and Temple Ordinators and Armigers. Further complicating matters was the refusal of Indoril, Dres, Hlaalu, and Telvanni to garrison the western borders; Indoril and Dres proposed, rather than defend the western border, instead to withdraw to the interior and fight a guerrilla war. With Hlaalu advocating accommodation, and Telvanni remaining neutral, Redoran therefore faced the prospect of standing alone against the Empire.

The situation changed radically when Vivec appeared in person in Vivec City to announce his negotiation of a treaty with Emperor Tiber Septim, reorganizing Morrowind as a province of the Empire, but guaranteeing "all rights of faith and self-government." A shocked Temple hierarchy, which apparently had not been consulted, greeted the announcement with awkward silence. Indoril swore they would resist to the death, with the loyal support of Dres, while Redoran, grateful for a graceful excuse to avoid facing the legions unsupported, joined with Hlaalu in welcoming the agreement. Telvanni, seeing which way the wind blew, joined with Hlaalu and Redoran in supporting the treaty.

Nothing is known of the circumstances of the personal meeting between Septim and Vivec, or where it took place, or the preliminaries which must have preceded the treaty. The public reason was to protect the identities of the agents involved. In the West, speculation has centered around the role of Zurin Arctus in brokering the agreement; in the East, rumors suggest that Vivec offered Numidium to aid in the conquest of the Altmer and Sumerset Isle in return for significant concessions to preserve self-rule, house traditions, and religious practices in Morrowind.

The Lord High Councilor of the Grand Council, an Indoril, refused to accept the treaty, and refused to step down. He was assassinated, and replaced by a Hlaalu. House Hlaalu took the opportunity to settle some old scores with House Indoril, and a number of local councils changed hands in bloody coups. More blood was shed in these inter-house struggles than
against the Imperial Legions during Morrowind's transition from an independent nation to a province of the Empire.

The generals of the legions had dreaded an invasion of Morrowind. The Dunmer were widely regarded as the most dreadful and fanatic foes, further inspired by their Temple and clan traditions. The generals had not grasped the political weaknesses of Morrowind, which Emperor Tiber Septim recognized and exploited. At the same time, given the tragic depopulation and destruction experienced by the other provinces conquered by Septim, and the swift and efficient assimilation of Morrowind into the Imperial legal systems and economy, with relatively small impact on lower or upper classes of Morrowind's citizens, the Tribunal also deserves some credit for recognizing the hopelessness of Morrowind's defense, and the chance of gaining important concessions at the treaty table by being the first to offer peace.

By contrast, many Indoril nobles chose to commit suicide rather than submit to the Empire, with the result that the House was significantly weakened during the period of transition, guaranteeing that they would lose much of their influence and power to House Hlaalu, whose influence and power was waxing with its enthusiastic accommodation with the Empire. The Temple hierarchy more skillfully managed their loss of face, remaining aloof from political struggles, and earning the good will of the people by concentrating on their economic, educational, and spiritual welfare.
On Oblivion

by Morian Zenas

It is improper, however customary, to refer to the denizens of the dimension of Oblivion as "demons." This practice probably dates to the Alessian Doctrines of the First Era prophet Marukh -- which, rather amusingly, forbade "trafficke with daimons" and then neglected to explain what daimons were.

It is most probable that "daimon" is a misspelling or etymological rendition of "Daedra," the old Elven word for strange, powerful creatures of uncertain motivation who hail from the dimension of Oblivion. ("Daedra" is actually the plural form; the singular is "Daedroth.") In a later tract by King Hale the Pious of Skyrim, almost a thousand years after the publication of the original Doctrines, the evil machinations of his political enemies are compared to "the wickedness of the demons of Oblivion... their depravity equals that of Sanguine itself, they are cruel as Boethiah, calculating as Molag Bal, and mad as Sheogorath." Hale the Pious thus long-windedly introduced four of the Daedra lords to the written record.

But the written record is not, after all, the best way to research Oblivion and the Daedra who inhabit it. Those who, in the words of the Alessian Doctrine, "trafficke with daimons" seldom wish it to be a matter of public account. Nevertheless, scattered throughout the literature of the First Era are diaries, journals, notices for witch burnings, and guides for Daedra-slayers which contain only a few contradictions. These I have used as my primary source material. They are at least as trustworthy as the Daedra lords I have actually summoned and spoken with at length.

Apparentlv, Oblivion is a place composed of many lands -- thus the many names for which Oblivion is synonymous: Coldharbour, Quagmire, Moonshadow, etc. It may be supposed that each land of Oblivion is ruled over by one prince. The princes whose names appear over and over in ancient records (though this is not an infallible test of their authenticity or explicit existence, to be sure) are the afore-mentioned Sanguine, Boethiah, Molag Bal, and Sheogorath, and in addition, Azura, Mephala, Clavicus Vile, Vaernima, Malacath, Hoermius (or Hermaeus or Hormaius or Herma) -- there seems to be no one accepted spelling) Mora, Namira, Jyggalag, Nocturnal, Mehrunes Dagon, and Peryite.

From my experience, Daedra are a very mixed lot. It is almost impossible to categorize them as a whole except for their immense power and penchant for extremism. (Be that as it may, I have here attempted to do so in a few cases, purely for the sake of scholastic expediency.)

Mehrunes Dagon, Molag Bal, Peryite, Boethiah, and Vaernima are among the most consistently "demonic" of the Daedra, in the sense that their spheres seem to be destructive in nature. The other Daedra can, of course, be equally dangerous, but seldom purely for the
sake of destruction as these five can. Nor are these previous five identical in their destructiveness. Mehrunes Dagon seems to prefer natural disasters -- earthquakes and volcanoes -- for venting his anger. Molag Bal elects the employment of other daedea, and Boethiah inspires the arms of mortal warriors. Peryite's sphere seems to be pestilence, and Vaernima's torture.

 Summoning daedra is not a difficult proposition, but it is usual an expensive one. Most Mages Guilds have a summoning room, but this is most often reserved for the highest echelon of guildmembers. Witches covens are much less class sensitive, and the Necromancers, the Dark Brotherhood, and many secretive kings and queens of Tamriel have private summoning rooms. Daedra princes usually demand some sort of service of those who summon them, though I am fortunate enough to have good relations with some and need not perform.

In preparation for the next instalment in this series, I will be investigating two matters that have intrigued me since I began my career as a Daedra researcher. The first is on one particular Daedroth, perhaps yet another Daedra prince, referred to in multiple articles of incunabula as Hircine. Hircine has been called "the Huntsman of the Princes" and "the Father of Man-beasts," but I have yet to find anyone who can summon him. The other, and more doubtful, goal I have for the next chapter is to find a practical means for mortal men to pass through to Oblivion. It has always been my philosophy that we need only fear that which we do not understand -- and with that thought in mind, I ever pursue my objective.

Notes

1 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "though common".
2 ESM, ESO. ESD does not have the quotation marks.
3 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
4 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "traffic with "daimons,"".
5 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "demons are".
6 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
7 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Elvish".
8 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the".
9 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "come".
10 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
11 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "later tractates".
12 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
13 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "is".
14 ESD only.
15 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
16 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "that".
17 ESD only.
18 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "traffic with "daimons,"".
19 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "record".
20 ESD only.
21 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
22 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "and others".
23 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
24 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
25 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
26 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "name appears".
27 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
28 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "a sure".
29 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
ESM, ESO. ESD reads "is no consistant".
ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
ESM, ESO. ESD reads "very".
ESM, ESO. ESD reads "those five aforementioned daedra".
ESM, ESO. ESD reads "destruction".
ESM, ESO. ESD reads "to vent his spleen".
ESM, ESO. ESD reads "prefers employing actual daedralings".
ESD only.
ESM, ESO. ESD reads "second chapter of".
ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
ESD only.
ESM, ESO. ESD reads "man".
ESM, ESO. ESD reads "only need".
ESM, ESO. ESD reads "goal".
On Wild Elves
by Kier-jo Chorvak

In the wilds of most every province of Tamriel, descended philosophically if not directly from the original inhabitants of the land, are the Ay leids, commonly called the Wild Elves. While three races of Elven stock -- {the Altmer (or High Elves)}\(^2\), {the Bosmer (or Wood Elves)}\(^3\), and {the Dunmer (or Dark Elves)}\(^4\) -- have assimilated well {into}\(^5\) the new cultures of Tamriel, the Ayleids and their brethren have remained aloof {toward}\(^6\) our civilization, preferring to practice the old ways far from the eyes of the world.

The Wild Elves speak a variation of Old Cyrodilic {and not Tamrielic}\(^7\), {opting to shun Tamrielic and}\(^8\) separating themselves {from the mainstream of Tamriel even}\(^9\) further {even}\(^10\) than {the least urbanized of their}\(^11\) Elven cousins. In temperament they are dark-spirited and taciturn -- though {this is from the point of view of outsiders (or "Pellani" in their tongue), and doubtless they act differently}\(^12\) within their own tribes.

Indeed, one of the finest sages of the University of Gwilym was a civilized Ayleid Elf, Tjurhane Fyrre (1E2790-2E227), whose published work on Wild Elves suggests a lively, vibrant culture. Fyrre is one of the very few Ayleids to speak freely on his people and religion, and {he himself}\(^13\) said "the nature of the {Ayleid tribes is}\(^14\) multihued, their personalities often wildly different from their neighboring tribes" (Fyrre, T., Nature of Ayleidic Poesy, p. 8, {University}\(^16\) of Gwilym Press, 2E12).

Like any alien culture, Wild Elves are often feared by the simple people of Tamriel. The Ayleids continue to be one of the greatest enigmas of the continent of Tamriel. They seldom appear in the pages of written history in any role, and then only as a strange sight a chronicler stumbles upon before they vanish into the wood. When probable fiction is filtered from common legend, we are left with almost nothing. The mysterious ways of the Ayleids have remained shrouded since before the First Era, and may well remain so for thousands of years to come.

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Kiergo".
2 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Salache (or High)".
3 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Boiche (or Wood)".
4 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Moriche (or Dark)".
5 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "to".
6 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "of".
7 ESD only.
8 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
9 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
10 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
11 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "their more urbanized".

ESD. ESM. ESO.
ESM, ESO. ESD reads "they doubtless act differently with outsiders (or "Pellani" in their tongue) than within their own tribes".

13 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "even he".

14 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "tribes of Ayleid are".

15 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

16 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Univ".
Origin of the Mages Guild
by {The Archmage} Salarth

The idea of a collection of Mages, Sorcerers, and assorted Mystics pooling their resources and talents for the purpose of research and public charity was a revolutionary concept in the early years of the Second Era. The {only} organization {then closest in aim and structure} to what we {know today} as the Mages Guild was the Psijic Order of the Isle of Artaeum. {At the time,} magic was something to be learned by individuals, or at most {within} intimate covens. Mages were, if not {actually} hermits, usually quite solitary.

The Psijic Order served the rulers of {Summurset} Isle as {counsellors}, and chose its members {through} a complex, ritualized method not understood by {outsiders}. Its purposes and goals {likewise went} unpublished, and {its} detractors attributed the worst {evils} as the source of {the Order's} power. {Actually,} the religion of the old Order could be described as ancestor worship, an increasingly unfashionable philosophy in the Second Era.

When Vanus Galerion, a Psijic of Artaeum and student of the famed Iachesis, began collecting {magic-users} from around {Summurset} Isle, he attracted the animosity of all. He was operating out of {the urban center of} Firsthold, and there was a common (and not entirely {unfounded}) attitude that magical experiments should be conducted only in unpopulated areas. Even more shocking, Galerion proposed to make magical items, potions, and even spells available to any member of the general public who could {afford to} pay. No longer was magic to be limited either to the aristocracy or {intelligentsia}.

Galerion was brought before Iachesis and the King of Firsthold, Rilis XII, and made to state the intentions of the {fraternity} he was forming. The fact that Galerion's speech to Rilis and Iachesis was not recorded for posterity is {doubtless} a tragedy, though it does {afford} opportunity for historians to amuse one another with {speculation about the} lies and persuasions Galerion might have used to found the ubiquitous organization. The charter{, at any rate,} was approved.

Almost immediately after the Guild was formed, the question of security had to be {addressed}. The Isle of Artaeum did not {require} force of arms to shield it from invaders {interested in stealing its treasures} -- when the Psijic Order does not wish someone to land on the {Isle}, {it and all its inhabitants simply} become insubstantial. The new Mages Guild{, by contrast,} had to hire guards. Galerion soon discovered what {the Tamrielan nobility has} known for thousands of years: Money alone does not buy loyalty. The knightly Order of the Lamp was formed the following year.

Like a tree from an acorn, the Mages Guild grew branches all over {Summurset} Isle and {gradually} the mainland of Tamriel. There are {numerous} records of superstitious or sensibly fearful rulers forbidding the Guild in their {domains}, but their heirs or {their}
heirs' heirs {eventually} recognized the wisdom of allowing the Guild {free rein}. The Mages Guild {has become} a powerful force in Tamriel, a dangerous foe if a somewhat disinterested ally. There have been only a few rare incidents of the Mages Guild actually becoming involved in local political struggles. On these occasions, the Guild's participation has been the ultimate decider in the conflict.

{As} begun by Vanus Galerion, the Mages Guild as {an} institution is presided over by a {supreme} council of six Archmagisters. Each {Guildhall} is run by a Guildmagister, assisted by a {twofold counsel}, the Master of Incunabula and the Master at Arms. The Master of Incunabula presides over {an additional counsel of} two mages, the Master of Academia and the Master of the Scrye. The Master at Arms also has a counsel of two, the Master of Initiates and the Palatinus, the leader of the {local chapter of the} Order of the Lamp.

One need not be a member of the Mages Guild to know that this carefully {contrived hierarchy} is often nothing more than {a chimera}. As Vanus Galerion himself said bitterly, leaving Tamriel to travel to other lands, "The Guild has become nothing more than an intricate morass of political infighting."

\[69\] ORIGIN OF THE MAGES GUILD

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
2 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "closest".
3 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
4 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "today know".
5 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
6 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "in".
7 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "actual".
8 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the Sumurset".
9 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "counselors".
10 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "by".
11 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the common people".
12 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "were likewise".
13 ESD only.
14 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "evil".
15 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "its".
16 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
17 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "mages".
18 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Sumurset".
19 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
20 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "unsensible".
21 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
22 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "intelligensia".
23 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "guild".
24 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
25 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "allow the".
26 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
27 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
28 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "answered".
29 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "have to have a".
30 ESD only.
31 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "island".
32 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "the island and all on it".
33 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
34 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "nobles have".
ORIGIN OF THE MAGES GUILD
**[70] An Overview of Gods and Worship in Tamriel**

An Overview Of Gods and Worship In Tamriel
By Brother Hetchfeld

Editor's Note:
Brother Hetchfeld is an Associate Scribe at the Imperial University, Office of Introductory Studies

Gods are commonly {judged upon}\(^1\) the evidence of their interest in worldly matters. A central belief in the active participation of Deities in mundane matters can be challenged by the {reference to apparent}\(^2\) apathy {and indifference}\(^3\) on the part of Gods during times of plague or famine.

From intervention in legendary quests to manifestations in common daily life, no pattern for the Gods of Tamriel activities is readily {perceived}\(^4\). The concerns of Gods in many ways may seem unrelated or at best unconcerned with the daily trials of the mortal realm. The exceptions do exist, however.

Many historical records and legends point to the direct intervention of one or more gods at times of great need. Many heroic tales recount blessings of the divinity bestowed upon heroic figures who worked or quested for the good of a Deity or the Deity's temple. Some of the more powerful artifacts in the known world were originally bestowed upon their owners through such reward. It has also been reported that priests of high ranking in their temples may on occasion call upon their Deity for blessings or help in time of need. The exact nature of such contact and the blessings bestowed is given to much speculation, as the temples hold such associations secret and holy. This direct contact gives weight to the belief that the Gods are aware of the mortal realm. In many circumstances, however, these same Gods will do nothing in the face of suffering and death, seeming to feel no need to interfere. It is thus possible to conclude that we, as mortals, may not be capable of understanding more than a small fraction of the reasoning and logic such beings use.

One defining characteristic of all Gods and Goddesses is their interest in worship and deeds. Deeds in the form of holy quests are just one of the many things that bring the attention of a Deity. Deeds in everyday life, by conforming to the statutes and obligations of individual temples are commonly supposed to please a Deity. Performance of ceremony in a temple may also bring a Deity's attention. Ceremonies vary according to the individual Deity. The results are not always apparent but sacrifice and offerings are usually required to have any hope of gaining a Deity's attention.

While direct intervention in daily temple life has been recorded, the exact nature of the presence of a God in daily mundane life is {a subject of controversy}\(^5\). A traditional saying of the Wood Elves {is that}\(^6\) "One man's miracle is another man's accident." While some gods

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\(^1\) ESD. ESM (*Overview Of Gods and Worship In Tamriel*). ESO (Gods and Worship).

\(^2\) ESD. ESM (*Overview Of Gods and Worship In Tamriel*). ESO (Gods and Worship).

\(^3\) ESD. ESM (*Overview Of Gods and Worship In Tamriel*). ESO (Gods and Worship).

\(^4\) ESD. ESM (*Overview Of Gods and Worship In Tamriel*). ESO (Gods and Worship).

\(^5\) ESD. ESM (*Overview Of Gods and Worship In Tamriel*). ESO (Gods and Worship).

\(^6\) ESD. ESM (*Overview Of Gods and Worship In Tamriel*). ESO (Gods and Worship).
are believed to take an active part of daily life, others are well known for their lack of interest in temporal affairs.

It has been theorized that gods do in fact gain strength from such things as worship through praise, sacrifice and deed. It may even be theorized that the number of worshippers a given Deity has may reflect on His overall position among the other Gods. This my own conjecture, garnered from the apparent ability of the larger temples to attain blessings and assistance from their God with greater ease than smaller religious institutions.

There are reports of the existence of spirits in our world that have the same capacity to use the actions and deeds of mortals to strengthen themselves as do the Gods. The understanding of the exact nature of such creatures would allow us to understand with more clarity the connection between a Deity and the Deity's worshipers.

The implication of the existence of such spirits leads to the speculation that these spirits may even be capable of raising themselves to the level of a God or Goddess. Motusuo of the Imperial Seminary has suggested that these spirits may be the remains of Gods and Goddesses who through time lost all or most of their following, reverting to their earliest most basic form. Practioners of the Old Ways say that there are no Gods, just greater and lesser spirits. Perhaps it is possible for all three theories to be true.

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "viewed by".
2 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "evidence of".
3 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
4 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "apparent".
5 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "up to great speculation".
6 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "goes".
Palla. Pal La. I remember when I first heard that name, not long ago at all. It was at a Tales and Tallows ball at a very fine estate west of Mir Corrup, to which I and my fellow Mages Guild initiates had found ourselves unexpectedly invited. Truth be told, we needn't have been too surprised. There were very few other noble families in Mir Corrup -- the region had its halcyon days as a resort for the wealthy far back in the 2nd era -- and on reflection, it was only appropriate to have sorcerers and wizards present at a supernatural holiday. Not that we were anything more exotic than students at a small, nonexclusive charterhouse of the Guild, but like I said, there was a paucity of other choices available.

For close to a year, the only home I had known was the rather ramshackle if sprawling grounds of the Mir Corrup Mages Guild. My only companions were my fellow initiates, most of which only tolerated me, and the masters, whose bitterness at being at a backwater Guild prompted never-ending abuse.

Immediately the School of Illusion had attracted me. The Magister who taught us recognized me as an apt pupil who loved not only the spells of the science but their philosophical underpinnings. There was something about the idea of warping the imperceptible energies of light, sound, and mind that appealed to my nature. Not for me the flashy schools of destruction and alteration, the holy schools of restoration and conjuration, the practical schools of alchemy and enchantment, or the chaotic school of mysticism. No, I was never so pleased as to take an ordinary object and by a little magic make it seem something other than what it was.

It would have taken more imagination than I had to apply that philosophy to my monotonous life. After the morning's lessons, we were assigned tasks before our evening classes. Mine had been to clean out the study of a recently deceased resident of the Guild, and categorize his clutter of spellbooks, charms, and incunabula.

It was a lonely and tedious appointment. Magister Tendixus was an inveterate collector of worthless junk, but I was reprimanded any time I threw something away of the least possible value. Gradually I learned enough to deliver each of his belongings to the appropriate department: potions of healing to the Magisters of Restoration, books on physical phenomena to the Magisters of Alteration, herbs and minerals to the Alchemists, and soulgems and bound items to the Enchanters. After one delivery to the Enchanters, I was leaving with my customary lack of appreciation, when Magister Ilther called me back.

"Boy," said the portly old man, handing me back one item. "Destroy this."
It was a small black disc covered with runes with a ring of red-orange gems like bones circling its periphery.

"I'm sorry, Magister," I stammered. "I thought it was something you'd be interested in."

"Take it to the great flame and destroy it," he barked, turning his back on me. "You never brought it here."

My interest was piqued, because I knew the only thing that would make him react in such a way. Necromancy. I went back to Magister Tendixus's chamber and poured through his notes, looking for any reference to the disc. Unfortunately, most of the notes had been written in a strange code that I was powerless to decipher. I was so fascinated by the mystery that I nearly arrived late for my evening class in Enchantment, taught by Magister Ilther himself.

For the next several weeks, I divided my time categorizing the general debris and making my deliveries, and researching the disc. I came to understand that my instinct was correct: the disc was a genuine necromantic artifact. Though I couldn't understand most of the Magister's notes, I determined that he thought it to be a means of resurrecting a loved one from the grave.

Sadly, the time came when the chamber had been categorized and cleared, and I was given another assignment, assisting in the stables of the Guild's menagerie. At least finally I was working with some of my fellow initiates and had the opportunity of meeting the common folk and nobles who came to the Guild on various errands. Thus was I employed when we were all invited to the Tales and Tallows ball.

If the expected glamour of the evening were not enough, our hostess was reputed to be young, rich, unmarried orphan from Hammerfell. Only a month or two before had she moved to our desolate, wooded corner of the Imperial Province to reclaim an old family manorhouse and grounds. The initiates at the Guild gossiped like old women about the mysterious young lady's past, what had happened to her parents, why she had left or been driven from her homeland. Her name was Betaniqi, and that was all we knew.

We wore our robes of initiation with pride as we arrived for the ball. At the enormous marble foyer, a servant announced each of our names as if we were royalty, and we strutted into the midst of the revelers with great puffery. Of course, we were then promptly ignored by one and all. In essence, we were unimportant figures to lend some thickness to the ball. Background characters.

The important people pushed through us with perfect politeness. There was old Lady Schaudirra discussing diplomatic appointments to Balmora with the Duke of Rimfarlin. An orc warlord entertained a giggling princess with tales of rape and pillage. Three of the Guild Magisters worried with three painfully thin noble spinsters about the haunting of Daggerfall. Intrigues at the Imperial and various royal courts were analyzed, gently mocked, fretted over, toasted, dismissed, evaluated, mitigated, admonished, subverted. No one looked our way even when we were right next to them. It was as if my skill at illusion had somehow rendered us all invisible.

I took my flagon out to the terrace. The moons were doubled, equally luminous in the sky and in the enormous reflecting pool that stretched out into the garden. The white marble statuary
lining the sides of the pool caught the fiery glow and seemed to burn like torches in the night. The sight was so otherworldly that I was mesmerized by it, and the strange Redguard figures immortalized in stone. Our hostess had made her home there so recently that some of the sculptures were still wrapped in sheets that billowed and swayed in the gentle breeze. I don't know how long I stared before I realized I wasn't alone.

She was so small and so dark, not only in her skin but in her clothing, that I nearly took her for a shadow. When she turned to me, I saw that she was very beautiful and young, not more than seventeen.

"Are you our hostess?" I finally asked.

"Yes," she smiled, blushing. "But I'm ashamed to admit that I'm very bad at it. I should be inside with my new neighbors, but I think we have very little in common."

"It's been made abundantly clear that they hope I have nothing in common with them either," I laughed. "When I'm a little higher than an initiate in the Mages Guild, they might see me as more of an equal."

"I don't understand the concept of equality in Cyrodiil yet," she frowned. "In my culture, you proved your worth, not just expected it. My parents both were great warriors, as I hope to be."

Her eyes went out to the lawn, to the statues.

"Do the sculptures represent your parents?"

"That's my father Pariom there," she said gesturing to a life-sized representation of a massively built man, unashamedly naked, gripping another warrior by the throat and preparing to decapitate him with an outstretched blade. It was clearly a realistic depiction. Pariom's face was plain, even slightly ugly with a low forehead, a mass of tangled hair, stubble on his cheeks. Even a slight gap in his teeth, which no sculptor would surely have invented except to do justice to his model's true idiosyncrasies.

"And your mother?" I asked, pointing to a nearby statue of a proud, rather squat warrior woman in a mantilla and scarf, holding a child.

"Oh no," she laughed. "That was my uncle's old nurse. Mother's statue still has a sheet over it."

I don't know what prompted me to insist that we unveil the statue that she pointed to. In all likelihood, it was nothing but fate, and a selfish desire to continue the conversation. I was afraid that if I did not give her a project, she would feel the need to return to the party, and I would be alone again. At first she was reluctant. She had not yet made up her mind whether the statues would suffer in the wet, sometimes cold Cyrodilic climate. Perhaps all should be covered, she reasoned. It may be that she was merely making conversation, and was reluctant as I was to end the stand-off and be that much closer to having to return to the party.

In a few minutes time, we tore the tarp from the statue of Betaniqi's mother. That is when my life changed forevermore.
She was an untamed spirit of nature, screaming in a struggle with a misshapen monstrous figure in black marble. Her gorgeous, long fingers were raking across the creature's face. The monster's talons gripped her right breast in a sort of caress that prefaces a mortal wound. Its legs and hers wound around one another in a battle that was a dance. I felt annihilated. This lithe but formidable woman was beautiful beyond all superficial standards. Whoever had sculpted it had somehow captured not only a face and figure of a goddess, but her power and will. She was both tragic and triumphant. I fell instantly and fatally in love with her.

I had not even noticed when Gelyn, one of my fellow initiates who was leaving the party, came up behind us. Apparently I had whispered the word "magnificent," because I heard Betaniqi reply as if miles away, "Yes, it is magnificent. That's why I was afraid of exposing it to the elements."

Then I heard, clearly, like a stone breaking water, Gelyn: "Mara preserve me. That must be Palla."

"Then you heard of my mother?" asked Betaniqi, turning his way.

"I hail from Wayrest, practically on the border to Hammerfell. I don't think there's anyone who hasn't heard of your mother and her great heroism, ridding the land of that abominable beast. She died in that struggle, didn't she?"

"Yes," said the girl sadly. "But so too did the creature."

For a moment, we were all silent. I don't remember anything more of that night. Somehow I knew I was invited to dine the next evening, but my mind and heart had been entirely and forever more arrested by the statue. I returned back to the Guild, but my dreams were fevered and brought me no rest. Everything seemed diffused by white light, except for one beautiful, fearsome woman. Palla.
Palla. Pal La. The name burned in my heart. I found myself whispering it in my studies even when I tried to concentrate on something the Magister was saying. My lips would silently purse to voice the "Pal," and tongue lightly flick to form the "La" as if I were kissing her spirit before me. It was madness in every way except that I knew that it was madness. I knew I was in love. I knew she was a noble Redguard woman, a fierce warrior more beautiful than the stars. I knew her young daughter Betaniqi had taken possession of a manorhouse near the Guild, and that she liked me, perhaps was even infatuated. I knew Palla had fought a terrible beast and killed it. I knew Palla was dead.

As I say, I knew it was madness, and by that, I knew I could not be mad. But I also knew that I must return to Betaniqi's palace to see her statue of my beloved Palla engaged in that final, horrible, fatal battle with the monster.

Return I did, over and over again. Had Betaniqi been a different sort of noblewoman, more comfortable with her peers, I would not have had so many opportunities. In her innocence, unaware of my sick obsession, she welcomed my company. We would talk for hours, laughing, and every time we would take a walk to the reflecting pond where I would always stop breathless before the sculpture of her mother.

"It's a marvelous tradition you have, preserving these figures of your ancestors at their finest moments," I said, feeling her curious eyes on me. "And the craftsmanship is without parallel."

"You wouldn't believe me," laughed the girl. "But it was a bit of scandal when my great grandfather began the custom. We Redguards hold a great reverence for our families, but we are warriors, not artists. He hired an traveling artist to create the first statues, and everyone admired them until it was revealed that the artist was an elf. An Altmer from the Summerset Isle."

"Scandal!"

"It was, absolutely," Betaniqi nodded seriously. "The idea that a pompous, wicked elf's hands had formed these figures of noble Redguard warriors was unthinkable, profane, irreverent, everything bad you can imagine. But my great grandfather's heart was in the beauty of it, and his philosophy of using the best to honor the best passed down to us all. I would not have even considered having a lesser artist create the statues of my parents, even if it would have been more allegiant to my culture."

"They're all exquisite," I said.

"But you like the one of my mother most of all," she smiled. "I see you look at it even when you seem to be looking at the others. It's my favorite also."
"Would you tell me more about her?" I asked, trying to keep my voice light and conversational.

"Oh, she would have said she was nothing extraordinary, but she was," the girl said, picking a flower from the garden. "My father died when I was quite young, and she had so many roles to fill, but she did them all effortlessly. We have a great many business interests and she was brilliant at managing everything. Certainly better than I am now. All it took was her smile and everyone obeyed, and those that didn't paid dearly. She was very witty and charming, but a formidable force when the need arose for her to fight. Hundreds of battles, but I can never remember a moment of feeling neglected or unloved. I literally thought she was too strong for death. Stupid, I know, but when she went to battle that -- that horrible creature, that freak from a mad wizard's laboratory, I never even thought she would not return. She was kind to her friends and ruthless to her enemies. What more can one say about a woman than that?"

Poor Betaniqi's eyes teared up with remembrance. What sort of villain was I to goad her so, in order to satisfy my perverted longings? Sheogorath could never have conflicted a mortal man more than me. I found myself both weeping and filled with desire. Palla not only looked like a goddess, but from her daughter's story, she was one.

That night while undressing for bed, I rediscovered the black disc I had stolen from Magister Tendixus's office weeks before. I had half-forgotten about its existence, that mysterious necromantic artifact which the mage believed could resurrect a dead love. Almost by pure instinct, I found myself placing the disc on my heart and whispering, "Palla."

A momentary chill filled my chamber. My breath hung in the air in a mist before dissipating. Frightened I dropped the disc. It took a moment before my reason returned, and with it the inescapable conclusion: the artifact could fulfill my desire.

Until the early morning hours, I tried to raise my mistress from the chains of Oblivion, but it was no use. I was no necromancer. I entertained thoughts of how to ask one of the Magisters to help me, but I remembered how Magister Ilther had bid me to destroy it. They would expel me from the Guild if I went to them and destroy the disc themselves. And with it, my only key to bringing my love to me.

I was in my usual semi-torpid condition the next day in classes. Magister Ilther himself was lecturing on his specialty, the School of Enchantment. He was a dull speaker with a monotone voice, but suddenly I felt as if every shadow had left the room and I was in a palace of light.

"When most persons think of my particular science, they think of the process of invention. The infusing of charms and spells into objects. The creation of a magickal blade, perhaps, or a ring. But the skilled enchanter is also a catalyst. The same mind that can create something new can also provoke greater power from something old. A ring that can generate warmth for a novice, on the hand of such a talent can bake a forest black." The fat man chuckled: "Not that I'm advocating that. Leave that for the School of Destruction."

That week all the initiates were asked to choose a field of specialization. All were surprised when I turned my back on my old darling, the School of Illusion. It seemed ridiculous to me that I had ever entertained an affection for such superficial charms. All my intellect was now focused on the School of Enchantment, the means by which I could free the power of the disc.
For months thereafter, I barely slept. A few hours a week, I'd spend with Betaniqi and my statue to give myself strength and inspiration. All the rest of my time was spent with Magister Ilther or his assistants, learning everything I could about enchantment. They taught me how to taste the deepest levels of magicka within a stored object.

"A simple spell cast once, no matter how skillfully and no matter how spectacularly, is ephemeral, of the present, what it is and no more," sighed Magister Ilther. "But placed in a home, it develops into an almost living energy, maturing and ripening so only its surface is touched when an unskilled hand wields it. You must consider yourself a miner, digging deeper to pull forth the very heart of gold."

Every night when the laboratory closed, I practiced what I had learned. I could feel my power grow and with it, the power of the disc. Whispering "Palla," I delved into the artifact, feeling every slight nick that marked the runes and every facet of the gemstones. At times I was so close to her, I felt hands touching mine. But something dark and bestial, the reality of death I suppose, would always break across the dawning of my dream. With it came an overwhelming rotting odor, which the initiates in the chambers next to mine began to complain about.

"Something must have crawled into the floorboards and died," I offered lamely.

Magister Ilther praised my scholarship, and allowed me the use of his laboratory after hours to further my studies. Yet no matter what I learned, Palla seemed scarcely closer. One night, it all ended. I was swaying in a deep ecstasy, moaning her name, the disc bruising my chest, when a sudden lightning flash through the window broke my concentration. A tempest of furious rain roared over Mir Corrup. I went to close the shutters, and when I returned to my table, I found that the disc had shattered.

I broke into hysterical sobs and then laughter. It was too much for my fragile mind to bear such a loss after so much time and study. The next day and the day after, I spent in my bed, burning with a fever. Had I not been a Mages Guild with so many healers, I likely would have died. As it was, I provided an excellent study for the budding young scholars.

When at last I was well enough to walk, I went to visit Betaniqi. She was charming as always, never once commenting on my appearance, which must have been ghastly. Finally I gave her reason to worry when I politely but firmly declined to walk with her along the reflecting pool.

"But you love looking at the statuary," she exclaimed.

I felt that I owed her the truth and much more. "Dear lady, I love more than the statuary. I love your mother. She is all I've been able to think about for months now, ever since you and I first removed the tarp from that blessed sculpture. I don't know what you think of me now, but I have been obsessed with learning how to bring her back from the dead."

Betaniqi stared at me, eyes wide. Finally she spoke: "I think you need to leave now. I don't know if this is a terrible jest --"

"Believe me, I wish it were. You see, I failed. I don't know why. It could not have been that my love wasn't strong enough, because no man had a stronger love. Perhaps my skills as an enchanter are not masterful, but it wasn't from lack of study!" I could feel my voice rise and
knew I was beginning to rant, but I could not hold back. "Perhaps the fault lay in that your mother never met me, but I think that only the caster's love is taken into account in the necromantic spell. I don't know what it was! Maybe that horrible creature, the monster that killed her, cast some sort of curse on her with its dying breath! I failed! And I don't know why!"

With a surprising burst of speed and strength for so small a lady, Betaniqi shoved herself against me. She screamed, "Get out!" and I fled out the door.

Before she slammed the door shut, I offered my pathetic apologies: "I'm so sorry, Betaniqi, but consider that I wanted to bring your mother back to you. It's madness, I know, but there is only one thing that's certain in my life and that's that I love Palla."

The door was nearly shut, but the girl opened it crack to ask tremulously: "You love whom?"

"Palla!" I cried to the Gods.

"My mother," she whispered angrily. "Was named Xarlys. Palla was the monster."

I stared at the closed door for Mara knows how much time, and then began the long walk back to the Mages Guild. My memory searched through the minutiae to the Tales and Tallows night so long ago when I first beheld the statue, and first heard the name of my love. That Breton initiate, Gelyn had spoken. He was behind me. Was he recognizing the beast and not the lady?

I turned the lonely bend that intersected with the outskirts of Mir Corrup, and a large shadow rose from the ground where it had been sitting, waiting for me.


"Kiss me," it howled.

And that brings my story up to the present moment. Love is red, like blood.
No one -- not the oldest Dark Elf of Mount Dagoth-Ur or the Ancient Sage of Solitude {himself}; no one can recall a time when the Orc did not ravage our fair Tamriel. Whatever foul and pestilent Daedra of Oblivion conjured them up could scarcely have created a more constant threat to the well-being of the civilized races of Tamriel than the obnoxious Orc.

Orcs are thankfully easy to recognize from other humanoids by their size -- commonly forty pertans in height and fifteen thousand angaids in weight -- their brutal pig-like features, and their stench. They are consistently belligerent, morally grotesque, intellectually moronic, and unclean. By all rights, the civilized races of Tamriel should have been able to purge {the} land of their blight eras ago, but their ferocity, animal cunning, and curious tribal loyalty have made them inevitable as leeches in a stagnant pool.

Tales of Orcish barbarity precede written record. When Jastyaga wrote of the Order of Diagna's joining the armies of Daggerfall and Sentinel "to hold {at bay} the wicked Orcs in their foul Orsinium {fastness} ... and burn {aught in cleansing flame}" in 1E950, she assumed that any reader would be aware of the savagery of the Orcs. When the siege was completed thirty years later, after the death of many heroes including Gaiden Shinji, and the destruction of Orsinium scattered the {Orcish} survivors throughout the Wrothgarian Mountains, {she further} wrote, "The {free peoples} rejoiced for {that} their ancient {fell} enemy was dispersed {into diverse parts}.

Obviously, the Orcs had been terrorizing the region of the Iliac Bay at least since the early years of the First Era.

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
2 ESD only.
3 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD:
4 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
5 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "our".
6 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "preceed".
7 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
8 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "tower".
9 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "all".
10 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "orc".
11 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "Jastyaga".
12 ESM, ESO. ESD reads "people".
13 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
14 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.
15 ESM, ESO. Not in ESD.

* ESD. ESM. ESO.
The Posting of the Hunt*

[The writing {in the book} appears to be a hasty transcription, perhaps from dictation, or copied from a longer work.]

**{The Posting of the Hunt}**

Let no man say before a witness that the Hunt has not been called, nor the Rites declared, or the Ancient Offices observed.

The Ritual of the Innocent Quarry, also called the Wild Hunt, is an ancient rite drawing magical energy from the powerful {magicka} stream that engulfs this realm. The creators and times of the rituals are long forgotten. But followed properly, the rite brings great power and prestige to the Huntsman.

The ritual pits the all-powerful Huntsmen and their Greater and Lesser Dogs against the pitiful and doomed Innocent Quarry, called by tradition the Hare, after the mortal creature of human hunts. At once, the Huntsman is transported by the exquisite thrill and glory of his might and dominion over his helpless prey, and at the same time touched by the tragic, noble, and ultimately futile plight of the Innocent Quarry. In the highest aesthetic realization of the ritual, the ecstatic rapture of the kill is balanced by the Huntsman's identification with the sadness and despair of the Innocent Quarry. As in pieces the body of the innocent Hare is torn, the Huntsman reflects on the tragic imbalances of power and the cruel injustices of the world.

As the Hunt begins, the Lesser Dogs assemble before the green crystal reflections of the Chapel of the Innocent Quarry. Inside the Chapel, the Huntsmen, the Greater Dogs, and the Master of the Hunt perform the rites that initiate and sanctify the Huntsmen, the Hunt, and the Innocent Quarry. Then the Huntsman emerges from the Chapel, displays the Spear of Bitter Mercy, and recites the Offices of the Hunt. The Offices describe explains the laws and conditions of the four stages of the Hunt: the Drag, the Chase, the Call, and the View to the Kill.

Stage One -- The Drag, in which the Lesser Dogs drag the ground to flush out the Hare.

Stage Two -- The Chase, in which the Greater Hounds drive the Hare before them.

Stage Three -- The Call, in which the Greater Hounds trap the Hare and summon the Huntsmen for the kill.

Stage Four -- The View, in which the Huntsman makes the kill with the ritual Spear of Bitter Mercy, and calls upon the Master of the Hunt to view the kill by ringing the town bell. The Master of the Hunt then bestows the Bounty upon the Huntsman Bold who has wielded the Spear of Bitter Mercy in the kill. The Master of the Hunt also calls upon the Huntsman Bold

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* ESLB. ESM. ESO.
to name the next Hare for the next Hunt (though the Huntsman Bold himself may not participate in the next Hunt).

The Offices of the Hunt, which the Huntsmen, Master, and Hounds are solemnly sworn to honor, detail the practices and conditions of the Hunt. These practices and conditions, also known as the Law, strictly define all details of the Hunt, such as how many Hounds of each sort may participate, how the Spear of Bitter Mercy may be wielded, and so forth. In addition, the Law states that the Hare must have a genuine chance to escape the Hunt, no matter how slim. In practice, this condition has been defined as the availability of six keys, which, if gathered together in the Temple of Daedric Rites, permit the Hare to teleport away from the Hunt, and so elude the Huntsman and his Spear. It is inconceivable, of course, that the Hare might actually discover the keys and escape, but the forms must be observed, and tampering with the keys or cheating the Hare of a genuine chance of finding or using the keys is a shameful and unforgivable betrayal of the Law of the Hunt.

The Ritual of the Hunt grants the Huntsmen protection from all forms of attack, including mortal and immortal weapons, and sorceries of all schools. Huntsmen are cautioned, however, that the ritual does not protect the Huntsman from the potent energies of his own Spear, and cautions against reckless wielding of the Spear in close melee, darkness, or other dangerous circumstances, for a single touch of the Spear of Bitter Mercy means instant and certain death for innocent Hare or fellow Huntsman alike.

The right to name a Wild Hunt is a grand and grave right indeed, as all but the High Daedra Lords are vulnerable to the potent sorceries of the Spear of Bitter Mercy. The Spear itself is therefore a terrible weapon, and it is forbidden to remove it from the Grounds of the Ritual Hunt.

NOTES

1 ESM, ESO. ESLB reads "on the parchment".
2 ESM, ESO. Not in ESLB.
3 ESM, ESO. ESLB reads "magica".
The Empire of Tamriel encompasses the nine Imperial provinces: Skyrim, High Rock, Hammerfell, Summerset Isle, Valenwood, Elsweyr, Black Marsh, Morrowind, and the ancient Imperial province itself, Cyrodiil. Morrowind was among the last of the provinces to be integrated into the Empire, and because it was added by treaty, and not by conquest, Morrowind retains exceptional power to define local law by reference to ancient Great House precedents.

Skyrim, also known as the Old Kingdom or the Fatherland, was the first region of Tamriel settled by humans from the continent of Atmora: the hardy, brave, warlike Nords, whose descendants still occupy this rugged land. Though more restrained and civilized than their barbarian ancestors, the Nords of the pure blood still excel in the manly virtues of red war and bold exploration.

Hammerfell is primarily an urban and maritime province, with most of its population confined to the great cities of Sentinel and Stros M’Kai and to other small ports among the islands and along the coast. The interior is sparsely populated with small poor farms and beastherds. The Redguard love of travel, adventure, and the high seas has dispersed them as sailors, mercenaries, and adventurers in ports of call throughout the Empire.

High Rock encompasses the many lands and clans of Greater Bretony, the Dellese Isles, the Bjoulsae River tribes, and, by tradition, the Western Reach. The rugged highland strongholds and isolated valley settlements have encouraged the fierce independence of the various local Breton clans, and this contentious tribal nature has never been completely integrated into a provincial or Imperial identity. Nonetheless, their language, bardic traditions, and heroic legends are a unifying common legacy.

* ESM. ESO.
The Summerset Isle is a green and pleasant land of fertile farmlands, woodland parks, and ancient towers and manors. Most settlements are small and isolated, and dominated by ruling seats of the local wizard or warlord. The Isle has few good natural ports, and the natives are unwelcoming to foreigners, so the ancient, chivalric high culture of the Aldmer is little affected by modern Imperial mercantilism.

Valenwood is a largely uninhabited forest wilderness. The coasts of Valenwood are dominated by mangrove swamps and tropical rain forests, while heavy rainfalls nurture the temperate inland rain forests. The Bosmer live in timber clanhouses at sites scattered along the coast and through the interior, connected only by undeveloped foot trails. The few Imperial roads traverse vast dense woodlands, studded with tiny, widely separated settlements, and carry little trade or traffic of any kind.

The Khajiit of the southern Elsweyr jungles and river basins are settled city dwellers with ancient mercantile traditions and a stable agrarian aristocracy based on sugarcane and saltrice plantations. The nomadic tribal Khajiit of the dry northern wastes and grasslands are, by contrast, aggressive and territorial tribal raiders periodically united under tribal warlords. While the settled south has been quick to adopt Imperial ways, the northern nomadic tribes cling to their warlike barbarian traditions.

Most of the native Argonian population of Black Marsh is confined to the great inland waterways and impenetrable swamps of the southern interior. There are few roads here, and most travel is by boat. The coasts and the northwestern upland forests are largely uninhabited. For ages the Dunmer have raided Black Marsh for slaves; though the Empire has made this illegal, the practice persists, and Dunmer and Argonians have a long-standing and bitter hatred for one another.

Morrowind, homeland of the Dunmer peoples, is the northeastmost province of the Tamrielic Empire. Most of the population is gathered in the high uplands and fertile river valleys of central Morrowind, especially around the Inland Sea. The island Vvardenfel is encircled by the Inner Sea, and is dominated by the titanic volcano Red Mountain and its associated ash wastelands; most of the island's population is confined to the relatively hospitable west and southwest coast.

Cyrodiil is the cradle of Human Imperial high culture on Tamriel. It is the largest region of the continent, and most is endless jungle. The Imperial City is in the heartland, the fertile Nibenay Valley. The densely populated central valley is surrounded by wild rain forests drained by great rivers into the swamps of Argonia and Topal Bay. The land rises gradually to the west and sharply to the north. Between its western coast and its central valley are deciduous forests and mangrove swamps.

Map from the ESM edition. None in ESO.
Jalemmil stood in her garden and read the letter her servant had brought to her. The bouquet of joss roses in her hand fell to the ground. For a moment it was as if all birds had ceased to sing and a cloud had passed over the sky. Her carefully cultivated and structured haven seemed to flood over with darkness.

"We have thy son," it read. "We will be in touch with thee shortly with our ransom demands."

Zarek had never made it as far as Akgun after all. One of the brigands on the road, Orcs probably, or accursed Dunmer, must have seen his well-appointed carriage, and taken him hostage. Jalemmil clutched at a post for support, wondering if her boy had been hurt. He was but a student, not the sort to fight against well-armed men, but had they beaten him? It was more than a mother's heart could bear to imagine.

"Don't tell me they sent the ransom note so quickly," called a family voice, and a familiar face appeared through the hedge. It was Zarek. Jalemmil hurried to embrace her boy, tears running down her face.

"What happened?" she cried. "I thought thou had been kidnapped."

"I was," said Zarek. "Three huge soaring Nords attacked by carriage on the Frimvorn Pass. Brothers, as I learned, named Mathais, Ulin, and Koorg. Thou should have seen these men, mother. Each one of them would have had trouble fitting through the front door, I can tell thee."

"What happened?" Jalemmil repeated. "Were thou rescued?"

"I thought about waiting for that, but I knew they'd send off a ransom note and I know how thou does worry. So I remembered what my mentor at Akgun always said about remaining calm, observing thy surroundings, and looking for thy opponent's weakness," Zarek grinned. "It took a while, though, because these fellows were truly monsters. And then, when I listened to them, bragging to one another, I realized that vanity was their weakness."

"What did thou do?"

"They had me chained at their camp in the woods not far from Cael, on a high knoll overlooking a wide river. I heard one of them, Koorg, telling the others that it would take the better part of an hour to swim across the river and back. They were nodding in agreement, when I spoke up.

* ESM. ESO.
"I could swim that river and back in thirty minutes,' I said.

"'Impossible,' said Koorg. 'I can swim faster than a little whelp like thee.'

"So it was agreed that we would dive off the cliff, swim to the center island, and return. As we went to our respective rocks, Koorg took it upon himself to lecture me about all the fine points of swimming. The importance of synchronized movements of the arms and legs for maximum speed. How essential it was to breathe after only third or fourth stroke, not too often to slow thyself down, but not too often to lose one's air. I nodded and agreed to all his fine points. Then we dove off the cliffs. I made it to the island and back in a little over an hour, but Koorg never returned. He had dashed his brains at the rocks at the base of the cliff. I had noticed the telltale undulations of underwater rocks, and had taken the diving rock on the right."

"But thou returned?" asked Jalemmil, astounded. "Was that not then when thou escaped?"

"It was too risky to escape then," said Zarek. "They could have easily caught me again, and I wasn't keen to be blamed for Koorg's disappearance. I said I did not know what happened to him, and after some searching, they decided he had forgotten about the race and had swum ashore to hunt for food. They could not see how I could have had anything to do with his disappearance, as fully visible as I was throughout my swim. The two brothers began making camp along the rocky cliff-edge, picking an ideal location so that I would not be able to escape.

"One of the brothers, Mathais, began commenting on the quality of the soil and the gradual incline of the rock that circled around the bay below. Ideal, he said, for a foot race. I expressed my ignorance of the sport, and he was keen to give me details of the proper technique for running a race. He made absurd faces, showing how one must breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth; how to bend one's knees to the proper angle on the rise; the importance of sure foot placement. Most important, he explained, was that the runner keep an aggressive but not too strenuous pace if one intends to win. It is fine to run in second place through the race, he said, provided one has the willpower and strength to pull out in the end.

"I was an enthusiastic student, and Mathais decided that we ought to run a quick race around the edge of the bay before night fell. Ulin told us to bring back some firewood when we came back. We began at once down the path, skirting the cliff below. I followed his advice about breath, gait, and foot placement, but I ran with all my power right from the start. Despite his much longer legs, I was a few paces ahead as we wound the first corner.

"With his eyes on my back, Mathais did not see the gape in the rock that I jumped over. He plummeted over the cliff before he had a chance to cry out. I spent a few minutes gathering some twigs before I returned to Ulin at camp."

"Now thou were just showing off," frowned Jalemmil. "Surely that would have been a good time to escape."

"Thou might think so," agreed Zarek. "But thou had to see the topography -- a few large trees, and then nothing but shrubs. Ulin would have noticed my absence and caught up with me in no time, and I would have had a hard time explaining Mathais's absence. However, the brief
forage around the area allowed me to observe some of the trees close up, and I could formulate my final plan.

"When I got back to camp with a few twigs, I told Ulin that Mathais was slow coming along, dragging a large dead tree behind him. Ulin scoffed at his brother's strength, saying it would take him time to pull up a live tree by the roots and drop it on the bonfire. I expressed reasonable doubt.

"I'll show thee,' he said, ripping up a ten foot tall specimen effortlessly.

"But that's scarcely a sapling,' I objected. 'I thought thou could rip up a tree.' His eyes followed mine to a magnificent, heavy-looking one at the edge of the clearing. Ulin grabbed it and began to shake it with a tremendous force to loosen its roots from the dirt. With that, he loosened the hive from the uppermost branches, dropping it down onto his head.

"That was when I made my escape, mother," said Zarek, in conclusion, showing a little schoolboy pride. "While Mathais and Koorg were at the base of the cliff, and Ulin was flailing about, engulfed by a swarm."

Jalemmil embraced her son once again.

Publisher's Note

I was reluctant to publish the works of Marobar Sul, but when the University of Gwylim Press asked me to edit this edition, I decided to use this as an opportunity to set the record straight once and for all.

Scholars do not agree on the exact date of Marobar Sul's work, but it is generally agreed that they were written by the playwright "Gor Felim," famous for popular comedies and romances during the Interregnum between the fall of the First Cyrodilic Empire and the rise of Tiber Septim. The current theory holds that Felim heard a few genuine Dwemer tales and adapted them to the stage in order to make money, along with rewritten versions of many of his own plays.

Gor Felim created the persona of "Marobar Sul" who could translate the Dwemer language in order to add some sort of validity to the work and make it even more valuable to the gullible. Note that while "Marobar Sul" and his works became the subject of heated controversy, there are no reliable records of anyone actually meeting "Marobar Sul," nor was there anyone of that name employed by the Mages Guild, the School of Julianos, or any other intellectual institution.

In any case, the Dwemer in most of the tales of "Marobar Sul" bear little resemblance to the fearsome, unfathomable race that frightened even the Dunmer, Nords, and Redguards into submission and built ruins that even now have yet to be understood.
The Real Barenziah underwent the most changes. Just within its first volume (pp. 1 to 14 of the next 82 pages) more than 300 changes can be recorded. Because of the mass of changes I decided to give a synoptical edition of both versions instead of giving the changes within thousands of notes. The synoptical edition not only shows the changes, but also gives an idea of the enthusiasm with which Bethsoft created the third chapter of The Elder Scrolls.

*The left column has the original The Elder Scrolls Chapter 2: Daggerfall version, the right column the actual The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind and The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion version, derived from The Elder Scrolls Construction Set.*
The Real Barenziah
Anonymous

Five hundred years ago in Mournhold, city of gems, there lived a blind widow woman and her only child, a strapping young man. He was a miner, as was his father before him, a common laborer in the king’s mines, for his magicka ability was but small. The work was honorable, but poorly paid. His mother made and sold small wildenberry cakes in the market to help eke out their living. They did well enough, his mother said. They had enough to fill their bellies, no one could wear more than one suit of clothing at a time and the roof only leaked when it rained. Symmachus would have liked more. He hoped for a lucky strike in the mines, which would garner him a large bonus. In his free hours he enjoyed hoisting a glass of ale in the tavern with his friends, and gambling with them at cards, and he drew the eyes and sighs of more than one pretty elven girl, although none held his interest for long. In short, Symmachus was a typical young dark elf man, remarkable only for his size. It was rumored that he had a bit of Nord blood in him.

In Symmachus' thirtieth year there was great rejoicing in Mournhold for a girl child was born to their lord and his lady. A queen, the people sang, a queen is born to us! For among the people of Mournhold, the birth of a female heir is a sure sign of peace and prosperity to come.

When the time came for royal child's Rite of Naming, the mines were closed and Symmachus rushed home to bathe and dress in his best. "I'll come straight home and tell you all about it," he promised his mother, who was not to attend. She had been ailing; besides, there would be a great crush of people as all Mournhold would be there, and being blind she would be unable to see anything anyway.

"My son," she said. "Ere you go, fetch me a..."

The Real Barenziah, Part 1
Anonymous

Five hundred years ago in Mournhold, City of Gems, there lived a blind widow and her only child, a tall, strapping young man. He was a miner, as was his father before him, a common laborer in the mines of the Lord of Mournhold, for his ability in magicka was small. The work was honorable but paid poorly. His mother made and sold comberry cakes at the city market to help eke out their living. They did well enough, she said, they had enough to fill their bellies, no one could wear more than one suit of clothing at a time, and the roof leaked only when it rained. But Symmachus would have liked more. He hoped for a lucky strike at the mines, which would garner him a large bonus. In his free hours he enjoyed hoisting a mug of ale in the tavern with his friends, and gambling with them at cards. He also drew the eyes and sighs of more than one pretty Elven lass, although none held his interest for long. He was a typical young Dark Elf of peasant descent, remarkable only for his size. It was rumored that he had a bit of Nordic blood in him.

In Symmachus' thirtieth year, there was great rejoicing in Mournhold—a girl-child had been born to the Lord and Lady. A Queen, the people sang, a Queen is born to us! For among the people of Mournhold, the birth of an heiress is a sure sign of future peace and prosperity.

When the time came round for the royal child's Rite of Naming, the mines were closed and Symmachus dashed home to bathe and dress in his best. “I'll rush straight home and tell you all about it,” he promised his mother, who would not be able to attend. She had been ailing, and besides there would be a great crush of people as all Mournhold turned out to be part of the blessed event; and being blind she would be unable to see anything anyway.

“My son,” she said. “Afore you go, fetch me a..."
priest or healer, else I may pass from the mortal plane ere you return."

Symmachus crossed to her bed at once and noted anxiously that her head was very hot and her breathing shallow. He pried up the loose floorboard where their small hoard of savings was kept. There wasn't nearly enough to pay a priest for healing. He would have to give what they had and owe the rest. Symmachus snatched up his cloak and rushed away.

The streets were full of folk hurrying to the sacred grove, but the mage guild and the temples were locked and barred. "Closed for the ceremony" read the signs.

Symmachus elbowed his way through the crowd and managed to overtake a brown-robed monk. "After the rite, brother," the monk said, "if you have gold I shall gladly to attend your mother. My lord has bade all clerics to attend and I shall not offend him."

"My mother's desperately ill," Symmachus pled. "Surely, my lord will not miss just one lowly monk."

"The father abbot will," the monk said nervously, tearing his robe loose from Symmachus' grip and vanishing into the crowd.

Symmachus tried other monks and mages, too, but with no better result. Armored guards came through the street and pushed him aside with their lances and Symmachus realized that the royal procession was approaching.

As the royal carriage drew abreast, Symmachus rushed out from the crowd and shouted, "My lord, my mother's dying--!"

"I forbid her to do so on this glorious night!" the lord shouted, laughing and scattering coin into the throng. Symmachus was close enough

Symmachus crossed to her pallet at once and noted anxiously that her forehead was very hot and her breathing shallow. He pried loose a slat of the wooden floor under which their small hoard of savings was kept. There wasn't nearly enough to pay a priest for healing. He would have to give what they had and owe the rest. Symmachus snatched up his cloak and hurried away.

The streets were full of folk hurrying to the sacred grove, but the temples were locked and barred. "Closed for the ceremony," read all the signs.

Symmachus elbowed his way through the mob and managed to overtake a brown-robed priest. "After the rite, brother," the priest said, "if you have gold I shall gladly attend to your mother. Milord has bidden all clerics attend-and I, for one, have no wish to offend him."

"My mother's desperately ill," Symmachus pled. "Surely Milord will not miss one lowly priest."

"True, but the Archcanon will," the priest said nervously, tearing his robe loose from Symmachus' desperate grip and vanishing into the crowd.

Symmachus tried other priests, and even a few mages, but with no better result. Armored guards marched through the street and pushed him aside with their lances, and Symmachus realized that the royal procession was approaching.

As the carriage bearing the city's rulers drew abreast, Symmachus rushed out from the crowd and shouted, "Milord, Milord! My mother's dying-!"

"I forbid her to do so on this glorious night!" the Lord shouted, laughing and scattering coin into the throng. Symmachus was close enough
to smell wine on the royal breath. On the other side of the carriage his lady clutched her babe to her breast, and stared wide-eyed at Symmachus, her nostrils flared in disdain.

"Guards!" she cried. "Remove this oaf." Rough hands seized Symmachus. He was beaten and left dazed by the side of the road.

Symmachus, head aching, followed in the wake of the crowd and watched the Rite of Naming from the top of the hill. He could see the brown robed clerics and blue robed mages gathered near the royal folk far below.

Barenziah.

The name came dim to Symmachus ears as the High Priest lifted the naked babe and showed her to the twin moons on either side of the horizon: Jone rising, Jode setting.

"Behold the Lady Barenziah, born to the rule of Mournhold! Grant her thy blessings and thy counsel ever that she rule to Mournhold's weal."

"Blessings, blessings..." all the people murmured with their lord and lady, hands upraised.

Only Symmachus stood silent, head bowed, knowing in his heart that his dear mother was gone. And in his silence he swore a mighty oath, that he should be his lord's bane and in vengeance for his mother's needless death, the child Barenziah he would have as his own bride, that his mother's grandchildren should be born to rule Mournhold.

After the ceremony he watched impassively as the royal procession returned to the palace. He saw the monk to whom he'd spoken first. The man came gladly enough now in return for the gold Symmachus had and a promise of more later.

After the ceremony, he watched impassively as the royal procession returned to the palace. He saw the priest to whom he'd first spoken. The man came gladly enough now in return for the gold Symmachus had, and a promise of more afterward.
They found his mother dead, as he had feared.

The monk sighed and tucked the bag away. "I'm sorry, brother. Well, you can forget the rest of the gold, as there's naught I can do here. Likely--"

"Give me back my gold!" Symmachus snarled. "You've done naught to earn it!" He lifted his right arm threateningly.

The priest backed away, beginning a curse, but Symmachus struck him before more than three words had left his mouth. He went down heavily, striking his head sharply on one of the stones that formed the fire pit. He died instantly.

Symmachus took the gold back and fled the city, muttering the name "Barenziah".

The child Barenziah stood on the upper balcony of the palace, staring down into the courtyard where soldiers milled, splendid in their armor. Presently they formed into ordered ranks and cheered as her parents, the lord and lady emerged from the palace, clad head to toe in ebony armor, long purple-dyed fur cloaks flowing behind. Splendidly caparisoned shining black horses were brought for them and they mounted and rode to the courtyard gates, then turned to salute her.

"Barenziah!" they cried. "Barenziah, farewell!"

The little girl blinked back tears and waved bravely with one hand, her favorite stuffed toy animal, a gray wolf cub she called Wuffen, clutched to her breast with the other. She had never been parted from her parents before and had no idea what it meant, save that there was war in the west and the names Tiber Septim and Symmachus were on everyone's lips, spoken with hate and dread.

Barenziah stood on one of the balconies of the palace, staring down into the courtyard where soldiers milled, dazzling in their armor. Presently they formed into ordered ranks and cheered as her parents, the Lord and Lady, emerged from the palace, clad from head to toe in ebony armor, long purple-dyed fur cloaks flowing behind. Splendidly caparisoned, shining black horses were brought for them, and they mounted and rode to the courtyard gates, and turned to salute her.

"Barenziah!" they cried. "Barenziah our beloved, farewell!"

The little girl blinked back tears and waved one hand bravely, her favorite stuffed animal, a gray wolf cub she called Wuffen, clutched to her breast with the other. She had never been parted from her parents before and had no idea what it meant, save that there was war in the west and the name Tiber Septim was on everyone's lips, spoken in hate and dread.
"Barenziah!" The soldiers cried, lifting their lances and swords and bows. Then her dear parents turned and rode away, soldiers trailing in their wake until the palace was nearly emptied.

"Barenziah!" the soldiers cried, lifting their lances and swords and bows. Then her dear parents turned and rode away, knights trailing in their wake, until the courtyard was nearly emptied.

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Some time after came a day when Barenziah was shaken awake by her nurse, dressed hurriedly and carried from the palace.

Sometime after came a day when Barenziah was shaken awake by her nurse, dressed hurriedly, and borne from the palace.

All she remembered of that dreadful time was seeing a huge shadow with burning eyes that filled the sky. She was passed from hand to hand. Foreign soldiers appeared. Her nurse vanished and was replaced by strangers, some more strange than others. There were days, or was it weeks?, of travel.

All she could remember of that dreadful time was seeing a huge shadow with burning eyes filling the sky. She was passed from hand to hand. Foreign soldiers appeared, disappeared, and sometimes reappeared. Her nurse vanished and was replaced by strangers, some more strange than others. There were days, or it may have been weeks, of travel.

One morning she woke to step from the coach into a cold place with a large gray stone house set amid endless empty gray-green and hills patchily covered with gray-white snow. She clutched Wuffen to her breast with both hands and stood blinking and shivering in the gray dawn, feeling very small and very black in all this endless space gray-white space.

One morning she awoke to step out of the coach into a cold place with a large gray stone castle amid empty, endless gray-green hills covered patchily with gray-white snow. She clutched Wuffen to her breast in both hands and stood blinking and shivering in the gray dawn, feeling very small and very dark in all this endless space, this endless gray-white space.

A large gray-white woman was staring at her with dreadful bright blue eyes.

She and Hana, a brown-skinned, black-haired maid who had been traveling with her for several days, went inside the keep. A large gray-white woman with icy gray-golden hair was standing by a hearth in one of the rooms. She stared at Barenziah with dreadful, bright blue eyes.

"She's very -- black, isn't she?" the woman remarked to her companion, a brown skinned, black-haired woman named Hana who had been travelling with Barenziah for several days. "I've never seen a dark elf before."

"She's very -- black, isn't she?" the woman remarked to Hana. "I've never seen a Dark Elf before."

"I don't know much about them myself," Hana said. "This one's got red hair and a temper to match, I can tell you that. Take care. She bites. And worse."

"I don't know much about them myself, Milady," Hana said. "But this one's got red hair and a temper to match, I can tell you that. Take care. She bites. And worse."
"I'll soon train her out of that," the other woman sniffed, "And what's that filthy thing she's got? Ugh!" The woman snatched Wuffen away and cast him into the fire blazing in the hearth.

Barenziah shrieked and would have flung herself into the fire after him, but was forcibly restrained, despite her attempts to bite and claw her oppressors while poor Wuffen was reduced to a little heap of charred ash.

“I'll soon train her out of that,” the other woman sniffed. “And what's that filthy thing she's got? Ugh!” The woman snatched Wuffen away and threw him into the blazing hearth.

Barenziah shrieked and would have flung herself after him, but was held back despite her attempts to bite and claw at her captors. Poor Wuffen was reduced to a tiny heap of charred ash.
Barenziah grew like a weed transplanted to a Skyrim garden, a ward of Count Sven and his wife Lady Inga. Outwardly she thrived but there was a cold and empty place within.

"I've raised her as my own daughter," Lady Inga was wont to sigh when she sat gossiping with neighboring ladies come to visit, "But she's a dark elf. What can you expect?"

Barenziah was not meant to overhear these words. At least she thought she was not. Her hearing was far keener than that of her Nordic hosts. Other, less desirable dark elf traits included pilfering, lying and a little magic, just a small fire spell and a little levitation. And, as she grew older, a keen interest in boys and men, who could provide very pleasant sensations and, to her astonishment, gifts as well. Inga disapproved of this activity for reasons incomprehensible to Barenziah, so she was careful to keep it as secret as possible.

"She's wonderful with the children," Inga added, meaning her five sons, all younger than Barenziah. "She'd never see them come to harm." A tutor was hired when Jonny was six and Barenziah eight, and she studied academic lessons along with him. She would have liked arms training as well, but the very idea of a girl training to arms scandalized Inga and Sven. Barenziah was given a bow and allowed to practice target shooting with the boys. She watched them at arms practice when she could, practiced with them when no grown folk were about, and knew she was as good or better than they.

"She's very proud, isn't she?" the neighbor ladies would whisper, and Barenziah, pretending not to hear, would nod in agreement. She could not help but feel superior to the Count and Countess. There was

“She's wonderful with the children,” Inga added, referring to her five sons, all younger than Barenziah. “I don't think she'd ever let them come to harm.” A tutor had been hired when Jonni was six and Barenziah eight, and they took their lessons together. She would have liked to train in arms as well, but the very idea scandalized Count Sven and Lady Inga. So Barenziah was given a small bow and allowed to play at target shooting with the boys. She watched them at arms practice when she could, sparred with them when no grownup folk were about, and knew she was good as or better than they.

“She's very... proud, though, isn't she?” one of the ladies would whisper to Inga; and Barenziah, pretending not to hear, would nod silently in agreement. She could not help but feel superior to the Count and his Lady. There
something about them that encouraged this disdain in her.

She grew to learn that Sven and Inga were distant cousins of the last rulers of Darkmoon, and then she began to understand. They were poseurs, imposters, not rulers at all. At least, they were not raised to rule. This thought made her strangely furious at them, a good clean hatred detached from resentment. Barenziah came to see them as disgusting and corrupted insects who could be despised, but never feared.

Afterward she came to learn that Sven and Inga were distant cousins of Darkmoor Keep's last titled residents, and she finally understood. They were poseurs, imposters, not rulers at all. At least, they were not raised to rule. This thought made her strangely furious at them, a good clean hatred quite detached from resentment. She came to see them as disgusting and repellent insects who could be despised but never feared.

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Once a month a courier came from the emperor, bringing a small bag of gold for Inga and Sven and a large bag of dried mushrooms from Morrowind for Barenziah's consumption. She was always made presentable, as presentable as a skinny dark elf girl could be made to look in Inga's eyes, and summoned into the courier's presence for a brief interview. The same courier seldom came twice, but all looked her over rather as a farmer looks over a pig he's readying for market.

In the spring of her sixteenth year Barenziah thought the courier looked as if she were at last ready for market.

Upon reflection Barenziah decided that she did not wish to be marketed. The stable-boy, Straw, a big blond boy, clumsy, gentle, affectionate and rather simple, had been urging her to run off with him for some weeks. Barenziah stole the bag of gold the courier had left, took the mushrooms from the storeroom, dressed herself as a boy in some of twelve year old Timmy's casual clothing, and one fine spring night they took the two best horses and rode hard through the night toward Whiterun, the nearest city of any size, which was where Straw wanted to go. But Morrowind also lay east and it drew Barenziah as a lodestone draws iron.

Once a month a courier came from the Emperor, bringing a small bag of gold for Sven and Inga and a large bag of dried mushrooms from Morrowind for Barenziah, her favorite treat. On these occasions, she was always made to look presentable-or at least as presentable as a skinny Dark Elf could be made to look in Inga's eyes-before being summoned into the courier's presence for a brief interview. The same courier seldom came twice, but all of them looked her over in much the same way a farmer would look over a hog he is readying for market.

In the spring of her sixteenth year, Barenziah thought the courier looked as if she were at last ready for market.

Upon reflection, she decided she did not wish to be marketed. The stable-boy, Straw, a big, muscular blond lad, clumsy, gentle, affectionate, and rather simple, had been urging her to run off for some weeks now. Barenziah stole the bag of gold the courier had left, took the mushrooms from the storeroom, disguised herself as a boy in one of Jonni's old tunics and a pair of his cast-off breeches... and on one fine spring night she and Straw took the two best horses from the stable and rode hard through the night toward Whiterun, the nearest city of any importance and the place where Straw wanted to be. But Mournhold and Morrowind also lay eastward and they drew Barenziah as a lodestone draws iron.
In the morning they abandoned the horses at Barenziah's insistence. She knew they would be missed and tracked, and she hoped to throw pursuers off the trail.

They continued afoot until late afternoon, keeping to side roads, then slept for several hours in an abandoned hut. They went on at dusk and came to the Whiterun city gates just before dawn. Barenziah had prepared a pass for Straw, stating an errand to a temple in the city for a local village lord. She herself sneaked over the wall with the help of her levitation spell. She had reasoned that by now the gate guards would have been alerted to look for a young dark elf and a Nord boy traveling together, but country boys like Straw were common enough. Alone and with papers, he would be unlikely to draw their attention.

Her simple plan went smoothly. She met Straw at the temple, which was not far from the gate. She had been to Whiterun on a few previous occasions. Straw, however, had never been more than a few miles from Sven's estate, his birthplace.

Together they made their way to a run-down inn in the poor quarter of Whiterun. Gloved, cloaked and hooded against the chill of the morning, her dark skin and red eyes were not apparent and no one paid any attention to them. They entered the inn separately. Sven paid the host for a single room, a large meal and a jug of ale, and Barenziah sneaked in a few minutes later.

They ate and drank together gleefully, celebrating their escape, made love vigorously on the narrow bed, then fell into an exhausted sleep.

They stayed a week in Whiterun. Straw earned a bit of money running errands and Barenziah

In the morning they abandoned the horses at Barenziah's insistence. She knew they would be missed and tracked down, and she hoped to throw off any pursuers.

They continued on foot until late afternoon, keeping to side roads, and slept for several hours in an abandoned hut. They went on at dusk and came to Whiterun's city gates just before dawn. Barenziah had prepared a pass of sorts for Straw, a makeshift document stating an errand to a temple in the city for a local village lord. She herself glided over the wall with the help of a levitation spell. She had reasoned—correctly, as it turned out—that by now the gate guards would have been alerted to keep an eye out for a young Dark Elven girl and a Nordic boy traveling together. On the other hand, unaccompanied country yokels like Straw were a common enough sight. Alone and with papers, it was unlikely that he would draw attention.

Her simple plan went smoothly. She met Straw at the temple, which was not far from the gate; she had been to Whiterun on a few previous occasions. Straw, however, had never been more than a few miles from Sven's estate, which was his birthplace.

Together they made their way to a rundown inn in the poorer quarters of Whiterun. Gloved, cloaked, and hooded against the morning chill, Barenziah's dark skin and red eyes were not apparent and no one paid any heed to them. They entered the inn separately. Straw paid the innkeeper for a single cubicle, an immense meal, and two jugs of ale. Barenziah sneaked in a few minutes later.

They ate and drank together gleefully, rejoicing in their escape, and made love vigorously on the narrow cot. Afterward they fell into an exhausted, dreamless sleep.

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They stayed a week at Whiterun. Straw earned a bit of money running errands and Barenziah earned a bit of money running errands and
Robbed a few houses at night. Barenziah continued to dress as a boy. She cut her hair short and dyed her flame-red tresses jet black as a further disguise, and kept out of sight as much as possible for there were few dark elves in Whiterun.

Then Straw got them places as guards for a merchant caravan that was traveling east. The sergeant looked her over dubiously.

"Heh," he chuckled, "dark elf, ain'tcha? Like setting a wolf to guard the sheep, that is. Still, I need arms, and we ain't going near enough to Morrowind that ye can betray us to yer brothers. Our home-grown bandits will as lief cut yer throat as mine."

The sergeant gave Straw an appraising look, then abruptly spun back to Barenziah, whipping out his short sword. But she had her knife out and was in a defensive stance. Straw drew his own knife and circled to the man's rear. The sergeant dropped his blade and chuckled again.

"Not bad, kids, not bad. How are ye with that bow, dark elf?" Barenziah demonstrated her prowess. "Aye, not bad, not bad a'tall. And ye'll be keen of eye by night and of hearing at all times. A trusty dark elf makes as good a fightin' man as any could ask for. I know. I served under Symmachus himself before I lost this arm and got invalided out of the Emperor's forces."

"We could betray them. I know folk who'd pay well," Straw said later, as they bedded down for their last night in the old inn, "Or rob them ourselves. They're very rich, those merchants are, Berry."

Barenziah chuckled, "What ever would we do with so much money? And we need their protection for traveling quite as much as they need ours."

Barenziah burgled a few houses at night. She continued to dress as a boy. She cut her hair short and dyed her flame-red tresses jet black to further the disguise, and kept out of sight as much as possible. There were few Dark Elves in Whiterun.

One day Straw got them work as temporary guards for a merchant caravan traveling east. The one-armed sergeant looked her over dubiously.

"Heh," he chuckled, "Dark Elf, ain'tcha? Like settin' a wolf t'guard the sheep, that is. Still, I need arms, and we ain't goin' near 'nough Morrowind so's ye can betray us to yer folk. Our homegrown bandits would as fain cut yer throat as mine."

The sergeant turned to give Straw an appraising look. Then he spun back abruptly toward Barenziah, whipping out his shortsword. But she had her dagger out in the twinkling of an eye and was in a defensive stance. Straw drew his own knife and circled round to the man's rear. The sergeant dropped his blade and chuckled again.

"Not bad, kids, not bad. How are ye with yon bow, Dark Elf?" Barenziah demonstrated her prowess briefly. "Aye, not bad, not bad 'tall. And ye'll be keen of eye by night, boy, and of hearin' 'tall times. A trusty Dark Elf makes as good a fightin' man as any could ask for. I know. I served under Symmachus hisself afore I lost this arm and got invalided outter the Emp'ror's army."

"We could betray them. I know folk who'd pay well," Straw said later as they bedded down for their last night at the ramshackle lodge. "Or rob them ourselves. They're very rich, those merchants are, Berry."

Barenziah laughed. "Whatever would we do with so much money? And besides, we need their protection for traveling quite as much as they need ours."
"We could buy a little farm and settle down."

Peasant! Barenziah thought scornfully. Straw was a peasant and had peasant dreams. But all she said was, "Not here, Straw, we're too close to Darkmoor still. We'll have more chances farther east."

Peasant! Barenziah thought scornfully. Straw was a peasant and harbored nothing but peasant dreams. But all she said was, "Not here, Straw, we're too close to Darkmoor still. We'll have other chances farther east."

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The caravan went only as far east as Sunguard. Tiber Septim had done much in the way of building relatively safe patrolled highways, but his tolls were steep, and this particular caravan kept to the side roads as much as possible to avoid them. This exposed them to the hazards of robber barons, both human and orcish, and roving bands of brigands of various races, but such were the perils of trade and profit.

The Emperor Tiber Septim I had done much in the way of building relatively safe and regularly patrolled highways. But the tolls were steep, and this particular caravan kept to the side roads as much as possible to avoid them. This exposed them to the hazards of wayside robbers, both human and Orcish, and roving brigand bands of various races. But such were the perils of trade and profit.

They had two such encounters before reaching Sunguard, an ambush which Barenziah's keen ears detected in plenty of time for them to circle about and surprise the lurkers, and a night attack by a mixed band of Khajiit, humans and wood elves. The latter were a skilled band and even Barenziah did not hear them sneaking up in time to give much warning. The fighting was fierce. The attackers were driven off, but two of the caravan's guards were killed, and Straw got a nasty cut on his thigh before he and Barenziah killed his Khajiit assailant.

They had two such encounters before reaching Sunguard -- an ambush which Barenziah's keen ears warned them of in plenty of time for them to circle about and surprise the lurkers, and a night attack by a mixed band of Khajiit, humans, and Wood Elves. The latter were a skilled band and even Barenziah did not hear them sneaking up in time to give much warning. This time the fighting was fierce. The attackers were driven off, but two of the caravan's other guards were slain and Straw got a nasty cut on his thigh before he and Barenziah managed to gash his Khajiit assailant's throat.

Barenziah rather enjoyed the life. The garrulous sergeant had taken a liking to her, and she spent most of her evenings sitting around a campfire listening to his tales of campaigning in Morrowind with Tiber Septim and Symmachus. Symmachus had been made a general after Mournhold fell, the sergeant said. "He's a fine soldier, Symmachus is, but there was more than soldiery involved in Morrowind, if you take my drift. Well, you know about that, I expect."

Barenziah rather enjoyed the life. The garrulous sergeant had taken a liking to her, and she spent most of her evenings sitting around a campfire listening to his tales of campaigning in Morrowind with Tiber Septim and General Symmachus. This Symmachus had been made general after Mournhold fell, the sergeant said. "He's a fine soldier, boy, Symmachus is. But there was more'n soldiery involved'n that Morrowind business, if y'take my meanin'. But, well, y'know all 'bout that, I 'spect."
"I don't remember," Barenziah said, "I've mostly lived in Skyrim. My mother married a Skyrim man. They're both dead, though. What happened to the lord and lady of Mournhold?"

"No. No, I don't remember," Barenziah said, trying to sound nonchalant. "I've lived most of my life in Skyrim. My mother married a Skyrim man. They're both dead, though. Tell me, what happened to the Lord and Lady of Mournhold?"

The sergeant shrugged, "I never heard. Dead, I expect. All Morrowind's under military rule now. It's pretty quiet. Maybe too quiet. Like a calm before a storm. You going back there?"

The sergeant shrugged. "I ain't never heard. Dead, I 'spect. 'Twas alot of fightin' afore the Armistice got signed. It's pretty quiet now. Maybe too quiet. Like a calm afore a storm. Say, boy, you goin' back there?"

"Maybe," Barenziah said. The truth was that she was drawn to Morrowind like a magnet. Straw sensed it and was unhappy about it. He was unhappy anyway, since they could not bed together, as she was supposed to be a boy. Barenziah rather missed it too, but not as much as Straw did, seemingly.

"Maybe," Barenziah said. The truth was that she was drawn irresistibly to Morrowind, and Mournhold, like a moth to a burning house. Straw sensed it and was unhappy about it. He was unhappy anyway since they could not bed together, as she was supposed to be a boy. Barenziah rather missed it too, but not as much as Straw did, seemingly.

The sergeant wanted them to sign on for the return trip, but gave them a bonus when they parted and letters of recommendation.

The sergeant wanted them to sign on for the return trip, but gave them a bonus nonetheless when they turned the offer down, and parchments of recommendation.

Straw wanted to settle permanently near Sunguard, but Barenziah insisted on continuing to travel east. "I'm the queen of Mournhold by rights," she said, unsure whether it was true, or it was a story she had made up as a child. "I want to go home. I need to go home." That at least was true. She had run out of mushrooms and was very hungry for them. She found a few for sale in the Sunguard marketplace, but they were not as good or satisfying as the ones the courier had brought.

Straw wanted to settle down permanently near Sunguard, but Barenziah insisted on continuing their travels east. "I'm the Queen of Mournhold by rights," she said, unsure whether it was true -- or was it just a daydream she had made up as a lost, bewildered child? "I want to go home. I need to go home." That at least was true.

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After a few weeks they managed to get places in a caravan heading east. By early winter, they were in Riften, and near the Morrowind border, but the weather had grown severe and they were told no merchant caravans would set forth until mid-spring.

After a few weeks they managed to get places in another caravan heading east. By early winter they were at Rifton, and nearing the Morrowind border. But the weather had grown severe as the days passed and they were told no merchant caravans would be setting forth till mid-spring.

Barenziah stood atop the city walls and stared

Barenziah stood on top of the city walls and
across the deep gorge that separated Riften from the snow-clad mountain wall of Morrowind beyond.

"Berry," Straw said gently, "Mournhold's a long way off yet, nearly as far as we've come already, and the lands between are wild, full of wolves and bandits and orcs and still worse creatures. We'll have to wait for spring."

"Berry," Straw said gently. "Mournhold's a long way off yet, nearly as far as we've come already. And the lands between are wild, full of wolves and bandits and Orcs and still worse creatures. We'll have to wait for spring."

"There's Silgrod Tower," Berry said, referring to the Dark Elf town that had grown up around the ancient tower that guarded the border between Skyrim and Morrowind.

"There's Silgrod Tower," Berry said, referring to the Dark Elven township that had grown up around an ancient minaret guarding the border between Skyrim and Morrowind.

"The bridge guards won't let me across, Berry. They're crack Imperial troops. They can't be bribed. If you go, you go alone. I won't try to stop you. But what will you do? Silgrod Tower is full of Imperial troops. Will you become a washerwoman for them? A camp follower?"

"The bridge guards won't let me across, Berry. They're crack Imperial troops. They can't be bribed. If you go, you go alone. I won't try and stop you. But what will you do? Silgrod Tower is full of Imperial soldiers. Will you become a washing-woman for them? Or a camp follower?"

"No," Barenziah said thoughtfully. Actually the idea was not entirely unappealing. She was sure that she could earn a modest living by sleeping with the soldiers for money. She'd had a few adventures of that sort as they crossed Skyrim, when she'd dressed as a woman and slipped away from Straw. She'd only been looking for a bit of variety. Straw was sweet but dull. She'd been startled, but pleased when the men she picked up offered her money afterwards. Straw had been unhappy about it though and would shout for awhile, then sulk for days afterwards if he caught her at it. He was very jealous. He'd even threatened to leave her.

"No," Barenziah said slowly, thoughtfully. Actually the idea was not entirely unappealing. She was sure she could earn a modest living by sleeping with the soldiers. She'd had a few adventures of that sort as they crossed Skyrim, when she'd dressed as a woman and slipped away from Straw. She'd only been looking for a bit of variety. Straw was sweet but dull. She'd been startled, but extremely pleased, when the men she picked up offered her money afterward. Straw had been unhappy about it, though, and would shout for a while then sulk for days afterward if he caught her at it. He was quite jealous. He'd even threatened to leave her. Not that he ever did. Or could.

But the Imperial Guards were a tough and brutal lot by all accounts and Barenziah had heard some very ugly stories during her travels. The ugliest stories had come from the lips of ex-veterans around the caravan campfire and were proudly recounted. They'd been trying to shock her and Straw, she realized, but she also realized that there was some truth behind the wild tales. Straw hated that kind of talk and hated having her hear it, but there was a part of him that was fascinated

But the Imperial Guards were a tough and brutal lot by all accounts, and Barenziah had heard some very ugly stories during their treks. The ugliest of them by far had come from the lips of ex-army veterans around the caravan campfire, and were proudly recounted. They'd been trying to shock her and Straw, she realized—but she also comprehended that there was some truth behind the wild tales. Straw hated that kind of dirty talk, and hated it more that she had to hear it. But there was a part of
by it. Barenziah had encouraged Straw to seek out other women, but he said he didn't want anyone but her. She told him she didn't feel that way, but she did like him better than anyone else. "Then why do you go with other men?"

"I don't know, dear."

Straw sighed. "They say dark elf women are like that."

Barenziah smiled and shrugged. "I know. I guess that's all the explanation there is."

him that was fascinated nevertheless. Barenziah sensed this and had encouraged Straw to seek out other women. But he said he didn't want anyone else but her. She told him candidly she didn't feel that way about him, but she did like him better than anyone else. "Then why do you go with other men?" Straw had asked on one occasion.

“I don't know.”

Straw sighed. “They say Dark Elven women are like that.”

Barenziah smiled and shrugged. “I don't know. Or, no ... maybe I do. Yes, I do know.” She turned and kissed him affectionately. “I guess that's all the explanation there is.”
They settled into Rifton for the winter, taking a cheap room in the slums. Barenziah joined the Thieves' Guild, knowing there would be trouble if she were caught freelancing. One day in the barroom she caught the eye of a known member of the guild, a bold young Khajiit named Therris. She offered to bed with him if he would sponsor her for membership. He looked her over, grinning, and agreed, but said she'd still have to pass a test.

"What sort of test?"

"Ah," Therris said. "Payment first, sweet thing."

Barenziah and Straw settled into Rifton for the winter, taking a cheap room in the slummier section of town. Barenziah wanted to join the Thieves Guild, knowing there would be trouble if she were caught freelancing. One day in a barroom she caught the eye of a known member of the Guild, a bold young Khajiit named Therris. She offered to bed him if he would sponsor her membership. He looked her over, grinning, and agreed, but said she'd still have to pass an initiation.

“Ah,” Therris said. “Pay up first, sweet-ness.”

[This passage has been censored by order of the Temple.]
Straw was going to kill her, and maybe Therris too. What in Tamriel had possessed her to do such a thing? She cast an anxious look around the room, but the other patrons had lost interest and gone back to their own business. She did not recognize any of them; this wasn't the inn where she lived. With luck it'd be awhile, or never, before Straw found out.

But Therris was by far the most exciting and attractive man she'd yet met. He not only told her about the skills needed to be a member of the Thieves' Guild, but trained her in them himself or introduced her to people who could teach her.

Among these was a Nord woman who knew something about magic. Katisha was plump and matronly. She was married to a smith, had two teen aged children and was perfectly ordinary and respectable except that she was very fond of cats, had a gift for certain kinds of magic, and cultivated rather odd friends. She taught Barenziah an Invisibility spell and trained her in other forms of stealth and disguise. Katisha mingled magical and non-magical talents freely, using one to enhance the other. She was not a member of the Thieves' Guild but was fond of Therris in a motherly sort of fashion. Barenziah warmed to her as she never had to any woman, and over the next few weeks she told Katisha all about herself.

She brought Straw there, too. Straw approved of Katisha but not of Therris. Therris found

Straw was going to kill her, and maybe Therris too. What in Tamriel had possessed her to do such a thing? She cast an apprehensive look around the room, but the other patrons had lost interest and gone back to their own business. She did not recognize any of them; this wasn't the inn where she and Straw were staying. With luck it'd be a while, or never, before Straw found out.

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Among these was a woman who knew something about magic. Katisha was a plump and matronly Nord. She was married to a smith, had two teenage children, and was perfectly ordinary and respectable except that she was very fond of cats (and by logical inference, their humanoid counterparts the Khajiit), had a talent for certain kinds of magic, and cultivated rather odd friends. She taught Barenziah an invisibility spell and schooled her in other forms of stealth and disguise. Katisha mingled magical and non-magical talents freely, using one set to enhance the other. She was not a member of the Thieves' Guild but was fond of Therris in a motherly sort of way. Barenziah warmed to her as she never had toward any woman, and over the next few weeks she told Katisha all about herself.

She brought Straw there too sometimes. Straw approved of Katisha. But not of Therris.
Straw amusing and suggested to Barenziah that they arrange what he called a threesome.

"Indeed not," Barenziah said, grateful that Therris had broached the subject in private. "He wouldn't like it. I wouldn't like it!"

Therris smiled his charming triangular cat-smile and sprawled lazily back in his chair, curling his tail. "You might both be surprised. Pairing is so boring. Well, would you mind if I brought a friend?"

"Yes. If you're bored with me you and your friend can find someone else." She was a member of the Thieves' Guild now. She found Therris useful but not essential. Maybe she was a bit bored with him, too.

Barenziah cocked her head to one side quizzically. "They say dark elf women are pro- something. Prostitutes?"

"You mean promiscuous, although some do become prostitutes, I suppose. Elf women are promiscuous when they're young. You'll outgrow it. Perhaps you're beginning to already," Katisha said hopefully. "You ought to meet some nice elven boys, though. If you

She talked to Katisha about her men problems. Katisha shook her head and told her she was looking for love, not sex, that she'd know the right man when she found him, and that neither Straw nor Therris was the right one for her.

Barenziah cocked her head to one side quizzically. "They say Dark Elven women are pro-- something. Prostitutes?" she said, although she was dubious.

"You mean promiscuous. Although some do become prostitutes, I suppose," Katisha said as an afterthought. "Elves are promiscuous when they're young. But you'll outgrow it. Perhaps you're beginning to already," she added hopefully. She liked Barenziah, had grown to
keep on keeping company with Khajiits and humans you'll find yourself pregnant soon."

Barenziah smiled involuntarily at the thought. "I'd like that. But it would be inconvenient, wouldn't it? Babies are a lot of trouble, and I don't even have a home yet."

"How old are you? Seventeen? Well, you've a year or two yet before you'll be fertile, unless you're very unlucky. Elves don't have children readily with other elves even after that, so you'll be all right if you stick with them."

"Straw wants to buy a farm and marry me."

"Is that what you want?"

No. Not yet. Maybe some day, if I can't be a queen."

"I think Straw will be a very old man before "some day" comes, Berry. Elves live a very long time." Katisha's face briefly wore the wistful look humans got when contemplating the thousand year life span that elves were entitled to by nature. True, few ever actually lived that long, as disease and violence took a toll, but they could.

"I like old men, too," Berry said.

"I like old men too," Berry said.

Katisha laughed.

be quite fond of her. "You ought to meet some nice Elven boys, though. If you go on keeping company with Khajiits and humans and what have you, you'll find yourself pregnant in next to no time."

Barenziah smiled involuntarily at the thought. "I'd like that. I think. But it would be inconvenient, wouldn't it? Babies are a lot of trouble, and I don't even have my own house yet."

"How old are you, Berry? Seventeen? Well, you've a year or two yet before you're fertile, unless you're very unlucky. Elves don't have children readily with other Elves after that, even, so you'll be all right if you stick with them."

Barenziah remembered something else. "Straw wants to buy a farm and marry me."

"Is that what you want?"

"No. Not yet. Maybe someday. Yes, someday. But not if I can't be queen. And not just any queen. The Queen of Mournhold."

She said this determinedly, almost stubbornly, as if to drown out any doubt.

Katisha chose to ignore this last comment. She was amused at the girl's hyperactive imagination, took it as a sign of a well-functioning mind. "I think Straw will be a very old man before 'someday' comes, Berry. Elves live for a very long time." Katisha's face briefly wore the envious, wistful look humans got when contemplating the thousand-year lifespan Elves had been granted by the gods. True, few ever actually lived that long as disease and violence took their respective tolls. But they could. And one or two of them actually did.
Barenziah fidgeted impatiently while Therris sorted through the papers in the desk. He was being meticulous and methodical, careful to replace everything just as he'd found it.

They'd entered a nobleman's house, leaving Straw outside as a lookout. Therris had said it was a simple job but very secret. He hadn't even wanted to bring any other Guild members along. He said he knew he could trust Berry and Straw.

"Tell me what you're looking for and I'll find it," Berry whispered. Therris' night sight wasn't as good as hers and he didn't want to make a light.

Berry had never been in such a luxurious place. She gazed around with wonder as they'd made their way through the huge echoing downstairs rooms, but Therris didn't seem interested in anything but the desk in the small book-lined study on the upper floor.

"Ssss't," he hissed angrily.

"Someone's coming!" Berry said, a moment before the door opened and two dark figures appeared. Therris gave her a violent shove toward them and sprang away toward the window. Barenziah's muscles went rigid; she couldn't move or even speak. She watched helplessly as a dark figure leaped after Therris. There were two quick, silent blue flares of light, then Therris folded in a still heap.

Outside the study the house had come alive with footsteps and voices calling and the clank of armor.

Barenziah fidgeted impatiently while Therris sorted through the papers on the desk. He was being meticulous and methodical, carefully replacing everything just as he'd found it.

They'd broken into a nobleman's household, leaving Straw to hover outside as lookout. Therris had said it was a simple job but very hush-hush. He hadn't even wanted to bring any other Guild members along. He said he knew he could trust Berry and Straw, but no one else.

“Tell me what you're looking for and I'll find it,” Berry whispered urgently. Therris' night sight wasn't as good as hers and he didn't want her to magick up even a small orb of light.

She had never been in such a luxurious place. Not even the Darkmoor castle of Count Sven and Lady Inga where she had spent her childhood compared to it. She'd gazed around in wonder as they made their way through the ornately decorated and hugely echoing downstairs rooms. But Therris didn't seem interested in anything but the desk in the small book-lined study on the upper floor.

“Ssss,” he hissed angrily.

“Someone's coming!” Berry said, a moment before the door opened and two dark figures stepped into the room. Therris gave her a violent shove toward them and sprang to the window. Barenziah's muscles went rigid; she couldn't move or even speak. She watched helplessly as one of the figures, the smaller one, leaped after Therris. There were two quick, silent stabs of blue light, then Therris folded over into a still heap.

Outside the study the house had come alive with hastening footsteps and voices calling out in alarm and the clank of armor hurriedly put
The big man, a dark elf, half lifted, half dragged Therris to the door and thrust him into waiting arms. A jerk of the elf's head sent his robed companion after him. The elf came over to inspect Barenziah, who was once again able to move, although her head throbbed maddeningly when she did so.

"Open your shirt, Barenziah," the elf said. Barenziah gaped at him and clutched it closed. "You are a girl, aren't you, Berry?" he said softly. "You should have stopped dressing as a boy a few months ago, you know. You were only drawing attention to yourself. And calling yourself Berry! Is your friend Straw too stupid to remember anything else?"

"It's a common elf name," Barenziah defended herself.

The man shook his head sadly. "Not among dark elves it isn't, my dear, but you really don't know much about dark elves, do you? I regret that, but it couldn't be helped. No matter. I'll remedy it."

"Who are you?" Barenziah demanded.

"So much for fame," the man shrugged, smiling wryly. "I am Symmachus, my lady, and it's a merry chase you've led me, although I'd guessed you'd head for Morrowind. You had a bit of luck. A body was found in Whiterun that was thought to be Straw's so we stopped looking for the pair. That was careless of me, yet I'd not have thought you'd have stayed together this long."

"Where is he? Is he all right?"

The bigger man, a Dark Elf by the looks of him, half-lifted, half-dragged Therris to the door and thrust him into the waiting arms of another Elf. A jerk of the first Elf's head sent his smaller blue-robed companion after them. Then he sauntered over to inspect Barenziah, who was once again able to move although her head throbbed maddeningly when she tried to.

“Open your shirt, Barenziah,” the Elf said. Barenziah gawked at him and clutched it closed. “You're a girl, aren't you, Berry?” he said softly. “You should have stopped dressing as a boy months ago, you know. You were only drawing attention to yourself. And calling yourself Berry! Is your friend Straw too stupid to remember anything else?”

“It's a common Elven name,” Barenziah defended.

The man shook his head sadly. “Not among Dark Elves it isn't, my dear. But you wouldn't know much about Dark Elves, would you? I regret that, but it couldn't be helped. No matter. I shall try to remedy it.”

“Who are you?” Barenziah demanded.

“Ai. So much for fame,” the man shrugged, smiling wryly. “I am Symmachus, Milady Barenziah. General Symmachus of His Awesome and Terrible Majesty Tiber Septim I's Imperial Army. And I must say it's a merry chase you've led me throughout Tamriel. Or this part of it, anyway. Although I guessed, and guessed correctly, that you'd head for Morrowind eventually. You had a bit of luck. A body was found in Whiterun that was thought to be Straw's. So we stopped looking for the pair of you. That was careless of me. Yet I'd not have thought you'd have stayed together this long.”

“Where is he? Is he all right?” she asked in genuine trepidation.
"Oh, he's fine for now. In custody, of course. You ... care for him, then?" he stared at her with curiosity out of red eyes that were so strange to her, except in her own seldom-seen image.

"He's my friend," Barenziah said. The words came in a tone that sounded dull and hopeless in her own ears. Symmachus! A general in the Imperial Army, said to have the friendship and the ear of Tiber Septim himself.

"Ai. You seem to have several unsuitable friends, if you'll forgive my saying so, my lady."

"Ai. You seem to have several unsuitable friends--if you'll forgive my saying so, Milady."

As they talked the bustle and flurry in the house had died away, although she could hear people, presumably the residents, whispering together not far off. The tall elf seated himself on a corner of the desk. He seemed quite relaxed and prepared to stay awhile.

As they talked the bustle and flurry in the house died away. Although she could still hear people, presumably the residents, whispering together not far off. The tall Elf perched himself on a corner of the desk. He seemed quite relaxed and prepared to stay awhile.

Several?

Then it occurred to her. Several unsuitable friends, had he said? This man knew all about her! Or seemed to know enough, anyway. Which amounted to the same thing. "W-what's going to happen to them? To me?"

"Ah. As you know this house belongs to the commander of the Imperial troops in this area." Barenziah gasped and Symmachus looked up sharply. "You didn't know? You are rash, even for seventeen. You must always know what it is you do."

"Ah. As you know, this house belongs to the commander of the Imperial troops in this area. Which means to say that it belongs to me." Barenziah gasped and Symmachus looked up sharply. "What, you didn't know? Tsk, tsk. Why, you are rash, Milady, even for seventeen. You must always know what it is you do, or get yourself into."

"B-but the G-guild w-wouldn't -- " Barenziah was trembling. The Thieves' Guild would never have attempted a mission that involved Imperial policies. No one dared oppose Tiber

"B-but the G-guild w-wouldn't ... wouldn't h-have--" Barenziah was trembling. The Thieves Guild would never have attempted a mission that crossed Imperial policy. No one
Septim, at least no one she knew of.

"I daresay. It's unlikely that Therris had Guild approval for this job. I wonder--" Symmachus examined the desk carefully, pulling out its drawers. He selected one, placed its contents on the desk top and removed the false bottom. It seemed to be a map of some sort. Barenziah edged closer to see it. Symmachus held it away from her, laughing. "Rash indeed!" He glanced it over, then folded and replaced it.

"You advised me to seek knowledge."

"So I did, so I did." Suddenly he seemed to be in high good humor. "We must be going, my dear lady."

He shepherded her to the door, down the stairs and out into the night air. No one was about. Barenziah's eyes darted to the shadows. She wondered if she could outrun him, or elude him somehow.

"You're not thinking of attempting to escape, are you? Don't you want to hear what my plans for you are first?" He sounded a bit hurt.

"Yes."

"Perhaps you'd rather hear about your friends first."

"No."

He looked pleased. It was the answer he wanted, but it was also the truth. While Barenziah was concerned for her friends, especially Straw, she was far more concerned for herself.

"You will take your rightful place as Queen of Mournhold." Her heart leapt. It was really dared oppose Tiber Septim, at least no one she knew of. Someone at the Guild had bungled. Badly. And now she was going to pay for it.

"I daresay. It's unlikely that Therris had Guild approval for this. In fact, I wonder--" Symmachus examined the desk carefully, pulling out drawers. He selected one, placed it on top of the desk, and removed a false bottom. There was a folded sheet of parchment inside. It seemed to be a map of some sort. Barenziah edged closer. Symmachus held it away from her, laughing. "Rash indeed!" He glanced it over, then folded and replaced it.

"You advised me a moment ago to seek after knowledge."

"So I did, so I did." Suddenly he seemed to be in high good humor. "We must be going, my dear Lady."

He shepherded her to the door, down the stairs, and out into the night air. No one was about. Barenziah's eyes darted toward the shadows. She wondered if she could outrun him, or elude him somehow.

"You're not thinking of attempting to escape, are you? Ai. Don't you want to hear first what my plans for you are?" She thought that he sounded a bit hurt.

"Now that you mention it--yes."

"Perhaps you'd rather hear about your friends first."

"No."

He looked gratified at this. It was evidently the answer he wanted, thought Barenziah, but it was also the truth. While she was concerned for her friends, especially Straw, she was far more concerned for herself.

"You will take your place as the rightful Queen of Mournhold."
true then!

Symmachus explained that this had been his, and Tiber Septim's plan for her all along. That Mournhold, which had been under military rule for the dozen years since she had left was to be returned, gradually, to civilian government, under Imperial guidance, of course, and as a part of the Imperial Province of Morrowind.

"But why was I sent to Darkmoor."

"For safekeeping. Why did you run away?"

Barenziah shrugged. "I saw no reason to stay. I should have been told."

"You would have been by now. I had in fact sent for you to be removed to Imperial City to spend some time as a part of the Emperor's household. As for your destiny, it should have been obvious to you. Tiber Septim does not keep those he has no use for, and what else could you be that is of use to him?"

"I know nothing of him or you."

"Then know this: Tiber Septim rewards friend and foe alike according to their deserts."

Barenziah chewed on that for a few moments. "Straw has deserved well of me and has never done anyone any harm. He is not a member of the Thieves' Guild. He came along to protect me. He earns our keep by running errands, and--"

Symmachus waved her to silence. "I know all about Straw," he said, "and about Therris. So? What would you?"

Symmachus waved her impatiently to silence. "Ai. I know all about Straw," he said, "and about Therris." He stared at her intently. "So?"
"Straw wants a little farm. If I'm to be rich, then I would give that to him."

"Very well. He shall have it. And Therris?"

"He betrayed me," Barenziah said in a low voice. Therris should have told her the risks the job entailed. Further, he'd pushed her right into their foes' arms in an attempt to save himself.

"Yes. And?"

"Well, he should be made to suffer for it, shouldn't he?"

"That seems reasonable. What form should the suffering take?"

Barenziah balled her hands into fists. She'd like to beat and claw at the Khajiit herself, but that didn't seem very queenly. "A whipping. Would twenty stripes be too many do you think? I don't want to do him any permanent injury."

"I shall arrange it."

Barenziah spent two days in Symmachus' apartment during which she was kept very busy. There was a dark elf woman named Drelliane who saw to their needs, although she

What would you?"

She took a deep breath. "Straw wants a little farm. If I'm to be rich, then I would like for one to be given to him."

"Very well. He seemed astonished at this, and then pleased. "Done. He shall have it. And Therris?"

"He betrayed me," Barenziah said coldly. Therris should have told her what risks the job entailed. Besides, he'd pushed her right into their enemies' arms in an attempt to save himself. Not a man to be rewarded. Not, in fact, a man to be trusted.

"Yes. And?"

"Well, he should be made to suffer for it ... shouldn't he?"

"That seems reasonable. What form should said suffering take?"

Barenziah balled her hands into fists. She would've liked to beat and claw at the Khajiit herself. But considering the turn events had taken, that didn't seem very queenly. "A whipping. Er ... would twenty stripes be too many, do you think? I don't want to do him any permanent injury, you understand. Just teach him a lesson."

"Ai. Of course." Symmachus grinned at this. Then his features suddenly set, and became serious. "It shall be done, Your Highness, Milady Queen Barenziah of Mournhold." Then he bowed to her, a sweeping, courtly, ridiculously wonderful bow.

Barenziah's heart leapt.

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Barenziah spent two days at Symmachus' apartment, during which she was kept very busy. There was a Dark Elven woman named Drelliane who saw to her needs, although she

She spent two days at Symmachus' apartment, during which she was kept very busy. There was a Dark Elven woman named Drelliane who saw to her needs, although she
did not seem to be exactly a servant as she took her meals with them. Nor was she his wife. Drelliane seemed amused when Barenziah asked her about that. She simply said she was in Symmachus' employ and did whatever he asked of her.

With Drelliane's assistance several fine gowns and pairs of shoes were ordered for her, plus a riding habit and boots, along with other small necessities. Barenziah was given a room to herself.

Symmachus was out a great deal. She saw him at most meals, but he said little about himself or what he had been doing, although he was cordial and polite, was quite willing to converse on most subjects, and seemed interested in anything she had to say. Drelliane was much the same. Barenziah found them pleasant enough, but hard to get to know, as Katisha would have put it. She felt an odd disappointment. These were the first Dark Elves with whom she'd associated closely. She had expected to feel comfortable with them, to feel, at last, that this was where she belonged. Instead she found herself yearning for her Nord friends, Katisha and Straw.

When Symmachus told her they were to set out for Imperial City on the morrow, she asked if she could say goodbye to her friends.

"Katisha?" he asked. "Well enough. I suppose I owe her something. She it was who led me to you by telling me of a lonely Dark elf girl named Berry who need Elven friends -- and sometimes dressed as a boy. She has no association with the Thieves' Guild. And no one associated with the Thieves' Guild seems to know your true identity, save Therris. That is well. I prefer that your former Guild membership not be made public knowledge. You will speak of it to no one. It does not become an Imperial queen."

"No one knows but Straw and Therris. They won't tell anyone."

"Katisha?" he asked. "Ai. But then ... I suppose I owe her something. She it was who led me to you by telling me of a lonely Dark elf girl named Berry who needed Elven friends -- and who sometimes dressed as a boy. She has no association with the Thieves' Guild, apparently. And no one associated with the Thieves Guild seems to know your true identity, save Therris. That is well. I prefer that your former Guild membership not be made public knowledge. Please speak of it to no one, Your Highness. Such a past does not ... become an Imperial Queen."

"No one knows but Straw and Therris. And they won't tell anyone."
"No, they won't."

He didn't know that Katisha knew then!

He didn't know that Katisha knew, then. But still, there was something about the way he said it ...

Straw came to their apartment the morning of their departure, and they were left alone in the parlor, although Barenziah knew that the other elves were well within hearing. Straw looked drawn and pale. They hugged one another silently for a few minutes. Straw's shoulders were shaking and tears were rolling down his cheeks, but he said nothing.

Barenziah tried a smile. "So we both get what we want. I'm to be Queen of Mournhold and you'll be king of your own farm. I'll write you. You must find a scribe so you can write me, too."

Barenziah tried a smile. "So we both get what we want, eh? I'm to be Queen of Mournhold and you'll be lord of your own farmstead." She took his hand, smiled at him warmly, genuinely. "I'll write you, Straw. I promise. You must find a scribe so you can write me too."

Straw shook his head sadly, and when Barenziah persisted, he opened his mouth and pointed inside, making an inarticulate noise. His tongue was gone!

Straw shook his head sadly. When Barenziah persisted, he opened his mouth and pointed at it, making inarticulate noises. Then she realized what it was. His tongue was gone, had been cut off.

Barenziah collapsed onto a chair and wept noisily.

"Why?" she demanded of Symmachus, when Straw had been ushered away. "Why?"

"But why?" she demanded of Symmachus when Straw had been ushered away. "Why?"

Symmachus shrugged. "He knows too much of you. He could be dangerous. At least he's alive, and he won't need his tongue to farm."

Symmachus shrugged. "He knows too much. He could be dangerous. At least he's alive, and he won't need his tongue to ... raise pigs or whatever."

"I hate you!" Barenziah screamed at him, then leaned over and vomited on the floor. She continued to revile him between intermittent bouts of nausea. She listened stolidly for some time, while Drelliane cleaned up after her. Finally, he told her to cease or he would gag

"I hate you!" Barenziah screamed at him, then abruptly doubled over and vomited on the floor. She continued to revile him between intermittent bouts of nausea. She listened stolidly for some time while Drelliane cleaned up after her. Finally, he told her to cease or he
her for the journey.

They stopped at Katisha's house. Symmachus and Drelliane didn't dismount. All seemed normal but Barenziah was frightened as she knocked on the door. Katisha answered her knock. She'd obviously been weeping, but she embraced Barenziah.

"Why are you crying?" Barenziah asked.

"For Therris, of course. You haven't heard? He's dead. He was caught stealing from the commandant's house. Poor fellow, but it was so foolish of him. Oh, Barenziah, he was drawn and quartered this very dawn by the commandant's order. I went; he asked for me. It was terrible; he suffered so before he died. I'll never forget it. I looked for you and Straw but no one knew where you'd got to. That's Symmachus you're with, isn't it? You know, the moment I saw him, I thought, this is the one for Barenziah! I told him about you, you know."

"Yes," Barenziah said. "Katisha, I love you, but please don't ever tell anyone else anything about me. Ever. Swear you won't. Especially not Symmachus. And look after poor Straw for me."

Katisha promised, puzzled but willing. "Berry, it wasn't somehow because of me that Therris was caught? I never said anything about Therris to Symmachus."

Barenziah assured her that it wasn't, that an

would gag her for her journey to the Emperor.

They stopped at Katisha's house on their way out of the city. Symmachus and Drelliane didn't dismount. All seemed normal but Barenziah was frightened as she knocked on the door. Katisha answered the knock. Barenziah thanked the gods silently that at least she was all right. But she'd also obviously been weeping. In any case, she embraced Barenziah warmly.

"Why are you crying?" Barenziah asked.

"For Therris, of course. You haven't heard? Oh dear. Poor Therris. He's dead." Barenziah felt icy fingers creeping round her heart. "He was caught stealing from the Commandant's house. Poor fellow, but that was so foolish of him. Oh, Berry, he was drawn and quartered this very dawn by the Commandant's order!" She started to sob. "I went. He asked for me. It was terrible. He suffered so before he died. I'll never forget it. I looked for you and Straw, but no one knew where you'd both gone to." She glanced behind Barenziah. "That's the Commandant, isn't it? Symmachus." Then Katisha did a strange thing. She stopped crying and grinned. "You know, the moment I saw him, I thought, This is the one for Barenziah!" Katisha took a fold of her apron and wiped it across her eyes. "I told him about you, you know."

"Yes," Barenziah said, "I know." She took Katisha's hands in each of hers and looked at her earnestly. "Katisha, I love you. I'm going to miss you. But please don't ever tell anyone else anything about me. Ever. Swear you won't. Especially not to Symmachus. And look after Straw for me. Promise me that."

Katisha promised, puzzled though willing. "Berry, it wasn't somehow because of me that Therris was caught, was it? I never said anything about Therris to ... to ... him." She glanced over at the general.

Barenziah assured her that it wasn't, that an
informer had told of the Imperial Guard of Therris' plans, which was probably a lie, but Katisha badly needed some kind of comfort.

"Oh, I'm glad of that, if I can be glad of anything just now. I'd hate to think-- but how could I have known? And Symmachus is very handsome, don't you think? And charming."

"I don't know," Barenziah said. "I haven't really thought about it. There hasn't been time." She explained about being Queen of Mournhold and going to live in Imperial City for awhile first. "He was looking for me. I don't think he thinks of me as a woman at all. He said I didn't look like a boy, though," she added in the face of Katisha's incredulity. She knew that Barenziah evaluated every male she saw in terms of sexual desirability. "I suppose it's the shock of finding out that I really am a queen," she added, and Katisha agreed that that must be something of a shock, although one there was no likelihood of her experiencing first hand.

Their party left Rifton by the great south gate. Once through Symmachus tapped her shoulder and pointed back to the gate. "I thought you might want to say good-bye to Therris, too," he said.

Barenziah stared briefly but steadily at the head impaled on a spike above the gate. The birds were at it, but the face was still recognizable. "I think he will not hear me," she said. "Let's be on our way, shall we?"

informant had told the Imperial Guard of Therris' plans. Which was probably a lie, but she could see that Katisha plainly needed some kind of comfort.

“Oh, I'm glad of that, if I can be glad of anything just now. I'd hate to think-- But how could I have known?” She leaned over and whispered in Barenziah's ear, “Symmachus is very handsome, don't you think? And so charming.”

“I wouldn't know about that,” Barenziah said dryly. “I haven't really thought about it. There've been other things to think about.” She explained hurriedly about being Queen of Mournhold and going to live in the Imperial City for a while. “He was looking for me, that's all. On orders from the Emperor. I was the object of a quest, nothing more than some sort of... of a... goal. I don't think he thinks of me as a woman at all. He said I didn't look like a boy, though,” she added in the face of Katisha's incredulity. Katisha knew that Barenziah evaluated every male she met in terms of sexual desirability, and availability. “I suppose it's the shock of finding out that I really am a queen,” she added, and Katisha agreed that yes, that's true, that must've been something of a shock, although one there was no likelihood of her experiencing firsthand. She smiled. Barenziah smiled with her. Then they hugged again, tearfully, for the last time. She never saw Katisha again. Or Straw.

The royal party left Rifton by the great southern gate. Once through, Symmachus tapped her shoulder and pointed back at the portals. “I thought you might want to say good-bye to Therris too, Your Highness,” he said.

Barenziah stared briefly but steadily at the head impaled on a spike above the gate. The birds had been at it, but the face was still recognizable. “I don't think he'll hear me, although I'm quite sure he'll be pleased to know I'm fine,” she said, seeming to sound light. “Let's be on our way, General, shall we?”
Symmachus was clearly disappointed by her lack of reaction. "You heard of this from Katisha?"

"Of course. She attended the execution." Barenziah said casually. If he didn't know already, he'd find out soon enough; she was sure of that.

"Did she know Therris belonged to the Guild?"

"Everyone knew that. It's only lower ranking members like me who are supposed to keep their membership secret. The ranking officers are well known. But you know all that, don't you?" She smiled archly at him.

"So you told her who you were and whence you'd come, but not about the Guild."

"The Guild membership was not my secret to tell. The other was. There is a difference. Besides, Katisha is a very honest person. Had I told her it would have lessened me in her eyes. She was always after Therris to take up a more honest line of work. I value her good opinion."

She also thought I'd be happier if I'd settle down with just one man friend, one of my own race.

You, in fact.

Isn't it odd how wishes come true sometimes, but not the way you want them to?"

"Yes. Very odd."

His answer so took her by surprise that she quite forgot about cantering off. "Yes. Very
odd,” he replied, and his tone matched his words exactly. Then he excused himself and fell behind.

She held her head high and urged her mount onward, trying to look unimpressed. Now what was it about his response that bothered her? Not what he said. No, that wasn't it. But something about the way he said it. Something about it made her think that she, Barenziah, was one of his wishes that had come true. Unlikely as this seemed, she gave it due deliberation. He had found her at last, after months of searching, it seemed, under pressure from the Emperor, no doubt. So his wish had come true. Yes, that must be it.

in a way that wasn't altogether to his liking. But in a way, apparently, not altogether to his liking.

Something about the way he said it made her think that she herself was one of his wishes that had come true.
Barenziah felt the weight of sorrow for several days, but by the third day out her spirits had begun to rise a bit. She found that she enjoyed being on the road again, although she missed Straw's companionship more than she would have thought. They were escorted by a troop of Redguard knights, with whom she felt comfortable, although these were much more disciplined than the guards of the merchant caravans. They were cordial but respectful towards her despite her attempts to flirt with the men.

Symmachus scolded her privately, saying a queen must maintain a royal dignity at all times.

"You mean I'm never to have any fun?"

"Not with such as these. They are beneath you. Graciousness is to be desired in those in authority. Familiarity is not. You will remain chaste and modest while you are in Imperial City."

Barenziah screwed up her face. "I might as well be back in Black Moor. Elves are promiscuous by nature. Everyone says so."

"'Everyone' is wrong, then. Some are, some aren't. The emperor -- and I -- expect you to show both discrimination and discretion. Let me remind you that you will hold the throne of Mournhold not by right of blood but solely at the pleasure of Tiber Septim. If he judges you unsuitable your reign will end ere it begins. He requires intelligence, obedience, discretion and total loyalty in all his appointees, and he favors chastity and modesty in women. I suggest you model your deportment after Drelliane."

Symmachus scolded her privately, saying a queen must maintain royal dignity at all times.

"You mean I'm never to have any fun?" she inquired petulantly.

"Ai. Not with such as these. They are beneath you. Graciousness is to be desired from those in authority, Milady. Familiarity is not. You will remain chaste and modest while you are at the Imperial City."

Barenziah made a face. "I might as well be back at Darkmoor Keep. Elves are promiscuous by nature, you know. Everyone says so."

"'Everyone' is wrong, then. Some are, some aren't. The Emperor -- and I -- expect you to display both discrimination and good taste. Let me remind you, Your Highness, that you hold the throne of Mournhold not by right of blood but solely at the pleasure of Tiber Septim. If he judges you unsuitable, your reign will end ere it begins. He requires intelligence, obedience, discretion, and total loyalty of all his appointees, and he favors chastity and modesty in women. I strongly suggest you model your deportment after our good Drelliane. Milady."
"I'd liefer be back in Black Moor," Barenziah said indignantly.

"That is not an option. If you are of no use to Tiber Septim he will see to it that you are of no use to his enemies either," Symmachus said coldly. "If you would keep your head upon your shoulders take warning. Let me add that power offers pleasures other than those of carnality and low company."

He spoke of art, literature, drama, music, and grand balls. Barenziah listened with interest spurred by his threats, but after asked if she might continue her study of spellcasting while in Imperial City. Symmachus seemed pleased and promised to arrange it. Pleased with this she then said that she noted that three of their knights were women, and asked if she might train a little in combat with them, just for the sake of exercise. Symmachus looked less than pleased, but agreed she might, although only with the women.

The late winter weather held fair but cold for their journey, so that they travelled quickly over firm roads. On the last day, spring seemed to come at last for there was a thaw, and the road grew sloppy underfoot, and everywhere one could faintly hear the sound of water trickling and dripping.

They came to the great bridge that crossed into Imperial City at sunset. The rosy glow turned all the stark white marble buildings a delicate pink. It all looked very new and grand and immaculate. A broad avenue led straight north to the Palace. There was a crowd of people of all sorts in the streets. Lights winked out in the shops and on in the inns as dusk fell and the stars came out one by one. Even the side

"I'd as lief be back in Darkmoor!" Barenziah snapped resentfully, offended at the thought of emulating the frigid, prudish Drelliane in any way.

"That is not an option. Your Highness. If you are of no use to Tiber Septim, he will see to it that you are of no use to his enemies either," the general said portentously. "If you would keep your head on your shoulders, take heed. Let me add that power offers pleasures other than those of carnality and cavorting with base company."

He began to speak of art, literature, drama, music, and the grand balls thrown at the Imperial Court. Barenziah listened with growing interest, spurred on not entirely by his threats. But afterward she asked timidly if she might continue her study of magic while at the Imperial City. Symmachus seemed pleased at this and promised to arrange it. Encouraged, she then said that she noted three of their knights escort were women, and asked if she might train a little with them, just for the sake of exercise. The general looked less delighted at this, but gave his consent, though stressing it would only be with the women.

The late winter weather held fair, though slightly frosty, for the rest of their journey so that they traveled quickly over firm roads. On the last day of their trip, spring seemed to have arrived at last for there were hints of a thaw. The road grew muddy underfoot, and everywhere one could hear water trickling and dripping faintly but steadily. It was a welcome sound.

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They came to the great bridge that crossed into the Imperial City at sunset. The rosy glow turned the stark white marble edifices of the metropolis a delicate pink. It all looked very new and grand and immaculate. A broad avenue led north toward the Palace. There was a crowd of people of all sorts and races filled the wide concourse. Lights winked out in the shops and on in the inns as dusk fell and stars came out
streets were broad and brightly lit. Near the palace the towers of a grand Mage Guild reared to the east while westward the stained glass windows of a great temple glittered.

Symmachus had an apartment in a great house two blocks from the palace, past the Temple, the Temple of the One, he said, as they passed it, an ancient Nordic cult which Tiber Septim had revived. He said that Barenziah would be expected to become a member, should she prove acceptable to the Emperor. Symmachus' apartment was very grand, although little to Barenziah's liking. The walls and furnishings were stark white, relieved only by touches of bright gold, the floors of gleaming black marble. Barenziah's eyes ached for color and shadow.

In the morning Symmachus and Drelliane escorted her to the Imperial Palace. Barenziah noted that everyone they met greeted Symmachus with a deferential respect which in some cases bordered on obsequiousness. He took it quite for granted.

They were ushered directly into the imperial presence. Morning sun flooded a small room through a large window with tiny panes, washing over a sumptuously laden breakfast table and the single man who sat there, dark against the light. He leapt to his feet as they entered and hurried toward them. "Ah, Symmachus our most loyal friend, we welcome your return most gladly." His hands held Symmachus' shoulders briefly, fondly, halting the deep genuflection the Dark Elf had been in the process of effecting.

Barenziah curtseyed as Tiber Septim turned to her.

"Barenziah, my naughty little runaway, how do you, child? Here, let me have a look at you. Why, Symmachus, she's charming, absolutely charming. Why have you hidden her from us all these years? Is the light too much? Shall I singly then by twos and threes. Even the side streets were broad and brightly illuminated. Near the Palace the towers of an immense Mages Guildhall reared toward the east, while westward the stained glass windows of a huge tabernacle glittered in the dying light.

Symmachus had apartments in a magnificent house two blocks from the palace, past the temple. ("The Temple of the One," he identified as they passed it, an ancient Nordic cult which Tiber Septim had revived. He said that Barenziah would be expected to become a member should she prove acceptable to the Emperor.) The place was quite splendid—although little to Barenziah's taste. The walls and furnishings were done in utter pristine white, relieved only by touches of dull gold, and the floors in dully gleaming black marble. Barenziah's eyes ached for color and the interplay of subtle shadings.

In the morning Symmachus and Drelliane escorted her to the Imperial Palace. Barenziah noted that everyone they met greeted Symmachus with a deferential respect which in some cases bordering on obsequiousness. The general seemed to take it for granted.

She and Symmachus were ushered directly into the Imperial presence. Morning sun flooded the small room through a large window with tiny panes, washing over the breakfast table and the single man who sat there, dark against the light. He leapt to his feet as they entered and hurried toward them, "Ah, Symmachus, my friend, I welcome thy return most gladly." His hands touched Symmachus' shoulders briefly, fondly, interrupting the deep bow the elf had begun.

Barenziah curtseyed as Tiber Septim turned to her.

"Barenziah, our naughty little runaway. How do you do, child? Here, let us have a look at you. Why, Symmachus, she's charming, absolutely charming. Why have you hidden her from us all these years? Is the light too
draw the hangings? Yes, of course." He waved aside Symmachus protests and drew the curtains himself, not troubling to summon a servant. "You will pardon me for this discourtesy to my guests. I've much to think of, but that's scant excuse for inhospitality -- ah, pray join me. There's some excellent fruit from the Black Marsh."

They settled themselves at the table. Barenziah was astonished. Tiber Septim was nothing like the grim grey giant warrior she'd pictured. He was only of middle height, half a head shorter than tall Symmachus, although he was well knit of figure and lithe in movement. He had a winning smile, bright, indeed piercing, blue eyes, and a full head of stark white hair above a lined and weathered face. He might have been of any age from forty to sixty. He pressed food and drink upon them, then repeated his question: why had she left her home? Had her guardians been unkind to her?

"No, excellency," Barenziah replied, "in truth, no, although I fancied so at times." Symmachus had made up a lie for her and Barenziah told it, although with misgivings. The stableboy, Straw, had convinced her that her guardians, unable to find a suitable husband for her, meant to sell her as a concubine in Rihad, and when a Redguard had indeed come, she had panicked and fled with him.

Tiber Septim seemed fascinated and listened raptly as she provided details of her life as a merchant caravan guard. "Why, 'tis like a ballad," he said. "By the One, I'll have the court bard set it to music. What a charming boy you must have made."

"Symmachus said--" Barenziah stopped in some confusion, "he said, well, that I no longer look much like a boy. I have grown in the past few months." She lowered her gaze in what she hoped looked like maiden modesty.

much, child? Shall we draw the hangings? Yes, of course." He waved aside Symmachus' protests and drew the curtains himself, not troubling to summon a servant. "You will pardon us for this discourtesy toward yourselves, our dear guests. We've much to think of, though that's scant excuse for hospitality's neglect. But ah! pray join us. There's some excellent nectarines from Black Marsh."

They settled themselves at the table. Barenziah was dumbfounded. Tiber Septim was nothing like the grim, grey, giant warrior she'd pictured. He was of average height, fully half a head shorter than tall Symmachus, although he was well-knit of figure and lithe of movement. He had a winning smile, bright -- indeed piercing -- blue eyes, and a full head of stark white hair above a lined and weathered face. He might have been any age from forty to sixty. He pressed food and drink upon them, then repeated the question the general had asked her days ago: Why had she left home? Had her guardians been unkind to her?

"No, Excellency," Barenziah replied, "in truth, no -- although I fancied so at times." Symmachus had fabricated a story for her, and Barenziah told it now, although with a certain misgiving. The stable-boy, Straw, had convinced her that her guardians, unable to find a suitable husband for her, meant to sell her off as a concubine in Rihad; and when a Redguard had indeed come, she had panicked and fled with Straw.

Tiber Septim seemed fascinated and listened raptly as she provided details of her life as a merchant caravan escort. "Why, 'tis like a ballad!" he said. "By the One, we'll have the Court Bard set it to music. What a charming boy you must have made."

"General Symmachus said--" Barenziah stopped in some confusion, then proceeded. "He said -- well, that I no longer look much like a boy. I have... grown in the past few months." She lowered her gaze in what she hoped approximated maidenly modesty.
"He's a very discerning fellow, is my friend Symmachus."

"I know I've been a very foolish girl. I must crave thy pardon, and that of my kind guardians. I... I realized that some time ago, but I was too ashamed to go home. And I do long for Morrowind. My soul pines for my own country."

"My dear. You shall go home, I promise you, but I pray you remain with us a little longer, that you may prepare yourself for the stern task with which I shall charge you."

Barenziah gazed at him earnestly, heart beating fast. It was all working just as Symmachus had said it would. She felt a warm flush of gratitude toward him, but was careful to keep her attention focused on the Emperor. "I am honored, Excellency, and wish most earnestly to serve you and this great Empire you have forged in any way I can." It was the politic thing to say, but Barenziah really meant it. She was awed by the magnificence of the city and the discipline and order everywhere evident, and was excited at the prospect of being a part of it all. Plus she felt quite drawn to Tiber Septim.

"I know I've been a very foolish girl, Excellency. I must crave your pardon, and that of my kind guardians. I... I realized that some time ago, but I was too ashamed to go back home. But I don't want to return to Darkmoor now. Excellency, I long for Mournhold. My soul pines for my own country."

"Our dear child. You shall go home, we promise you. But we pray you remain with us a little longer, that you may prepare yourself for the grave and solemn task with which we shall charge you."

Barenziah gazed at him earnestly, heart beating hard. It was all working just as Symmachus had said it would. She felt a warm flush of gratitude toward him, but was careful to keep her attention focused on the Emperor. "I am honored, Excellency, and wish most earnestly to serve you and this great Empire you have forged in any way I can." It was the politic thing to say, to be sure -- but Barenziah really meant it. She was awed at the magnificence of the city and the discipline and order evident everywhere, and moreover was excited at the prospect of being a part of it all. And she felt quite taken by the gentle Tiber Septim.

After a few days Symmachus left for Mournhold to take up the duties of a governor until Barenziah was ready to assume the throne, after which he would become her Prime Minister. Barenziah, with Drelliane as chaperone, took up residence in a suite at the Palace. Several tutors were provided for her. During this time she became deeply interested in the magical arts, but she found the study of history and politics not at all to her taste.

After a few days Symmachus left for Mournhold to take up the duties of a governor until Barenziah was ready to assume the throne, after which he would become her Prime Minister. Barenziah, with Drelliane as chaperone, took up residence in a suite of rooms at the Imperial Palace. Several tutors were provided her, in all the fields deemed seemly for a queenly education. During this time she became deeply interested in the magical arts, but she found the study of history and politics not at all to her preference.
On occasion she met Tiber Septim in the Palace gardens and he would unfailingly inquire politely as to her progress, and chide her, although with a smile, over her disinterest in matters of state. However, he was always happy to instruct her on fine points of magic, and he could make even history and politics seem interesting after all. "They're people, child, not dry facts in a dusty book," he said.

As her understanding broadened their discussions became longer, deeper and more frequent. He spoke to her of his vision of a united Tamriel, each race separate and distinct but with shared ideals and goals, all contributing to the common weal. "Some things are universal, shared by all sentient folk of good will," he said. "So the One teaches us. We must unite against the malicious and the brutish, the mis-created, the orcs, trolls, goblins and other worse creatures, not strive 'gainst one another." His blue eyes would light up as he stared into his dream, and Barenziah was delighted just to sit and listen to him. If he drew close to her, the side of her body next to him would glow as if he were a fire. If their hands met she would tingle all over as if his body were charged with a small shock spell.

One day, quite unexpectedly, he took her face in his hands and kissed her gently on the mouth. She drew back after a few moments, astonished by the violence of her feelings, and he apologized instantly. "I didn't mean to do that. It's just -- you are so beautiful, my dear. So very beautiful." He was looking at her with a hopeless yearning in his face.

She turned away, tears streaming down her face.

"Are you angry with me? Talk to me."

Barenziah shook her head. "I could never be angry with you. I love you. I know it's wrong, but I can't help it."

On occasion she met with Tiber Septim in the Palace gardens and he would unfailingly and politely inquire as to her progress -- and chide her, although with a smile, for her disinterest at matters of state. However, he was always happy to instruct her on the finer points of magic, and he could make even history and politics seem interesting. "They're people, child, not dry facts in a dusty volume," he said.

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One day, quite unexpectedly, he took her face in his hands and kissed her gently on the mouth. She drew back after a few moments, astonished by the violence of her feelings, and he apologized instantly. "I... we... we didn't mean to do that. It's just -- you are so beautiful, dear. So very beautiful." He was looking at her with hopeless yearning in his generous eyes.

She turned away, tears streaming down her face.

"Are you angry with us? Speak to us. Please."

Barenziah shook her head. "I could never be angry with you, Excellency. I... I love you. I know it's wrong, but I can't help it."
"I have a wife," he said. "She is a good and virtuous woman, and the mother of my children. I could never put her aside, yet there is nothing between us, no sharing of the spirit. She would have had me be other than what I am. I am the most powerful man in all Tamriel, and, Barenziah, I think I am the most lonely as well. Power!" he said with contempt. "I'd trade a goodly share of it for youth and love if the gods allowed it."

"We have a consort," he said. "She is a good and virtuous woman, the mother of our children and future heirs. We could never put her aside -- yet there is nothing between us and her, no sharing of the spirit. She would have us be other than what we are. We are the most powerful person in all of Tamriel, and... Barenziah, we... I... I think I am the most lonely as well." He stood up suddenly. "Power!" he said with sublime contempt. "I'd trade a goodly share of it for youth and love if the gods would only sanction it."

"But you are strong and vigorous and vital, more than any man I've ever known."

"But you are strong and vigorous and vital, more than any man I've ever known."

He shook his head. "Today, perhaps. Yet I am less than I was yesterday, last year, ten years ago. I feel the sting of my mortality and it is painful."

He shook his head vehemently. "Today, perhaps. Yet I am less than I was yesterday, last year, ten years ago. I feel the sting of my mortality, and it is painful."

"If I can ease thy pain, let me do so." Barenziah moved towards him, hands outstretched.

"If I can ease your pain, let me." Barenziah moved toward him, hands outstretched.

"I would not take thy innocence from thee."

"I would not take your innocence from you."

"I'm not that innocent."

"I'm not that innocent."

"How so?" Tiber Septim's voice grated harshly, his brow knitted.

"How so?" The Emperor's voice suddenly grated harshly, his brows knitted.

Barenziah's mouth went dry. What had she done? "There was Straw," she faltered. "I -- I was lonely, too. Am lonely. And not so strong as you." She cast her eyes down in embarrassment. "I'm not worthy--"

Barenziah's mouth went dry. What had she just said? But she couldn't turn back now. He would know. "There was Straw," she faltered. "I... I was lonely too. Am lonely. And not so strong as you." She cast her eyes down in abashment. "I... I guess I'm not worthy, Excellency--"

"No, no, not so. Barenziah, it cannot last for long. You have a duty in Mournhold. I must tend my Empire. Shall we share what we may and pray the One forgives us our frailty?"

"No, no. Not so. Barenziah. My Barenziah. It cannot last for long. You have a duty toward Mournhold, and a duty toward the Empire. I must tend toward mine as well. But while we may -- shall we share what we have, what we can, and pray the One forgives us our frailty?"
Tiber Septim held out his arms and, wordlessly, Barenziah stepped into his embrace.

* * *
"You dance on the edge of a volcano, child," Drelliane scolded, as Barenziah admired the emerald ring her lover had given her to celebrate their one month anniversary.

"You caper on the edge of a volcano, child," Drelliane admonished as Barenziah admired the splendid star sapphire ring her imperial lover had given her to celebrate their one-month anniversary.

"How so? We make one another happy. We harm no one. Symmachus bade me to be discriminate and discreet. Who better could I choose? And we've been most discreet. He treats me as a daughter in public." Tiber Septim's nightly visits were made through a secret passage.

"How so? We make one another happy. We harm no one. Symmachus bade me be discriminating and discreet. Who better could I choose? And we've been most discreet. He treats me like a daughter in public." Tiber Septim's nightly visits were made through a secret passage that only few in the Palace were privy to -- himself and a handful of trusted bodyguards.

"He slavers over you like a dog his dinner. Have you not noticed the coolness of the Empress and her son toward you?"

"He slavers over you like a cur his supper. Have you not noticed the coolness of the Empress and her son toward you?"

Barenziah shrugged. Even before she and Septim had become lovers she'd had no more from his family than bare civility. Threadbare civility. "What matter? It is Tiber who holds power."

Barenziah shrugged. Even before she and Septim had become lovers, she'd received no more from his family than bare civility. Threadbare civility. "What matter? It is Tiber who holds the power."

"It is his son who holds the future. Do not hold his mother up to public scorn, I beg you."

"But it is his son who holds the future. Do not put his mother up to public scorn, I beg you."

"Can I help it if that dry stick of a woman cannot hold her husband's interest even in conversation at dinner?"

"Can I help it if that dry stick of a woman cannot hold her husband's interest even in conversation at dinner?"

"Have less to say in public. That is all I ask. She matters little, save that her children love her, and you do not want them as enemies. Tiber Septim has not long to live. I mean," Drelliane amended quickly, at Barenziah's scowl, "Humans are all short-lived. Temporary, as we elves say. They come and go as the seasons do, but the families of the powerful live on for a time. You must be a family friend if you would see lasting profit from your relationship. Ah, how can I make
you truly see, you who are so young and human-bred as well! If you take care you and Mournhold are like to live to see the fall of Septim's dynasty, if indeed he has founded one, as you have seen its rise. It is the way of human history. They ebb and flow like the tides. Their cities and even their empires bloom like spring flowers, only to wither and die in the summer sun."

Barenziah just laughed. She knew that rumors abounded about her and Tiber Septim. She enjoyed the attention for all save the Empress and her son seemed captivated by her. Bards sang of her dark beauty and her charming ways. She was in fashion and in love and if it was temporary, well, what was not? She was happy for the first time she could remember, each day filled with joy and pleasure, and the nights yet better.

"What is wrong with me?" Barenziah lamented. "Look, not one of my skirts fit? What's become of my waist? Am I getting fat?" Barenziah regarded her thin arms and legs and her undeniably thickened waist in the mirror with displeasure.

Drelliane shrugged. "You appear to be with child, young as you are. Constant pairing with a human has brought you early to fertility. I see no choice but for you to speak with him about it. You are in his power. It would be best, I think, for you to go directly to Mournhold if he will agree, and bear the child there."

"Alone?" Barenziah placed her hands on her swollen belly, tears forming in her eyes. Everything in her yearned to share the fruit of her love with her lover. "He'll ne'er agree to that. He won't be parted from me now. You'll see."
Drelliane shook her gray head. Although she said no more, a look of sympathy and sorrow had replaced her usual cool scorn.

That night Barenziah told Tiber Septim when he came to her.

"With child?" He looked shocked. Stunned. "You're sure of it? I was told elves do not bear so young."

Barenziah summoned a smile. "How can I be sure? I've never -- "

"I'll fetch my healer."

The healer, a high elf of middle years, confirmed that Barenziah was indeed pregnant and that such a thing had never before been known to happen. It was a testimony to His Excellency's potency, the healer said sycophantically. Tiber Septim snarled at him.

"This must not be," he said. "Undo it."

"Sire," the healer gaped at him. "I cannot--."

"Of course you can," he snapped. "I command you do so."

Barenziah, wide-eyed with sudden terror, sat up in the bed. "No!" she screamed. "No! What are you saying?"

"My dear child," Tiber Septim sat down beside her with his winning smile. "I'm so sorry. Truly. But this cannot be. Your child could be a threat to my son and his sons. I will put it no more plainly than that."

"The child I bear is your child!" she wailed.

"No. It's but a possibility, a might be, not yet gifted with a soul or quickened into life. I will not have it so." He gave the healer another

Barenziah, till then silent and wide-eyed with terror, suddenly sat up in bed. "No!" she screamed. "No! What are you saying?"

"Child," Tiber Septim sat down beside her, his face wearing one of his winning smiles. "I'm so sorry. Truly. But this cannot be. Your issue would be a threat to my son and his sons. I shall no more put it plainly than that."

"The child I bear is yours!" she wailed.

"No. It is now but a possibility, a might-be, not yet gifted with a soul or quickened into life. I will not have it so. I forbid it." He gave
hard stare and the elf began to tremble. the healer another hard stare and the Elf began to tremble.

"It is her child. Children are few among elves. No woman conceives more than four and that is very rare. Two is the allotted number. Some bear none, some only one. If I take this one from her, she may not conceive again."

"You told me she would not bear to me. I've little faith in your prognostications."

Barenziah scrambled naked from her bed, and ran for the door, not knowing where she was going, only that she could not stay. She never reached the door for blackness took her.

Barenziah awoke to pain and emptiness. She awoke to pain, and a feeling of emptiness. A void where something used to be, something that used to be alive, but now was dead and gone forever. Drelliane was there to soothe the pain and clean up the blood that still pooled at times between her legs. But there was nothing to fill the emptiness. There was nothing to take the place of the void.

Tiber Septim sent gifts and flowers, and came for short visits, always well attended. Barenziah received these visits with pleasure, but he came no more at night nor did she wish for him.

The Emperor sent magnificent gifts and vast arrangements of flowers, and came on short visits, always well-attended. Barenziah received these visits with pleasure at first. But Tiber Septim came no more at night -- and after some time nor did she wish him to.

After a week, when she was physically recovered, it was announced that Symmachus had requested she come to Mournhold earlier than planned, and that she would leave forthwith.

Some weeks passed, and when she was completely physically recovered, Drelliane informed her that Symmachus had written to request she come to Mournhold earlier than planned. It was announced that she would leave forthwith.

She was given a splendid retinue, a wardrobe befitting a queen and a ceremonial departure from the gates of Imperial City.

She was given a grand retinue, an extensive trousseau befitting a queen, and an elaborate and impressive ceremonial departure from the gates of the Imperial City. Some people were sorry to see her leave, and expressed their sadness in tears and ex postulations. But some...
others were not, and did not.
"Everything I have ever loved, I have lost," Barenziah thought, looking over the mounted knights behind and ahead, the tirewomen near her in a carriage, "yet have I gained a measure of wealth and power, and the promise of more to come. Dearly have I bought it. Now do I better understand Tiber Septim's love of it, if he has oft paid such prices, for surely worth is measured by the price one pays." Barenziah, by her wish, rode mounted on a shining black mare, clad as a warrior in shining chain mail of dark elf making.

As the slow days slipped by and her train rode a winding road eastward into the setting sun, around her rose the steep-sided mountain slopes of Morrowind. The air was thin and a chill late autumn wind blew constantly, but it was also rich with the sweet spice smell of the late-blooming black rose, which grew in every shadowy nook and crevice, finding nourishment even in the stoniest slopes. In small villages and towns, ragged dark elf folk gathered along the road to cry her name or simply gape. Most of her knightly escort were Redguards with a few dark elves, Nords and Bretons scattered among them. As they wove their way into the heart of Morrowind, these grew increasingly uncomfortable and clung together. Even the dark elf knights seemed somewhat uneasy.

Barenziah felt at home, felt the welcome extended to her by this land.

Symmachus met her at the Mournhold borders with an escort of knights, about half of whom were dark elf in Imperial battle dress, she noted.
There was a grand parade into the city and speeches of welcome from elders.

"I've had the queen's suite refurbished for you," he said, "but you can change anything not to your taste, of course." He went on about details of the coronation ceremony which was to be held in a week. He was his old commanding self, but she sensed something else as well. He was eager for her approval of the arrangements.

He asked her nothing about her stay in Imperial City or Tiber Septim, although Barenziah was certain that Drelliane had told him everything in detail.

The ceremony itself, like so much else, was a mixture of old and new, parts of it dictated by Imperial format, as she was sworn to service of the Empire and Tiber Septim, as well as to the land of Mournhold and its people. She then accepted fealty from the people and the council. The council was composed of a mixture of Imperial representatives, advisors they were called, and native representatives of the people. These latter were mostly elders, in accordance with elven custom.

Barenziah found that much of her time was occupied in attempting to reconcile these two forces. And the elders were expected to do most of the conciliating in the name of the reforms introduced by the Empire, such as land ownership and surface farming, which went clean against dark elven tradition, as laid down by their ancient gods and goddesses. Now, Tiber Septim, in the name of the One had decreed a new tradition, and the gods and goddesses themselves were expected to obey.

Barenziah later found that much of her time was occupied in attempting to reconcile these two factions and their cronies. The elders were expected to do most of the conciliating, in light of reforms introduced by the Empire pertaining to land ownership and surface farming. But most of these went clean against Dark Elven observances. Tiber Septim, “in the name of the One,” had ordained a new tradition -- and apparently even the gods and goddesses themselves were expected to obey.
Barenziah threw herself into work and study. She was through with love and men for a long, long time, if not forever. There were other pleasures, she discovered, as Symmachus had promised, those of the mind, of power. She developed a love for dark elf history and legend, a hunger to know the people from whom she sprang, proud warriors and craftsmen.

The new Queen threw herself into her work and her studies. She was through with love and men for a long, long time -- if not forever. There were other pleasures, she discovered, as Symmachus had promised her long ago: those of the mind, and those of power. She developed (surprisingly, for she had always rebelled against her tutors at the Imperial City) a deep love for Dark Elven history and mythology, a hunger to know more fully the people from whom she had sprung. She was gratified to learn that they had been proud warriors and skilled craftsmen and cunning mages since time immemorial.

Tiber Septim lived another half century, during which she saw him on a few occasions, as she was bidden to Imperial City for one reason or another. He greeted her with warmth on these occasions and they had long talks together about events. He seemed to have quite forgotten that there had ever been anything more between them. He changed little over the years. Rumor said that his mages had found spells to extend his vitality, and even that the One had granted him immortality. Then one day a messenger came with the news that he was dead, and his son was now Emperor in his place.

Tiber Septim lived for another half-century, during which she saw him on several occasions as she was bidden to the Imperial City on one reason of state or another. He greeted her with warmth during these visits, and they even had long talks together about events in the Empire when opportunity would permit. He seemed to have quite forgotten that there had ever been anything between them more than easy friendship and a profound political alliance. He changed little as the years passed. Rumor had it that his mages had developed spells to extend his vitality, and that even the One had granted him immortality. Then one day a messenger came with the news that Tiber Septim was dead, and his grandson Pelagius was now Emperor in his place.

They'd heard the news in private, she and Symmachus. He took it stoically, as he took everything.

"It doesn't seem possible," Barenziah said.

"I told you. It's the way of humans. They are a short-lived race. It doesn't really matter. His power lives on, and his son now wields it."

"You called him your friend. Do you feel nothing?"

They had heard the news in private, she and Symmachus. The sometime Imperial General and now her trusted Prime Minister took it stoically, as he took most everything.

"Somehow it doesn't seem possible," Barenziah said.

"I told you. Ai. It's the way of humans. They are a short-lived people. It doesn't really matter. His power lives on, and his son now wields it."

"You called him your friend once. Do you feel nothing? No grief?"
He shrugged. "There was a time when you called him somewhat more. What do you feel, Barenziah?"

He shrugged. "There was a time when you called him somewhat more. What do you feel, Barenziah?" They had long ago ceased to address each other in private by their formal titles.

"Emptiness. Loneliness," she said, then she too shrugged. "That's not new."

"Emptiness. Loneliness," she said, then she too shrugged. "But that's not new."

"I know," he said, taking her hand. "Barenziah, let me try to fill that lonely place." He turned her face up and kissed her.

"I know," he said softly, taking her hand. "Barenziah..." He turned her face up and kissed her.

It filled her with astonishment. She couldn't remember his ever touching her before. She'd never thought of him in that way, and yet, undeniably, an old familiar warmth spread through her. She'd forgotten how good it was, that warmth. Not the burning heat she'd felt with Tiber Septim, but the warmth she associated with, with Straw! Straw, poor Straw. She hadn't thought of him in so long. He'd be middle-aged now if he still lived. Probably married with a dozen children, she hoped, and a wife who could talk for two.

The act filled her with astonishment. She couldn't remember his ever touching her before. She'd never thought of him in that way -- and yet, undeniably, an old familiar warmth spread through her. She'd forgotten how good it felt, that warmth. Not the scorching heat she'd felt with Tiber Septim, but the comforting, robust ardor she somehow associated with... with Straw! Straw. Poor Straw. She hadn't thought of him in so long. He'd be middle-aged now if he were still alive. Probably with a dozen children, she thought affectionately... and a hearty wife who hopefully could talk for two.

"Marry me, Barenziah," he was saying, "I've worked and toiled and waited long enough, haven't I?"

"Marry me, Barenziah," Symmachus was saying, he seemed to have picked up her thoughts on marriage, children... wives, "I've worked and toiled and waited long enough, haven't I?"

Marriage. "A peasant with peasant dreams." The words appeared in her mind, as if from long ago. And yet, why not? If not him, who?

Marriage. A peasant with peasant dreams. The thought appeared in her mind, clear and unbidden. Hadn't she used those very same words to describe Straw, so very long ago? And yet, why not? If not Symmachus, who else?

The great noble families had been destroyed in the war and its aftermath. Dark elf rule had been restored, but not the old nobility. Most of them were upstarts, like Symmachus and not as good as he was. He'd fought to keep Mournhold whole and healthy when their so-called advisors would have picked their bones, sucked them dry as Ebonheart had

Many of the great noble families of Morrowind had been wiped out in Tiber Septim's great war of unification, before the treaty. Dark Elven rule had been restored, it was true -- but not the old, not the true nobility. Most of them were upstarts like Symmachus, and not even half as good or deserving as he was. He had fought to keep
The union was a good one, both in its political and personal aspects. While Tiber Septim's son viewed her with a jaundiced eye, his trust in his father's old friend was absolute.

Symmachus, however, was still viewed with suspicion by Morrowind's stiff-necked folk, suspicious of his peasant ancestry, his close ties to the Empire, while she was quite popular. "The Lady's one of our own in her heart," it was whispered, "held captive as we are."

Barenziah felt content. There was work and pleasure and what more could one ask of life?

The years passed swiftly, with crises to be dealt with, storms and famines and failures and successes and plots to be foiled. Mournhold prospered well enough. Her people were secure and fed, her mines and farms productive. All was well save that the marriage produced no children. No heirs.

Now elven children are slow to come, and most demanding of their welcome, noble children more so than others, thus many decades had passed before they grew concerned.

"Why not?" she said, smiling. "Why not?" she said, smiling. And took his hand. And kissed him.

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Mournhold whole and hale when their so-called counselors would have picked at its bones, sucked them dry as Ebonheart had been sucked dry. He'd fought for Mournhold, fought for her, while she and the kingdom grew and thrived. She felt a sudden rush of gratitude -- and, undeniably, affection. He was steady and reliable. And he'd served her well. And loved her well.

"The fault lies with me, husband. I am

Symmachus, however, was still viewed with suspicion by Morrowind's stiff-necked folk, chary at his peasant ancestry and his close ties to the Empire. But the Queen was quite unshakably popular. "The Lady Barenziah's one of our own," it was whispered, "held captive as we."

Barenziah felt content. There was work and there was pleasure -- and what more could one ask of life?

The years passed swiftly, with crises to be dealt with, and storms and famines and failures to be weathered, and plots to be foiled, and conspirators to be executed. Mournhold prospered steadily. Her people were secure and fed, her mines and farms productive. All was well -- save that the royal marriage had produced no children. No heirs.

Elven children are slow to come, and most demanding of their welcome -- and noble children more so than others. Thus many decades had come to pass before they grew concerned.

"The fault lies with me, Symmachus. I'm
damaged goods." Barenziah said bitterly. "If you want to take another..."

"I want no other," Symmachus snapped, "nor do I know the fault to be thine. Perhaps it is mine. Whichever, we will seek a cure. If there is damage, surely it may be repaired?"

"How so? When we dare not entrust anyone with my true story? Healer's oaths do not always hold."

"It won't matter if we change the time and circumstances a bit. Whate'er we say or fail to say Jephre never rests. His inventive mind and quick tongue are ever busy spreading gossip and rumor."

Priests and Healers came and went, but all their prayers, potions and other efforts produced not even a period of bloom, let alone a single fruit. Eventually, they put it from their minds and left it in the gods' hands. They were yet young, with centuries ahead of them. There was time. Elves always have time.

damaged goods," Barenziah said bitterly. "If you want to take another..."

"I want no other," Symmachus said gently, "nor do I know for certain that the fault is yours. Perhaps it is mine. Ai. Whichever. We will seek a cure. If there is damage, surely it may be repaired."

"How so? When we dare not entrust anyone with the true story? Healer's oaths do not always hold."

"It won't matter if we change the time and circumstances a bit. Whatever we say or fail to say, Jephre the Storyteller never rests. The god's inventive mind and quick tongue are ever busy spreading gossip and rumor."

Priests and healers and mages came and went, but all their prayers, potions, and philtres produced not even a promise of bloom, let alone a single fruit. Eventually they thrust it from their minds and left it in the gods' hands. They were yet young, as Elves went, with centuries ahead of them. There was time. With Elves there was always time.
Barenziah sat in the hall at dinner, pushing her food about on her plate, feeling bored and restless. Symmachus was away, having been summoned to Imperial City by Tiber Septim's great-great grandson, Uriel Septim. Or was it his great-great-great grandson? She'd lost count, she realized. Their faces seemed to blur into one another. Perhaps she should have gone with him, but there'd been the delegation from Tear on a tiresome matter that required delicate handling.

A bard was singing, but Barenziah hadn't been listening. Lately all the songs seemed the same to her, whether new or old. Now a turn of phrase caught her attention. He was singing of freedom, of adventure, of freeing Morrowind from its chains. How dare he! Barenziah sat up straight and turned to glare at him and worse, then realized that he was singing of some ancient war with Skyrim Nords, praising the heroism of King Moraelyn and his brave Companions. That tale was old enough, yet the song was new ... and the meaning...Barenziah wasn't sure.

A bold fellow, but with a good voice and an ear for poetry and music. Rather handsome, too, in a raffish way. He didn't look exactly prosperous, nor was he all that young. Certainly he wasn't under a century of age. Why hadn't she heard him before, or at least heard of him?

"Who is he?" she whispered to her dinner companion,

who shrugged and said, "Calls himself Nightingale. No one seems to know anything about him."

"Bid him speak with me when he has done."

Barenziah sat at dinner in the Great Hall, pushing food about on a plate, feeling bored and restless. Symmachus was away, having been summoned to the Imperial City by Tiber Septim's great-great-grandson, Uriel Septim. Or was it his great-great-great-grandson? She'd lost count, she realized. Their faces seemed to blur one into the next. Perhaps she should have gone with him, but there'd been the delegation from Tear on a tiresome matter that nevertheless required delicate handling.

A bard was singing in an alcove off the hall, but Barenziah wasn't listening. Lately all the songs seemed the same to her, whether new or old. Then a turn of phrase caught her attention. He was singing of freedom, of adventure, of freeing Morrowind from its chains. How dare he! Barenziah sat up straight and turned to glare at him. Worse, she realized he was singing of some ancient, and now immaterial, war with the Skyrim Nords, praising the heroism of Kings Edward and Moraelyn and their brave Companions. The tale was old enough, certainly, yet the song was new ... and its meaning ... Barenziah couldn't be sure.

A bold fellow, this bard, but with a strong, passionate voice and a good ear for music. Rather handsome too, in a raffish sort of way. He didn't look to be well-off exactly, nor was he all that young. Certainly he couldn't be under a century of age. Why hadn't she heard him before, or at least heard of him?

“Who is he?” she inquired of a lady-in-waiting.

The woman shrugged and said, “Calls himself the Nightingale, Milady. No one seems to know anything about him."

“Bid him speak with me when he has done.”
Nighingale came to her, thanked her for the honor and the purse she handed him. His manner wasn't bold, rather quiet and unassuming. He was quick enough with gossip about others, but she learned nothing about him, for he turned all questions away with a joking answer or a wild tale, yet one given so charmingly that it was impossible to take offense.

"My true name? Milady, I am no one. No, no, my parents named me Know Wan, or was it, No Buddy? What doth it matter? How can parents give name to that which they know not? Ah, I believe that was the name, No Not. I have been Nighingale for so long I do not quite remember, oh, since last month at the very least, or was it last week? All my memory goes into song and tales, you see. I've none left for myself. I'm really quite boring. Where was I born? Why, Knoweyr. I plan to settle in Dunroman when I get there, but I'm in no hurry."

"I see. And will you then marry Atleshur?"

"Very perceptive of you, milady. Perhaps, although I find Inaste quite charming, too, at whiles."

"Ah, you are fickle, then?"

"Like the wind, milady, I blow hither and yon and hot and cold."

"Stay with us awhile, then, if you will."

"As you wish, milady."

Barenziah found her interest in life rekindled. All that had seemed stale seemed fresh and new again. She greeted each day with zest,

The man called the Nightingale came to her, thanked her for the honor of the Queen's audience and the fat purse she handed him. His manner wasn't bold at all; she decided, rather quiet and unassuming. He was quick enough with gossip about others, but she learned nothing about him -- he turned all questions away with a joking riposte or a ribald tale. Yet these were recounted so charmingly it was impossible to take offence.

"My true name? Milady, I am no one. No, no, my parents named me Know Wan -- or was it No Buddy? What matters it? It matters not. How may parents give name to that which they know not? Ah! I believe that was the name, Know Not. I have been the Nightingale for so long I do not remember, since, oh, last month at the very least -- or was it last week? All my memory goes into song and tale, you see, Milady. I've none left for myself. I'm really quite dull. Where was I born? Why, Knoweyr. I plan to settle in Dunroamin when I get there ... but I'm in no hurry."

"I see. And will you then marry Atallshur?"

"Very perceptive of you, Milady. Perhaps, perhaps. Although I find Innhayst quite charming too, at whiles."

"Ah. You are fickle, then?"

"Like the wind, Milady. I blow hither and yon, hot and cold, as chance suits. Chance is my suit. Naught else wears well on me."

Barenziah smiled. "Stay with us awhile, then ... if you will, Milord Erhatick."

"As you wish, Milady Bryte."

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After that brief exchange, Barenziah found her interest in life somehow rekindled. All that had seemed stale became fresh and new
looking forward to conversation and song with Nightingale. Unlike other bards he never sang her praises, nor other women's but only of high adventure and bold deeds.

When she asked him about this, he merely said, "What greater praise of thy charm couldst thou ask, than what thy own mirror gives thee? And if words thou wouldst have, thou hast those of the greatest bards of the land? How should I vie with them, I who was born but a week gone by?"

For once they spoke privately, for Barenziah, unable to sleep, had bidden him come to her chamber that his music might soothe her. "Thou art lazy and a coward, else I hold no charm for thee."

"Milady, to praise thee I must know thee and thy spirit is wrapped in clouds of enchantment."

"Not so, 'tis thy words that weave enchantment, and thy eyes. Know me if thou wilt, and if thou dare'st."

He came to her; they lay close, kissed and embraced. "Not even Barenziah truly knows herself," he whispered softly. "How can I? Barenziah, thou seekest and know it not, nor yet for what. What would you have, that you have not?"

"Passion," she whispered, "passion. And children born of it."

"And for thy children, what? What birthright will you give them?"

"Freedom," she whispered, "freedom to be what they are. Where can I find these things?"

again. She greeted each day with zest, looking forward to conversation with the Nightingale and the gift of his song. Unlike other bards, he never sang her praises, nor other women's, but only of high adventure and bold deeds.

When she asked him about this, he said, "What greater praise of your beauty could you ask, Milady, than that which your own mirror gives you? And if words you would have, you have those of the greatest, of those greater than my callow self. How should I vie with them, I who was born but a week gone by?"

For once they were speaking privately. The Queen, unable to sleep, had summoned him to her chamber that his music might soothe her. "You are lazy and a coward, sera, else I hold no charm for you."

"Milady, to praise you I must know you. I can never know you. You are wrapped in enigma, in clouds of enchantment."

"Nay, not so. Your words are what weave enchantment. Your words... and your eyes. And your body. Know me if you will. Know me if you dare."

He came to her then. They lay close, they kissed, they embraced. "Not even Barenziah truly knows Barenziah," he whispered softly, "so how may I? Milady, you seek and know it not, nor yet for what. What would you have, that you have not?"


"And for your children, what? What birthright might be theirs?"

"Freedom," she said, "the freedom to be what they would be. Tell me, you who seem wisest to these eyes and ears, and the soul that knits them. Where may I find these things?"
"They lie beside you and beneath you if you dare stretch out your hand to take them."

"But Symmachus..."

"I tell you, in me lies the answer to part of your quest and below us in these very mines, lies that which will grant us the power to fulfill achieve it. That which Moraelyn and Edward between them used to free High Rock from Nord domination of their spirit. Properly used, none can stand against it, not e'en that power which the Emperor controls. Freedom, Barenziah, freedom from the chains that bind you. Think on it, Barenziah." He kissed her again, softly, and withdrew.

"You're not going?" she cried out, for her body yearned for him.

"For now," he said. "Pleasures of the flesh are nothing beside what we might have together. I would have you think on it."

"I don't need to think. What must we do? What preparation must we make?"

"Why, none. You can enter the mines freely. Once below I can guide you to where this thing lies and lift it from its resting place."

"The Horn of Summoning," she whispered. "Is it true? How do you know? 'Tis said it's buried 'neath Daggerfall itself."

"Nay, long have I studied this matter. Ere his death King Edward gave the horn for safekeeping into the hand of his old friend King Moraelyn, who secreted it here in

"One lies beside you, the other beneath you. But would you dare stretch out your hand, that you might take what could be yours, and your children's?"

"Symmachus..."

"In my person lies the answer to part of what you seek. The other lies hidden below us in these your very kingdom's mines, that which will grant us the power to fulfill and achieve our dreams. That which Edward and Moraelyn between them used to free High Rock and their spirits from the hateful domination of the Nords. If it be properly used, Milady, none may stand against it, not even the power the Emperor controls. Freedom, you say? Barenziah, freedom it gives from the chains that bind you. Think on it, Milady.” He kissed her again, softly, and withdrew.

"You're not leaving...?" she cried out. Her body yearned for him.

"For now,” he said. “Pleasures of the flesh are nothing beside what we might have together. I would have you think on what I have just said.”

"I don't need to think. What must we do? What preparations must be made?"

"Why -- none. The mines may not be entered freely, it is true. But with the Queen at my side, who will stand athwart? Once below I can guide you to where this thing lies, and lift it from its resting place."

Then the memory of her endless studies slid into place. “The Horn of Summoning,” she whispered in awe. “Is it true? Could it be? How do you know? I've read that it's buried beneath the measureless caves of Daggerfall.”

"Nay, long have I studied this matter. Ere his death King Edward gave the Horn for safekeeping into the hand of his old friend King Moraelyn. He in turn secreted it here in
Mournhold, under the guardianship of the god Ephen, whose birthplace this is. Now thou know'st what it hath cost me many long years and weary miles to learn."

"But the god?"

"Trust me, dear heart. All will be well." Laughing, he blew her a last kiss and was gone.

On the morrow they passed the guards at the great doors that led below. Barenziah made her usual tour of inspection but instead of leaving afterwards, she and Nightingale entered a long-sealed door that led to an ancient part of the workings, long abandoned. The going was treacherous, for some of the old passages had collapsed and they had to clear a passage or find a way around. Vicious rats and huge spiders scurried here and there and sometimes attacked them.

"We've been gone too long," Barenziah said. "They'll be looking for us. What will I tell them?"

"Whate'er you please," Nightingale laughed. "You are the queen, aren't you?"

"Symmachus--"

"That peasant obeys whoever holds power. Always has, always will. We shall hold the power, love." His lips were the sweetest wine, every touch of fire and lightning.

"Now," she said, "take me now. I'm ready." Her body seemed to hum, every nerve and muscle taut.
"Not yet. Not here, not like this." He waved around at the ancient dusty rubble and grim rock walls. "Just a little longer."

"Here," he said at last, pausing before a blank wall. "Here it lies." His hands wove a spell and the wall dissolved to reveal the entrance to an ancient shrine. In the midst stood a statue of the god, hammer in hand, poised above an adamantium anvil.

"By my blood, Ephen, I bid you wake! Moraelyn's heir of Ebonheart am I, last of the royal kin, sharer of thy blood. At Morrowind's last need, with all elvendom in peril of their souls, release to me that which thou guardst! Now do I bid thee strike!"

At his words the statue stirred and quickened, and the blank stone eyes glowed red. The massive head nodded, and the hammer smote the anvil, which split asunder with a thunderous crash, and the stone god himself crumbled. Barenziah clapped her hands over her ears and crouched down, crying aloud.

Nightingale strode boldly forward and clasped what lay among the ruins with a cry of ecstasy, lifting it high.

"Someone's coming!" Barenziah cried. "Wait, that's not the Horn, it -- it's a staff!"

"Indeed, my dear, you see truly, at last!" Nightingale laughed aloud, then -- "I'm sorry, my darling, that I must leave you now. Perhaps we'll meet again one day. Until then - - ah, until then, Symmachus," he said to the mail clad figure who'd appeared behind them,

“Not yet. Not here, not like this.” He waved around, indicating the aged dusty debris and grim walls of rock. “Just a little while longer.” Reluctantly, Barenziah nodded her assent. They resumed walking.

"Here," he said at last, pausing before a blank barrier. "Here it lies.” He scratched a rune in the dust, his other hand weaving a spell as he did so.

The wall dissolved. It revealed an entrance to some ancient shrine. In the midst stood a statue of a god, hammer in hand, poised above an admantium anvil.

"By my blood, Ephen," the Nightingale cried, "I bid thee waken! Moraelyn's heir of Ebonheart am I, last of the royal line, sharer of thy blood. At Morrowind's last need, with all Elvendom in dread peril of their selves and souls, release to me that guerdon which thou guardst! Now I do bid thee, strike!"

At his final words the statue glowed and quickened, the blank stone eyes shone a bright red. The massive head nodded, the hammer smote the anvil, and it split asunder with a thunderous crash, the stone god itself crumbling. Barenziah clapped her hands over her ears and crouched down, shaking terribly and moaning out loud.

Nightingale strode forward boldly and clasped the thing that lay among the ruins with a roar of ecstasy. He lifted it high.

“Someone's coming!” Barenziah cried in alarm, then noticed for the first time what it was he was holding aloft. “Wait, that's not the Horn, it -- it's a staff!"
"she's yours."

"No!" Barenziah sprang up and ran toward him, but he was gone -- winked out of existence -- just as Symmachus, sword drawn, reached him. His blade cleaved a single stroke through empty air, then he stood as still as if he'd taken the stone god's place.

Barenziah said nothing, nothing, nothing... Symmachus told the half dozen or so Elves who had accompanied him to say only that Nightingale and the queen had lost their way, and had been set upon by spiders. Nightingale had fallen into a deep crevice that closed upon him. His body could not be recovered. The queen had been badly shaken by the encounter and deeply mourned the loss of the friend, who had fallen in her defense. Such was his power of command that the slack-jawed soldiers, none of whom had caught more than a glimpse of the event, were half-convinced that it was true.

Barenziah was escorted above and taken to her chamber where she dismissed her servants and sat stunned, too shaken even to weep. Symmachus stood watching her.

"Do you have any idea what you have done?" he said finally.

"You should have told me," Barenziah whispered, "The Staff of Unity and Chaos! I never dreamed it lay here. He said--" A mewling moan escaped her lips and she doubled over in agony. "What have I done? What now? What's to become of me?"

them, "she is all yours. You may claim her back."

“No!” Barenziah screamed. She sprang up and ran toward him, but he was gone. Winked out of existence -- just as Symmachus, claymore drawn, reached him. His blade cleaved a single stroke through empty air. Then he stood still, as if taking the stone god's place.

Barenziah said nothing, heard nothing, saw nothing... felt nothing...

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Symmachus told the half dozen elves who had accompanied him to say only that Nightingale and the queen had lost their way, and had been set upon by spiders. Nightingale had lost his footing and fallen into a deep crevice, which closed over him. That his body could not be recovered. That the Queen had been badly shaken by the encounter and deeply mourned the loss of her friend, who had fallen in her defense. Such was Symmachus' presence and power of command that the slack-jawed knights, none of whom had caught more than a glimpse of what happened, were convinced that it was all exactly as he said.

The Queen was escorted back to the palace and taken to her chamber, whereupon she dismissed her servants-in-waiting. She sat still before her mirror for a long time, stunned, too distraught even to weep. Symmachus stood watching over her.

“Do you have any idea at all what you have just done?” he said finally -- flatly, coldly.

“You should have told me,” Barenziah whispered. “The Staff of Chaos! I never dreamed it lay here. He said-- he said-- " A mewling escaped her lips and she doubled over in despair. “Oh, what have I done? What have I done? What happens now? What's to become of me? Of us?”
"You loved him?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Oh, may the gods have mercy on me, I did love him."

Symmachus hard-lined face softened slightly and his eyes glittered with a new light, and he sighed softly. "Ahhh, that's something then. You will become a mother if it's within my power. As for the rest, my dear, I expect you have loosed a storm upon the land. It'll be awhile yet in the brewing. When it comes we'll weather it together."

He stripped her clothing from her and carried her to the bed. Out of grief and longing, her body responded to his as never before, pouring forth all that Nightingale had woken in her.

Symmachus' hard-lined face softened slightly, and his eyes glittered with new light, and he sighed. "Ai. That's something then. You will become a mother yet if it's within my power. As for the rest -- Barenziah, my dearest Barenziah, I expect you have loosed a storm upon the land. It'll be a while yet in the brewing. But when it comes, we'll weather it together. As we always have."

He came over to her then, and stripped her of her clothing, and carried her to the bed. Out of grief and longing, her enfeebled body responded to his brawny one as it never had before, pouring forth all that the Nightingale had wakened to life in her. And in so doing calming the restless ghosts of all he had destroyed.

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She was emptied, and then filled, for a child was planted and grew within her. As the babe grew in her womb, so did her feeling for patient faithful Symmachus, rooted in long friendship and affection, now at last ripen into the fullness of true love. Eight years later their love was blessed again with a little daughter.

She was empty, and emptied. And then she was filled, for a child was planted and grew within her. As her son flourished in the womb, so did her feeling toward patient, faithful, devoted Symmachus, which had been rooted in long friendship and unbroken affection -- and which now, at last, ripened into the fullness of true love. Eight years later they were again blessed, this time with a daughter.

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Directly after Nightingale's theft of the Staff of Chaos, Symmachus had sent urgent secret communiques to Uriel Septim. He had not gone himself, choosing instead to stay with Barenziah during her fertile period and father the child upon her. For this, and for the theft, he suffered Uriel Septim's disfavor and
suspicion. Spies were sent in search of the thief but Nighingale seemed to have vanished whence he'd come, wherever that was.

"Dark elf, in part, perhaps," said Barenziah, "but part human, too, I think, in disguise, else would I not have come so quickly to fertility."

"Part dark elf, for sure, of ancient R'Aathim lineage, else he could not have freed the staff," Symmachus reasoned, "and I think he would have lain with thee. As elf he did not dare, for then he would not have been able to part with thee. He knew the Staff lay there, not the Horn, and that he must teleport to safety, for the Staff is not a weapon that would have seen him clear, unlike the horn. Praise the gods he hath not that! I placed it there myself, with the aid of the rag-tail end of the R'Aathim clan who now sits king in Ebonheart as a reward. Tiber Septim claimed the Horn, but left the Staff for safekeeping. Nightingale can use the Staff to sow seeds of strife and dissension, if he wishes, yet that alone will not gain him power. That lies with the Horn and the ability to use it."

"I'm not so sure it's power that Nighingale seeks," Barenziah said.

"All seek power," Symmachus retorted, "each in our own way."

"I have found what I sought," Barenziah said.

Uriel Septim's temporary disfavor and unjust suspicion. Spies were sent in search of the thief, but the Nightingale seemed to have vanished whence he had come -- wherever that was.

“Dark Elf in part, perhaps,” said Barenziah, “but part human too, I think, in disguise. Else would I not have come so quickly to fertility.”

“Part Dark Elf, for sure, and of ancient Ra'athim lineage at that, else he would not have been able to free the Staff,” Symmachus reasoned. "I don't think he would have lain with you. As an Elf he did not dare, for then he would not have been able to part from you." He smiled. Then he turned serious once more. "Ai! He knew the Staff lay there, not the Horn, and that he must teleport to safety. The Staff is not a weapon that would have seen him clear, unlike the Horn. Praise the gods at least that he does not have that! It seems all was as he expected -- but how did he know? I placed the Staff there myself, with the aid of the rag-tail end of the Ra'athim Clan who now sits king in Castle Ebonheart as a reward. Tiber Septim claimed the Horn, but left the Staff for safekeeping. Ai! Now the Nightingale can use the Staff to sow seeds of strife and dissension wherever he goes, if he wishes. Yet that alone will not gain him power. That lies with the Horn and the ability to use it.”

“I'm not so sure it's power the Nightingale seeks,” Barenziah said.

“All seek power,” Symmachus said, “each in our own way.”

“Not I,” she answered. “I, Milord, have found that for which I sought.”
As Symmachus had predicted, the theft of the Staff of Chaos had few short-term consequences. The current emperor, Uriel Septim, sent some rather stiff messages expressing shock and displeasure at the staff's disappearance and urging that Symmachus make every effort to locate its whereabouts and communicate this to the newly appointed Imperial Battlemage, Jagar Tharn, in whose hands the matter had been placed.

"Tharn!" Symmachus thundered in disgust and frustration as he paced about the small chamber where Barenziah, now some months pregnant, was sitting serenely embroidering a baby blanket. "Jagar Tharn, indeed. Ai! I wouldn't give him directions for crossing the street."

"What have you against him, love?"

"I just don't trust that mongrel elf. Part Dark Elf, part High Elf, and part the gods only know what. All the worst qualities of all his combined bloods, I'll warrant." He snorted. "No one knows much about him. Claims he was born in southern Valenwood, of a Wood Elven mother. Seems to have been everywhere since —"

Barenziah, sunk in the contentment and lassitude of pregnancy, had only been humoring Symmachus thus far, but this piqued her interest. "Nightingale? Could he have been this Jagar Tharn, disguised?"

"Nay. Human blood seems to be the one missing component in Tharn's ancestry." To Symmachus, Barenziah knew, that was a flaw. Symmachus despised wood elves as lazy.
thieves and high elves as effete intellectuals, but he admired humans, especially Bretons, for their combination of pragmatism, intelligence and energy. "Nightingale's of Ebonheart, of the House of Mora, I'll be bound -- that house has had human blood since her time. Ebonheart was jealous that the Staff was laid here when Tiber Septim took the Horn from us."

Barenziah sighed a little. The rivalry between Ebonheart and Mournhold reached back almost to the dawn of history. Once the two had been one, all the mines within held by Clan R'Aathim, whose royal house held the High Kingship of Morrowind. Ebonheart had split into two separate city states, Ebonheart and Mournhold, when Queen Lian's twin sons, Moraelyn's grandsons, had been left as the heirs. At the same time the office of High King had been vacated in favor of a temporary War Leader to be named by a council in times of provincial emergency.

Still, Ebonheart remained jealous of her prerogatives as the eldest city state of Morrowind, still first among equals, and claimed that guardianship of the Horn should rightfully be entrusted to the elder. Mournhold responded that Moraelyn himself had placed the Horn in the keeping of the god Ephen, and Mournhold was unarguably the god's birthplace.

"Why not tell Jagar Tharn of your suspicions then? Let him recover the thing. As long as it's safe, what does it matter where it lies?"

"Why not tell Jagar Tharn of your suspicions, then? Let him recover the thing. As long as it's safe, what does it matter who recovers it, or where it lies?"

Symmachus stared at her without comprehension. "It matters," he said softly, "but not that much," he added. "Certainly not enough for you to concern yourself further over it. You just tend to your -- knitting."

Symmachus stared at her without comprehension. "It matters," he said softly after a while, "but I suppose not that much. Ai." He added, "Certainly not enough for you to concern yourself further with it. You just sit there and tend to your," and here he smiled at her wickedly, "embroidery."
Barenziah flung the sampler at him. It hit Symmachus square in the face -- needle, thimble, and all.

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In a few more months Barenziah produced a fine son, whom they named Helseth. Nothing more was heard of the Staff or "Nightingale." If Ebonheart held it, certainly they did not boast of it.

The years passed swiftly and happily. Helseth grew tall and strong. He was much like his father, whom he worshipped. When Helseth was eight years old Barenziah bore a second child, a daughter, to Symmachus' great delight. Helseth was his pride, yet little Morgiah held his heart.

Shortly after Morgiah's birth word came that a plot against the Emperor had been unmasked and that the chief co-conspirators Jagar Tharn and Ria Silmane were dead. Symmachus rejoiced at this news. "I told you so," he crowed. Yet thereafter relations with the Empire slowly deteriorated, for no apparent reason. Taxes were raised and quotas increased with each passing year. Symmachus felt that the Emperor suspected him of having had a hand in the Staff's disappearance and sought to prove his loyalty by making every effort to comply with the escalating demands. He lengthened working hours and raised tariffs, and even made up some of the difference from both the royal exchequer and their own private holdings. But the levies multiplied, and commoners and nobles alike began to complain. It was an ominous rumble.

"I want you to take the children and journey yourself to Imperial City," Symmachus at last said in desperation. "You must make the Emperor listen, else all Mournhold will be in revolt come spring. You have a way with men, you always did." He forced a smile.

"I want you to take the children and journey to the Imperial City," Symmachus said at last in desperation one evening after dinner. "You must make the Emperor listen, else all Mournhold will be up in revolt come spring." He grinned forcibly. "You have a way with men, love. You always did."
Barenziah forced a smile of her own. "Even you."

"Yes, even me," he said dully.

"Both children?" Barenziah looked over toward the corner windows where Helseth was strumming a lute and singing a duet with his little sister. Helseth was fifteen, Morgiah just eight.

"Perhaps they'll soften his heart. Besides, it's time that Helseth was presented at the Imperial Court."

"Both children?" Barenziah looked over toward a corner window, where Helseth was strumming a lute and crooning a duet with his little sister. Helseth was fifteen by then, Morgiah eight.

"Perhaps, but that's not your true reason. You do not think you can keep them safe here. If that's the case, then you're not safe here either. Come with us," Barenziah urged.

"They might soften his heart. Besides, it's high time Helseth was presented before the Imperial Court."

"Perhaps. But that's not your true reason." Barenziah took a deep breath and grasped the nettle. "You don't think you can keep them safe here. If that's the case, then you're not safe here either. Come with us," she urged.

He took her hands in his. "Barenziah. Love. Heart of my heart, if I leave now, there'll be nothing for us to return to. I'll be all right. I can take care of myself, and I can do it better if I need not fear for you and our children."

"If so, 'tis not that so a place to be." His eyes rested fondly on their carefree children. "And none of us shall go without. I cost you everything once, Barenziah, I and Tiber Septim. Without my aid the Septim dynasty would never have begun. I helped its rise. I can bring about its fall. You may tell Uriel Septim that, and that my patience is bounded."

"He smiled at her tenderly. "If so, 'tis not so bad a place to be." His eyes rested indulgently on their children. "None of us shall ever go without, or want for anything. Ever. Ever, my love, I promise you. I cost you everything once, Barenziah, I and Tiber Septim. Ai. Without my aid the Empire would never have begun. I helped its rise." His voice hardened. "I can bring about its fall. You may tell Uriel Septim that. That, and that my patience is not infinite."

Barenziah laid her head against his chest. "Just remember that we need you. We can do without the rest if we have each other. Empty hands and empty bellies are easier to bear than an empty heart. My foolishness has brought us to this pass."

Barenziah laid her head against his chest. "Just remember that we need you. I need you. We can do without the rest of it if we have each other. Empty hands and empty bellies are easier to bear than an empty heart." She started to cry, thinking of the Nightingale and that sordid business with the Staff. "My foolishness has brought us to this pass."
Barenziah gasped. Symmachus was not given to empty threats. She'd no more imagined that he would ever turn against the Empire than that the old house wolf lying by the hearth would turn on her. "How?" she demanded, but he shook his head.

"Better that you know not," he said. "Just tell him that, if he prove recalcitrant, and do not fear. He's Septim enough that he will not kill the messengers."

Barenziah stood before the Emperor's throne, explaining Mournhold's straits. She'd waited weeks for an audience with Uriel Septim, fobbed off on pretext or another. "His Excellency is indisposed." "An urgent matter demands his attention." "I am sorry, your Highness, there must be some mistake. Your appointment is for next week. No, see..." And now it was not going well. He did not even seem to be listening to her. He hadn't invited her to sit, nor had he dismissed the children. Helseth stood still as a carved statue, but little Morgiah had begun to fidget.
The state of her own mind didn't help her any. Shortly upon arrival at her lodgings, the Mournholdian ambassador to the Imperial City had demanded entry, bringing with him a sheaf of dispatches from Symmachus. Bad news, and plenty of it. The revolt had finally begun. The peasants had organized around a few disgruntled members of Mournhold's minor nobility, and were demanding Symmachus step down and hand over the reins of government. Only the Imperial Guard and a handful of troops whose families had been retainers of Barenziah's house for generations stood between Symmachus and the rabble. Hostilities had already broken out, but apparently Symmachus was safe and still in control. Not for long, he wrote. He entreated Barenziah to try her best with the Emperor -- but in any case she was to stay in the Imperial City until he wrote to tell her it was safe to go back home with the children.

She had tried to barge her way through the Imperial bureaucracy -- with little success. And to add to her growing panic, all news from Mournhold had come to a sudden stop. Tottering between rage at the Emperor's numerous major-domos and fear of the fate awaiting her and her family, the weeks had passed by tensely, agonizingly, remorselessly. Then one day the Mournholdian ambassador came calling to tell her she should expect news from Symmachus the following night at the latest, not through the regular channels but by nighthawk. Seemingly by the same stroke of luck, she was informed that same day by a clerk from the Imperial Court that Uriel Septim had finally consented to grant her an audience early on the morrow.

He had first greeted the three of them with a too-bright smile of welcome that did not reach his eyes. Then, as she presented her children, he had gazed at them with a fixed attention that was real, yet inappropriate. Barenziah had been dealing with humans for nearly five hundred years now and had developed skill at reading their expressions and movement that was far beyond that any human ever learned. Try as the Emperor might to conceal it, there

The Emperor had greeted the three of them when they came into the audience chamber with a too-bright smile of welcome that nonetheless didn't reach his eyes. Then, as she presented her children, he had gazed at them with a fixed attention that was real yet somehow inappropriate. Barenziah had been dealing with humans for nearly five hundred years now, and had developed the skill of reading their expressions and movements that
was a hunger in his eyes, and something more. Regret. Why? He had several fine children of his own. Why covet hers? And why look at her with an intense, though, brief yearning? Ah, well, perhaps he was tired of his Lady. Humans were fickle minded. But after that one long, burning glance, his gaze had shifted away as she began to speak of her mission, and he sat still as stone.

Puzzled, Barenziah stared into the pale set face, looking for some trace of the Septims she'd known. She hadn't known Uriel Septim well, having met him only once when he was still a child and then at his coronation twenty years before. He'd been stern and dignified then, yet not icily remote as this man was. Despite the physical resemblance, he didn't seem to be the same man at all. Not the same, yet something about him was familiar to her, more familiar than it should be, some trick of posture or gesture ...

Suddenly she felt very warm, as if lava had been poured over her. Illusion! She had studied well the arts of illusion since Nightingale had fooled her so badly. She had learned to detect it and she felt it now, as certainly as a blind man could feel the sun on his face. Illusion, but why? Her mind worked furiously even as her mouth went on reciting details about the Mournhold economy. Vanity? Humans were oft as ashamed of the signs of age as elves were proud of them. Yet the face Uriel Septim wore seemed consistent with his age.

Barenziah dared use none of her magic arts. Even petty nobles had means of detecting, if not shielding themselves from these in their halls. The use of magic here would bring down his wrath as surely as drawing a knife would.

was far beyond what any human could ever perceive. Try as the Emperor might to conceal it, there was hunger in his eyes -- and something else. Regret? Yes. Regret. But why? He had several fine children of his own. Why covet hers? And why look at her with such a vicious -- however brief -- yearning? Perhaps he had tired of his consort. Humans were notoriously, though predictably, inconstant. After that one long, burning glance, his gaze had shifted away as she began to speak of her mission and the violence that had erupted in Mournhold. He sat still as stone throughout her entire account.

Puzzled at his inertia, and vexed no end, Barenziah stared into the pale, set face, looking for some trace of the Septims she'd known in the past. She didn't know Uriel Septim well, having met him once when he was still a child, and then again at his coronation twenty years before. Twice, that was all. He'd been a stern and dignified presence at the ceremony, even as a young adult -- yet not icily remote as this more mature man was. In fact, despite the physical resemblance, he didn't seem to be the same man at all. Not the same, yet something about him was familiar to her, more familiar than it should be, some trick of posture or gesture...

Suddenly she felt very hot, as if lava had been poured over her. Illusion! She had studied the arts of illusion well since the Nightingale had deceived her so badly. She had learned to detect it -- and she felt it now, as certainly as a blind man could feel the sun on his face. Illusion! But why? Her mind worked furiously even as her mouth went on reciting details about Mournhold's troubles. Vanity? Humans were oft as ashamed at the signs of ageing as Elves were proud to exhibit them. Yet the face Uriel Septim wore seemed consistent with his age.

Barenziah dared use none of her own magic. Even petty nobles had means of detecting magicka, if not actually shielding themselves from its effects, within their own halls. The use of sorcery here would bring down the
Emperor's wrath as surely as drawing a dagger would.

Magic.

Illusion.

Suddenly she thought of Nightingale and briefly he sat before her, only saddened. Trapped. And then that vision faded and another man sat there, like Nightingale and yet unlike. Pale skin, red eyes and elven ears and about him a fierce glow of concentration, an aura of energy, a shrinking horror. This man was capable of anything!

And then, once again she beheld the face of Uriel Septim.

How could she be sure she wasn't imagining things? Perhaps her mind was playing tricks on her. She felt a sudden vast weariness, as if she'd been carrying a heavy burden too long and too far.

"Do you remember, Excellency, Symmachus and I had dinner with your family shortly after your father's coronation. You were no older than little Morgiah here. We were greatly honored to be the only guests that evening, except for your best friend Justin, of course."

"Ah, yes," the Emperor said. "I believe I do recall that."

"You and Justin were such friends. I was told he died not long after. A great pity."

"Indeed. I still do not like to speak of him."

His eyes were wary. "Ah, as for your request, His eyes turned blank -- or blanker, if it had
my lady, we shall take it under advisement and let you know."

Barenziah bowed, as did her children. A nod dismissed them, and they backed away from the presence.

Barenziah took a deep breath. "Justin" had been an imaginary friend, although Uriel had insisted that a place be set for Justin at every meal! Not only that, "Justin" had been a girl, despite the boy name. Symmachus had kept up the family joke long after "Justin" had gone wherever such childhood friends go, inquiring seriously after Justin's well-being whenever he and Uriel Septim met, and being responded to as seriously. The last Barenziah had heard "Justin", after an adventurous youth, had married a high elf and settled in Lilandril.

She took a deep breath when they emerged from the throne room. "Justin" had been an imaginary playmate, although young Uriel had insisted a place be set for Justin at every meal. Not only that, Justin, despite the boyish name, had been a girl! Symmachus had kept up the joke long after she had gone the way of imaginary childhood friends -- inquiring after Justin's health whenever he and Uriel Septim met, and being responded to in as mock-serious a fashion. The last Barenziah had heard of Justin, several years ago, the Emperor had evidently joked elaborately to Symmachus that she had met an adventurous though incorrigible Khajiit youth, married him, and settled down in Lilandril to raise fire ferns and mugworts.

The man occupying the Emperor's chair was not Uriel Septim! Nightingale! A chord of recognition rang through her and Barenziah knew that she was right. It was he, indeed! Symmachus had been wrong, so wrong ... The man sitting on the Emperor's divan was not Uriel Septim! The Nightingale? Could it be...? Yes. Yes! A chord of recognition rang through her and Barenziah knew she was right. It was him. It was! The Nightingale! Masquerading as the Emperor! Symmachus had been wrong, so wrong...

What now, she wondered. What had become of Uriel Septim, and, more to the point, what did it mean for her and Symmachus and Mournhold? Thinking back, Barenziah guessed that their troubles were due to this false emperor, Nightingale, or whoever he really was. He must have taken Uriel Septim's place shortly before the unreasonable demands on Mournhold had begun. That would explain why relations had deteriorated so long (as humans judged time) after her offense. Nightingale knew of Symmachus' famed loyalty to, and knowledge of, the Septims and was making a pre-emptive strike. If that were indeed the case they were all in terrible danger. She and the children were under his hand here... What now? she wondered frantically. What had become of Uriel Septim -- and more to the point, what did it mean for her and Symmachus, and all of Mournhold? Thinking back, Barenziah guessed that their troubles were due to this false Emperor, this Nightingale-spawned glamour -- or whatever he really was. He must have taken Uriel Septim's place shortly before the unreasonable demands on Mournhold had begun. That would explain why relations had deteriorated for so long (as humans reckoned time), long after her disapproved liaison with Tiber Septim. The Nightingale knew of Symmachus' famed loyalty to, and knowledge of, the Septim House, and was effecting a pre-
in Imperial City and Symmachus left alone to face the troubles of Nightingale's brewing.

What must she do? Barenziah urged the children ahead of her, a hand on each shoulder, her womanservant and guards trailing behind. They had reached their waiting carriage -- even though their apartment was only a few blocks from the Palace, royal dignity forbade their walking, and for once, Barenziah was glad of that. Even the carriage seemed a kind of sanctuary now, false as she knew that feeling to be.

A boy dashed up to one of the guards and handed him a letter, then pointed towards the carriage. The guard brought it to her. The boy waited, eyes wide. The letter was brief and complimentary and simply asked if King Eadwyre of Wayrest, High Rock, might be granted an audience with her, as he had heard much of her, and would be pleased to make her acquaintance.

Barenziah's first impulse was to refuse. She wanted only to leave this city! Certainly she had no inclination for any dalliances with a dazzled human. She looked up frowning and one of the guard said, "The boy says his master awaits your reply yonder." She looked in the direction indicated and saw a handsome elderly man on horseback, surrounded by a half-dozen courtiers and guards. He caught her eye and bowed respectfully, removing his plumed hat.

"Very well," Barenziah said to the boy, on impulse. "Tell your master he may call on me tonight, after the dinner hour." The man looked polite and grave, and rather worried, but not in the least lovesick.

Barenziah's first impulse was to refuse. She wanted only to leave this city! Certainly she had no inclination toward any dalliance with a dazzled human. She looked up, frowning, and one of the guards said, "Milady, the boy says his master awaits your reply yonder." She looked in the direction indicated and saw a handsome elderly man on horseback, surrounded by a half dozen courtiers and cavaliers. He caught her eye and bowed respectfully, taking off a plumed hat.

"Very well," Barenziah said to the boy on impulse. "Tell your master he may call on me tonight, after the dinner hour." King Eadwyre looked polite and grave, and rather worried -- but not in the least lovestruck. At least that was something, she thought pensively.
Barenziah stood at the open tower window, waiting. She could sense her familiar's nearness, but though the night sky was clear as day to her eyes she could not yet see him. Then suddenly he was there, a swift moving dot beneath the wispy night clouds. A few more minutes and the great nighthawk was there, wings folded, talons reaching for her thick leather armband.

She carried the bird to its perch where it waited, panting, while her impatient fingers felt for the message secured in a capsule on one leg. It drank, then ruffled its feathers and began to preen, secure in her presence. A tiny part of her consciousness shared its satisfaction with a job well done, rest earned ... yet beneath that was an unease. Things were not right, even to its bird mind.

Her fingers shook as she unfolded the thin sheet and pored over the sheet of cramped writing. Not Symmachus' bold hand! Barenziah sat, slowly, fingers smoothing the document while she prepared her mind and body to accept disaster calmly.

The Imperial Guards had deserted Symmachus and joined the rebels. The loyal troops had suffered a decisive defeat. The rebel leader had been recognized as king of Morrowind by the Emperor.

Symmachus was dead.

Barenziah and the children had been declared traitors of the Empire and a price set on their heads.

Symmachus was dead.
So the audience with the Emperor earlier that morning had been nothing but a blind, a ruse. A charade. The Emperor must have already known. She was just being strung along, told to stay put, take things easy, Milady Queen, enjoy the Imperial City and the delights it has to offer, do make your stay as long as you want. Her stay? Her detention. Her captivity. And in all probability, her impending arrest. She knew the Emperor and his minions would never let her leave the Imperial City, ever again. At least, not alive.

Symmachus was dead.

"My lady?"

Barenziah jumped, startled at her servant's approach.

"The Breton is here. King Eadwyre," the woman added helpfully, noting Barenziah's puzzlement. "Is there news, my lady?" she said, nodding at the nighthawk.

"Nothing that will not wait," Barenziah said quickly. "See to the bird."

"Milady?"

Barenziah jumped, startled by the servant's approach. "What is it?"

"The Breton is here, Milady. King Eadwyre," the woman added helpfully, noting Barenziah's incomprehension. She hesitated. "Is there news, Milady?" she said, nodding toward the nighthawk.

"Nothing that will not wait," Barenziah said quickly, and her voice seemed to echo in the emptiness that suddenly yawned like a gaping abyss inside her. "See to the bird." She stood up, smoothed her gown, and prepared to attend on her royal visitor.

She felt numb. Numb as the stone walls around her, numb as the quiescence of the night air... numb as a lifeless corpse.

Symmachus was dead!

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King Eadwyre greeted her gravely and courteously, if rather fulsomely. He claimed to be a great admirer of Symmachus, who figured prominently in his family legends. Gradually he turned the conversation to her business with the Emperor. Finding her noncommittal, he suddenly blurted out, "My Lady Queen, you..."
must believe me. The man posing as the Emperor is an impostor! I know it sounds mad, but I -- "

"No," Barenziah said, with sudden decisiveness. "You are correct. I know."

"No," Barenziah said, with sudden decisiveness. "You are entirely correct, Milord King. I know."

Eadwyre relaxed back into his seat for the first time, eyes shrewd. "You know? You're not just humoring a madman?"

Eadwyre relaxed into his seat for the first time, eyes suddenly shrewd. "You know? You're not just humoring someone you might think a madman?"

"I assure you, Milord, I am not." She took a deep breath. "And who do you surmise is dissembling as the Emperor?"

"The Imperial Battlemage, Jagar Tharn."

"Ah. Milord King, have you, perchance, heard of someone called the Nightingale?"

"Yes, Milady, as a matter of fact I have. My allies and I believe him to be one and the same man as the renegade Tharn."

"I knew it!" Barenziah stood up and tried to mask her upheaval. The Nightingale -- Jagar Tharn! Oh, but the man was a demon! Diabolical and insidious. And so very clever. He had contrived their downfall seamlessly, perfectly! Symmachus, my Symmachus...!

My lady I -- we -- need your aid."

Eadwyre coughed diffidently. "Milady, I... we... we need your aid."

Barenziah smiled grimly at the irony. "Of what assistance might I be, my lord?"

Barenziah smiled grimly at the irony. "I do believe I should be the one saying those words. But go on, please. Of what assistance might I be, Milord King?"

Quickly he outlined a plot. The Imperial Sorceress Ria Silmane had been killed and declared a traitor by the false emperor, yet she retained a bit of her power and could yet contact a few of those she had known well on the mortal plane. She had chosen a Champion favorable to Mournhold. Finding her noncommittal, he suddenly blurted out, "Milady Queen, you must believe me. The man who claims himself the Emperor is an impostor! I know it sounds mad, but I -- "

Quickly the monarch outlined a plot. The mage Ria Silmane, of late apprenticed to the vile Jagar Tharn, had been killed and declared a traitor by the false Emperor. Yet she had retained a bit of her powers and could still contact a few of those she had known well on
who would undertake to assemble the missing staff pieces and use the staff's power to destroy Jagar Tharn, who was otherwise invulnerable, and rescue the true Emperor, who was being held prisoner in another plane. However, the chosen Champion languished now in the Imperial Dungeons. Tharn's attention must be diverted while he freed himself with Ria's help. Barenziah had Tharn's ear and eye. Could she provide the necessary distraction?

"I suppose I could obtain another audience with him. Would that be sufficient? What do you mean, his eye?"

"I suppose I could obtain another audience with him," Barenziah said carefully. "But would that be sufficient? I must tell you that my children and I have just recently been declared traitors to the Empire."

"In Mournhold, perhaps, Milady, and Morrowind. Things are different in the Imperial City and the Imperial Province. The same administrative morass that makes it near impossible to obtain an audience with the Emperor and his ministers also quite assures that you would never be unlawfully imprisoned or otherwise punished without benefit of due legal process. In your case, Milady, and your children's, the situation is further exacerbated by your royal rank. As Queen and heirs apparent, your persons are considered inviolable -- sacrosanct, in fact."

The King grinned. "The Imperial bureaucracy, Milady, is a double-edged claymore."

So. At least she and the children were safe for the time being. Then a thought struck her. "Milord King, what did you mean earlier when you said I had the false Emperor's eyes? And seemingly, at that?"

Eadwyre looked uncomfortable. "It was whispered among the servants that Jagar Tharn kept your likeness in a sort of shrine in his chambers.

"I see." Her thoughts wandered momentarily
to that insane romance of hers with the Nightingale. She had been madly in love with him. Foolish woman. And the man she had once loved had caused to be killed the man she truly did love. Did love. Loved. He's gone now, he's... he... She still couldn't bring herself to accept the fact that Symmachus was dead. But even if he is, she told herself firmly, my love is alive, and remains. He would always be with her. As would the pain. The pain of living the rest of her life without him. The pain of trying to survive each day, each night, without his presence, his comfort, his love. The pain of knowing he would never see his children grow into a fine pair of adults, who would never know their father, how brave he was, how strong, how wonderful, how loving... especially little Morgiah.

And for that, for all that, for all you have done to my family, Nightingale -- you must die.

That surprises you?"

"Does that surprise you?"

Eadwyre's words broke into her thoughts. "What? Does what surprise me?"

"Your likeness. In Tharn's room."

"Yes. And no."

"Oh." Her features set imperturbably. "Yes. And no."

Eadwyre could see from her expression that she wished to change the subject. He turned once again to their plans. "Our chosen one may need a few days to escape."

"Our chosen one may need a few days to escape."

"You trust me in this? Why?"

"You trust me in this, Milord King? Why?"

"We are desperate, my lady. We have no choice. But yes, I do trust you. Symmachus --"

"We are desperate, Milady. We have no choice. But even if we did -- why, yes. Yes, I would trust you. I do trust you. Your husband has been good to my family over the years. The Lord Symmachus--"

"Is dead."

"Is dead."

"What?"
Barenziah explained quickly and coolly.

"My Lady. What dreadful news!" For the first time Eadwyre's urbane poise was shaken.

"Under the circumstances, we can hardly ask--"

"Nay, my lord king. Under the circum-stances I must do what I may to avenge myself upon the murderer of my children's father. In return I ask only that you protect my orphaned children as you may."

"Most willingly do I so pledge, most brave and noble lady!"

Old fool, Barenziah thought.

She did not sleep that night, but sat in a chair beside her bed, hands folded in her lap, thinking long deep thoughts. She would not tell the children, not yet, not until she must.

She had no need to seek another audience with the "Emperor" for a summons came in the morning.

She told the children she expected to be gone a few days, bade them give the servants no trouble and kissed them goodbye. Morgiah

Barenziah related the recent events quickly and coolly.

"Milady... Queen... but how dreadful! I... I'm so sorry..."

For the first time Barenziah's glacial poise was shaken. In the face of sympathy, she felt her outward calm start to crumble. She gathered her composure, and willed herself to stillness.

"Under the circumstances, Milady, we can hardly ask--"

"Nay, good Milord. Under the circum-stances I must do what I may to avenge myself upon the murderer of my children's father." A single tear escaped the fortress of her eyes. She brushed it away impatiently. "In return I ask only that you protect my orphaned children as you may."

Eadwyre drew himself up. His eyes shone. "Willingly do I so pledge, most brave and noble Queen. The gods of our beloved land, indeed Tamriel itself, be my witnesses."

His words touched her absurdly, yet profoundly. "I thank you from my heart and my soul, good Milord King Eadwyre. You have mine and m-my children's e-everlasting g-gra -- grati -- " She broke down.

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She did not sleep that night, but sat in a chair beside her bed, hands folded in her lap, thinking deep and long into the waxing and waning of the darkness. She would not tell the children -- not yet, not until she must.

She had no need to seek another audience with the Emperor. A summons arrived at first light.

She told the children she expected to be gone a few days, bade them give the servants no trouble, and kissed them good-bye. Morgiah
whimpered a bit, for she was bored and lonely in Imperial City. Helseth looked dour but said nothing. He was very like his father.

At the palace, Barenziah was escorted not into the great hall, but to a small parlor where the Emperor sat at a solitary breakfast. He nodded a greeting, and waved his hand at the window. "Splendid view, isn't it?"

Barenziah stared out over the towers of the great city. It dawned on her that this was the very chamber where she'd first met Tiber Septim and a strong wave of inchoate feeling swept over her.

When she turned back at last Uriel Septim had vanished and Nightingale sat in his place, laughing.

"You knew," he said accusingly, scanning her face. "I wanted to surprise you. You might at least pretend."

Barenziah spread her arms, "I'm afraid my skills at pretense are no match for yours, my liege."

"You're angry with me." He pretended to pout.

"Just a little," she said icily. "I do find betrayal offensive."

whimpered a bit; she was bored and lonely in the Imperial City. Helseth looked dour but said nothing. He was very like his father. His father...

At the Imperial Palace, Barenziah was escorted not into the great audience hall but to a small parlor where the Emperor sat at a solitary breakfast. He nodded a greeting and waved his hand toward the window. "Magnificent view, isn't it?"

Barenziah stared out over the towers of the great city. It dawned on her that this was the very chamber where she'd first met Tiber Septim all those years ago. Centuries ago. Tiber Septim. Another man she had loved. Who else had she loved? Symmachus, Tiber Septim... and Straw. She remembered the big blond stable-boy with sudden and intense affection. She never realized it till now, but she had loved Straw. Only she had never let him know. She had been so young then, those had been carefree days, halcyon days... before everything, before all this... before... him. Not Symmachus. The Nightingale. She was shocked in spite of herself. The man could still affect her. Even now. Even after all that had happened. A strong wave of inchoate emotion swept over her.

When she turned back at last, Uriel Septim had vanished -- and the Nightingale sat in his place.

"You knew," he said quietly, scanning her face. "You knew. Instantly. I wanted to surprise you. You might at least have pretended."

Barenziah spread her arms, trying to pacify the maelstrom churning deep inside her. "I'm afraid my skill at pretense is no match for yours, my liege."

"You're angry with me.

He sighed. "You're angry."

"Just a little, I must admit," she said icily. "I don't know about you, but I find betrayal a
"How human of you."

"What do you want of me?" He wiped his mouth and stood erect.

"Now you are pretending. You know what I want of you, my love."

"You want to tantalize and torment me. Go ahead. I'm in your power."

"No, no, no. I don't want that at all, Barenziah." He came near, speaking low in the old caressing voice that sent shivers over her body. "Don't you see? This was the only way." His hands closed on her arms.

"You could have taken me with you!" Tears gathered in her eyes.

He shook his head. "I didn't have the power. Ah, but now, now I have it all. Mine to have, mine to share -- with you." He waved his hand toward the window and the city beyond. "All Tamriel to lay at your feet -- and that is only the beginning."

"It's too late. Too late. You left me to him."

"He's dead. A scant few years...what does it matter?"

"The children --"

"I'll adopt them. We'll have others together, Barenziah."

I have powers you do not dream of!" He moved to kiss her but

trifle offensive."

"How human of you."

She took a deep breath. "What do you want of me?"

"Now you are pretending. He stood up to face her directly. "You know what I want of you."

"You want to torment me. Go ahead. I'm in your power. But leave my children alone."

"No, no, no. I don't want that at all, Barenziah." He came near, speaking low in the old caressing voice that had sent shivers cascading through her body. The same voice that was doing the same thing to her, here and now. "Don't you see? This was the only way." His hands closed on her arms.

She felt her resolve fading, her disgust at him weakening. "You could have taken me with you." Unbidden tears gathered in her eyes.

He shook his head. "I didn't have the power. Ah, but now, now...! I have it all. Mine to have, mine to share, mine to give -- to you." He once more waved his hand toward the window and the city beyond. "All Tamriel is mine to lay at your feet -- and that is only the beginning."

"It's too late. Too late. You left me to him."

"He's dead. The peasant's dead. A scant few years -- what do they matter?"

"The children--"

"Can be adopted by me. And we'll have others together, Barenziah. Oh, and what children they'll be! What things we shall pass on to them! Your beauty, and my magic. I have powers you haven't even dreamt of, not in your most untamed imaginings!" He moved to kiss her.
she slipped his grasp and turned away. "I don't believe you."

"You do, you know. You're still angry, that's all." His smile did not reach his eyes. "What do you want?"

She shrugged. Her whole life flashed in front of her. The past, the present, and the future still to come. Different times, different lives, different Barenziahs. Which one was the real one? Which one was the real Barenziah? For by that choice she would determine the shape of her fate.

She made it. She knew. She knew who the real Barenziah was, and what she wanted.

"A walk in the garden. A song or two."

"Ah. You want to be courted."

"Why not? You do it so well. It's been long since I've had the pleasure."

And so they spent their days in courtship, walking, talking, singing and laughing together, while the Empire's business was left to underlings.

"I'd like to see the staff," Barenziah said idly one day. "I only had a glimpse of it."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure, heart's delight, but that's impossible."

He frowned. "Nothing would give me greater pleasure, heart's delight -- but that would be impossible."

And so they spent their days in courtship -- walking, talking, singing and laughing together, while the Empire's business was left to subordinates.

"I'd like to see the Staff," Barenziah said idly one day. "I only had a glimpse of it, you'll recall."

"Tell me what you want, Barenziah. Barenziah my beloved. Tell me. It shall be yours."

The Nightingale laughed. "You want to be courted."

"And why not? You do it so well. It's been long, besides, since I've had the pleasure."

"Ah. You want to be courted."

He smiled. "As you wish, Milady Queen Barenziah. Your wish is my command." He took her hand and kissed it. "Now, and forever."

***

And so they spent their days in courtship, walking, talking, singing and laughing together, while the Empire's business was left to underlings.

"I only had a glimpse of it."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure, heart's delight, but that's impossible."
"You don't trust me," Barenziah pouted, but she softened her lips for his kiss.

"You don't trust me," Barenziah pouted, but softened her lips when he leaned over for a kiss.

"Nonsense, love. It isn't here. In fact, it isn't anywhere." He laughed and kissed her again, softly.

"Nonsense, love. Of course I do. But it isn't here." He chuckled. "In fact, it isn't anywhere." He kissed her again, more passionately this time.

"Now you're talking in riddles again. I want to see it. You can't have destroyed it."

"You're talking in riddles again. I want to see it. You couldn't have destroyed it."

"Ah, you've gained in wisdom, since last we met."

"Ah. You've gained in wisdom since last we met."

"You piqued my interest somewhat. The staff can't be destroyed and it can't be removed from Tamriel, not without the direst consequences to the land itself."

"You inspired my hunger for knowledge somewhat." She stood up. "The Staff of Chaos can't be destroyed. And it can't be removed from Tamriel, not without the direst consequences to the land itself."

"Ahhh. All true. And yet, as a I said, it isn't anywhere. Can you solve the riddle?" He pulled her to him and she leaned into his embrace. "Here's a greater riddle still," he whispered, "how to make one of two. That I can and will show you." Their bodies merged, limbs tangled together.

"Ahhh. You impress me, my love. All true. It is not destroyed, and it is not removed from Tamriel. And yet, as I said, it isn't anywhere. Can you solve the puzzle?" He pulled her to him and she leaned into his embrace. "Here's a greater riddle still," he whispered. "How does one make one of two? That I can, and will, show you." Their bodies merged, limbs tangled together.

Later, when they'd drawn a bit apart and dozed, she thought, sleepily. "One of two, two of one, three of two...what cannot be destroyed or banished might be split apart, perhaps..."

Later, when they had drawn a bit apart and he lay dozing, she thought sleepily, "One of two, two of one, three of two, two of three... what cannot be destroyed or banished might be split apart, perhaps..."

She stood up, eyes blazing. She started to smile.

***

Nightingale kept a diary. He scribbled entries in it each night after quick reports from his underlings. It was locked but the lock was a simple one, so

The Nightingale kept a journal. He scribbled entries onto it every night after quick reports from underlings. It was locked in a bureau. But the lock was a simple one. She had, after all, been a member of the Thieves Guild in a past life... in another life... another Barenziah...

Barenziah managed to sneak quick looks at it

One morning Barenziah managed to sneak a
while he was occupied in toileting himself. She discovered that the first staff piece was hidden in an ancient dwarven mine called Fang Lair, although its location was given only in vague terms. The diary was crammed with jotted events in an odd shorthand, and was very hard to decipher.

All Tamriel, she thought, in his hands and mine, and more perhaps, and yet ...

For all his surface charm there was a cold emptiness where his heart should have been, an emptiness of which he was quite unaware, she thought. One could glimpse it now and then, when his eyes would go blank and hard. Peasant dreams, Barenziah thought, and Straw flashed before her eyes, looking sad, and then Therris, with a mocking smile and empty eye sockets. Symmachus, who did what must be done, quietly and efficiently. Nightingale. Nightingale, who would rule all, and more, and yet spread chaos in the name of control.

Barenziah got reluctant leave from Nightingale to go to her children, who had to be told of their father's death and of the emperor's offer of his protection to them.

Eadwyre called on them while she was there, and she told him what she had discovered so far, and explained that she must remain awhile yet and learn more as she could.

Nightingale teased her about her elderly admirer. He was quite aware of Eadwyre's suspicion, although as he said, no one took the quick look at it while he was occupied at his toilet. She discovered that the first piece of the Staff of Chaos was hidden in an ancient Dwarvish mine called Fang Lair -- although its location was given only in the vaguest of terms. The diary was crammed with jotted events in an odd shorthand, and was very hard to decipher.

All Tamriel, she thought, in his hands and mine, and more perhaps -- and yet...

For all his exterior charm there was a cold emptiness where his heart should have been, a vacuum of which he was quite unaware, she thought. One could glimpse it now and then, when his eyes would go blank and hard. And yet, though he had a different concept of it, he yearned for happiness too, and contentment. Peasant dreams, Barenziah thought, and Straw flashed before her eyes again, looking lost and sad. And then Therris, with a feline Khajiit smile. Tiber Septim, powerful and lonely. Symmachus, solid, stolid Symmachus, who did what ought to be done, quietly and efficiently. The Nightingale. The Nightingale, a riddle and a certainty, both the darkness and the light. The Nightingale, who would rule all, and more -- and spread chaos in the name of order.

Barenziah got reluctant leave from him to visit her children, who had yet to be told of their father's death -- and of the Emperor's offer of protection. She finally did, and it wasn't easy. Morgiah clung to her for what seemed an era, sobbing wretchedly, while Helseth ran off into the garden to be alone, afterward refusing all her attempts to speak to him on the subject of his father, or even to let her hold him to her breast.

Eadwyre called on her while she was there. She told him what she had discovered so far, explaining that she must remain awhile yet and learn more as she could.

The Nightingale teased her about her elderly admirer. He was quite aware of Eadwyre's suspicion -- but he wasn't the least bit
old fool seriously. Barenziah managed to arrange a reconciliation of sorts between them. Eadwyre publicly recanted his suspicions and his “old friend” forgave him. Thus he was invited to dine with them at least once a week.

The children liked Eadwyre, even Helseth, who disapproved of his mother's liaison with the "Emperor" and consequently detested Nightingale. He had become surly and temperamental and frequently quarreled with both of them. Eadwyre was not happy either and Nightingale delighted in publicly displaying his affection for Barenziah.

They could not marry, of course, for Uriel Septim was already married. He had exiled the true Empress shortly after taking Septim's place, but had not dared to harm her. She was held by the Temple of the One. It had been given out publicly that she was in ill health, and rumors had been circulated that she had mental problems. The Emperor's children had also been dispatched to various prisons disguised as "schools".

"She'll grow worse in time," Nightingale said carelessly, eying Barenziah's swollen breasts and belly with satisfaction. "As for his children ... well, life is full of hazards, isn't it? We'll be married. Your child will be my true heir."

He did want the child. Barenziah was sure of that. She was far less sure of his feelings for her. They quarrelled, often violently, usually about Helseth, whom he wanted to send away to school. Barenziah made no effort to avoid these quarrels. Nightingale had no interest in a peaceful life and he thoroughly enjoyed making up afterwards.

perturbed, for no one took the old fool seriously. Barenziah even managed to arrange a reconciliation of sorts between them. Eadwyre publicly recanted his misgivings, and his “old friend” the Emperor forgave him. He was afterward invited to dine with them at least once a week.

The children liked Eadwyre, even Helseth, who disapproved of his mother's liaison with the Emperor and consequently detested him. He had become surly and temperamental as the days passed, and frequently quarreled with both his mother and her lover. Eadwyre was not happy with the affair either, and the Nightingale took great delight at times in openly displaying his affection for Barenziah just to nettles the old man.

They could not marry, of course, for Uriel Septim was already married. At least, not yet. The Nightingale had exiled the Empress shortly after taking the Emperor's place, but had not dared harm her. She was given sanctuary by the Temple of the One. It had been given out that she was suffering from ill health, and rumors had been circulated by the Nightingale's agents that she had mental problems. The Emperor's children had likewise been dispatched to various prisons all across Tamriel disguised as “schools.”

“She'll grow worse in time,” Nightingale said carelessly, referring to the Empress and eyeing Barenziah's swollen breasts and swelling belly with satisfaction. “As for their children... Well, life is full of hazards, isn't it? We'll be married. Your child will be my true heir.”

He did want the child. Barenziah was sure of that. She was far less sure, however, of his feelings for her. They argued continually now, often violently, usually about Helseth, whom he wanted to send away to school in Summurset Isle, the province farthest from the Imperial City. Barenziah made no effort to avoid these altercations. The Nightingale, after all, had no interest in a smooth, unruffled life; and besides, he thoroughly enjoyed making up afterward...
Occasionally Barenziah would take the children and retreat to their old apartment, declaring she wanted no more to do with him.

She was six months pregnant before she finally deciphered the location of the last Staff piece -- an easy one, since every dark elf knew where Dagoth-Ur was.

When next she quarrelled with Nightingale she simply left the city with Eadwyre and they rode hard for High Rock and Wayrest. Nightingale was furious, but there was little he could do. His assassins were rather inept, and he dared not leave his seat of power to pursue them in person, nor could he openly declare war on Wayrest. He had no legitimate claim on her or her unborn child. The nobility had disapproved of his liaison with Barenziah and were glad that she had gone.

Wayrest was equally disapproving and distrustful of her, but Eadwyre was much beloved by his prosperous little city, and allowances were readily made for his eccentricities. Barenziah and Eadwyre were married a year after the birth of her son by Jagar Tharn. Eadwyre doted on her. She did not love him, but she was fond of him, and that was something. It was nice to have someone, and Wayrest was a very pleasant place, a good place for children to grow up, while they waited, and hoped, and prayed for their Champion's success in his long mission.

Barenziah could only hope that he wouldn't take very long, whoever this unnamed Champion was. She was a Dark Elf, and she had all the time in the world. All the time. But no more love left to give, and no more hatred left to burn. She had nothing left,
nothing but pain, and memories... and her children. She only wanted to raise her family, and provide them a good life, and be left to live out what remained of hers. She had no doubt it was going to be a long life yet. And during it she wanted peace, and quiet, and serenity, of her soul as well as of her heart. Peasant dreams. That was what she wanted. That was what the real Barenziah wanted. That was what the real Barenziah was. Peasant dreams.

Pleasant dreams.
The castle would hold. No matter the forces, the walls of Cascabel Hall would never fail, but that was small consolation for Menegur. He was hungry. In fact, he had never been so hungry. The well in the atrium of the fortress supplied him with enough water to hold there until the Fourth Era, but his stomach reminded Menegur minute to minute that he needed food.

The wagonload of supplies mocked him. When his army, the forces of the King of Solitude, had left Cascabel Hall, and he had manned the battlements as the rear-guard to protect their retreat, they had left a wagon behind to supply him with enough food for months. It was not until the night after they left that he inspected the larder and found that nothing edible was in the wagon. Trunk after trunk was filled with netch armor from the army's incursion into Morrowind. Apparently his Nord confederates had assumed that the lightly opaque material was hard tack in aspic. If the Dunmer whose caravan had been raided knew about this, they would never be able to stop laughing.

Menegur thought that his fellow mercenary and kinswoman Aerin would have found this amusing as well. She had spoken with great authority about netch leather, being an expert of sorts on light armor, but she had made a point to mention that it could not be eaten like other leather in occasions of hardship. It was a pity she couldn't be there to enjoy the irony, Menegur thought savagely. She had returned to Morrowind even before the king's army had left, preferring a life as a wanted fugitive to a free existence in the cold of Skyrim.

All the weeds in the courtyard had been devoured by the rear-guard's sixteenth day manning Cascabel Hall. The entire castle had been scoured: rotten tubers in the mulch pile found and consumed, a dusty bouquet in the countess's bedchamber eaten, almost every rat and insect but the most cunning infesting the castle walls had been tracked down and gobbled up. The castellan's chambers, filled with acrid, inedible law books, had yielded up a couple crumbs of bread. Menegur had even scraped moss from the stones. There was no denying it: he would be dead from starvation before his army returned to break the ranks of the enemies who surrounded the fortress.

"The worst part," said Menegur, who had taken to talking to himself on only the second day alone in the castle. "Is how close sustenance is."

A vast arbor of golden apples stretched acre after acre near the castle walls. The sunlight cast a seductive gleam on the fruit, and the cruel wind carried sweet smells into Cascabel to torture him.

Like most Bosmer, Menegur was an archer. He was a master of long and medium distance fighting, but in close quarters, as he would be if he dared to leave the castle and enter the
enemy camp in the arbor, he knew he would not last long. At some point, he knew he would have to try, but he had been dreading the day. It was upon him now.

Menegur put on the netch armor for the first time, feeling the powdery, almost velvet texture of the rendered leather against his skin. There was also a barely perceptible throb, which he recognized as the remnant nematocysts of the netch's venomous flesh, still tingling months after its death with domesticated poison. The combination made him feel energized. Aerin had described the sensation perfectly, just as she had explained how to defend himself while wearing netch leather armor.

Under cover of night, Menegur crept out of the back gate of the castle, locking it behind him with a rather cumbersome key. He made for the arbor as quietly as he could, but a passing sentry, coming behind a tree, saw him. Remaining calm, Menegur did as he remembered Aerin had instructed, only moving after the attack had been launched. The sentry's blade glided against the armor and knocked to the left, throwing the young man off balance. That was the trick, as he understood it: you had to be prepared to be hit, and merely move with the blow, allowing the membranous armor to divert the injury away.

Use your enemy's momentum against him, as Aerin used to say.

There were several more close encounters in the arbor, but each swing of an ax and each thrust of a sword found purchase elsewhere. With handfuls of apples, Menegur ran the gauntlet back to the castle. He locked the back gate door behind him and fell into an orgy of eating.

For week after week, the Bosmer stole out to gather his food. The guards began anticipating his raids, but he kept his schedule irregular and always remembered when attacked to wait for the blow, accept it, and then turn. In such a way, he lived and survived his lonely vigil in Cascabel Hall.

Four months later, as he was preparing for another seizure of apples, Menegur heard a loud clamor at the front gate. Surveying the group from a safe distance on the battlements, he saw the shields of the King of Solitude, his ally the Count of Cascabel, and their enemy the King of Farrun. Evidently, a truce had been called.

Menegur opened the gates and the combined armies flooded the courtyard. Many of the knights of Farrun sought to shake the hand of the man they had named the Shadow of the Arbor, expressing their admiration at his defensive skills and apologizing good-naturedly for their attempts to slay him. Only doing their job, you know.

"There's hardly a apple left on the vines," said the King of Solitude.

"Well, I started on the edges and worked my way in," explained Menegur. "I brought back extra fruit to tempt the rats of out of walls so I could have a little meat as well."

"We've spent the last several months working out the details of the truce," said the King. "Really quite exhausting. In any rate, the Count will be taking back possession of his castle now, but there is a small detail we need to work out. You're a mercenary, and as such responsible for your own expenses. If you had been a subject of mine, things might be different, but there are certain old rules of law that must be respected."
Menegur anticipated the strike.

"The problem is," the King continued. "You've taken a good deal of the Count's crops while here. By any reasonable computation, you've eaten an amount equal to and likely exceeding your mercenary's wages. Obviously, I would not want to penalize you for the excellent job you've done defending the castle in uncomfortable circumstances, but you agree that it's important that we observe the old rules of law, don't you?"

"Of course," replied Menegur, accepting the blow.

"I'm delighted to hear that," said the King. "Our estimation is that you owe the Count of Cascabel thirty-seven Imperial gold."

"Which I will gladly pay to myself, with interest, after the autumn tide harvest," said Menegur. "There is more left on the vine than you suggest."

The Kings of Solitude and Farrun, and the Count of Cascabel stared at the Bosmer.

"We agreed to abide to the strictest old rules of law, and I've had time to read a great many books over the time you were making your truce. In 3E 246, during the reign of Uriel IV, the Imperial Council, in an attempt to clear up some questions of property rights in Skyrim during those chaotic days, decreed that any man without a liege who occupied a castle for more than three months would be granted the rights and titles of that estate. It's a good law, of course, meant to discourage absent and foreign landlords." Menegur smiled, feeling the now familiar sensation of a glancing strike diverting. "By the rule of law, I am the Count of Cascabel."

The rear-guard's son still hold the title of Count of Cascabel. And he grows the finest, most delectable apples in the Empire.
The Red Book of Riddles

This handye booke doth containe alle diverse manner of riddles and follyes, and, by means of carefulle studye, the prudente scholarlye gentlemane maye finde himselfe noe longer discomfited by the sharpe wite of his fellowes.

[The posing and puzzling of riddles is a convention of polite aristocratic Western society. Nobles and social aspirants collect books of riddles and study them, hoping thereby to increase the chances of their appearing sly and witty in conversation.]

The question:
It has a tail, a side and a head
I call it what I call a snake
It has no body and it is dead

The answer:
It must be a drake

The question:
Poets know the hearts of Men and Mer
But beasts can't know my heart, you see
This book was written by a bear

The answer:
It is not a book of poetry.

The question:
I gave you a sock, not unlike a box
With hammers and nails all around it
Two lids open when it knocks

The answer:
It must have been a great hit.
[79] Redguards, Their History and Their Heroes*

Redguards, Their History and Their Heroes
By Destri Melarg

Notes on the Redguards, their history and their heroes. This is a publisher's proof of the initial draft of my book, "REDGUARDS, THEIR HISTORY AND THEIR HEROES". The following is a collection of the tales, myths and history of the Redguards. Much of their history is shrouded in mystery and in the mists of time. It is hard to distinguish between myths, and real history. Below are the first chapters of the draft by Destri Melarg Author's note as translated into the Modern Tongue of Hammerfell:

Frandar Hunding was born in 2356 in the old way of reckoning, in our beloved deserts of the old land. The traditional rule of emperors had been overthrown in 2012, and although each successive emperor remained the figurehead of the empire, his powers were very much reduced. Since that time, our people saw 300 years of almost continuous civil war between the provincial lords, warrior monks and brigands, all fighting each other for land and power. Our people once were artisans, poets, and scholars, but the ever evolving strife made the way the sword inevitable - the song of the blade through the air, through flesh and bone, its ring against armor: an answer to our prayers.

In the time of Lord Frandar the first Warrior Princes, lords called Yokeda, built huge stone castles to protect themselves and their lands, and castle towns outside the walls begin to grow up. In 2245, however, Mansel Sesnit came to the fore. He became the Elden Yokeda, or military dictator, and for eight years succeeded in gaining control of almost the whole empire. When Sesnit was assassinated in 2253, a commoner took over the government. Randic Torn continued the work of unifying the Empire which Sesnit had begun, ruthlessly putting down any traces of insurrection. He revived the old gulf between the warriors - the sword singers - and the commoners by introducing restrictions on the wearing of swords. "Torn's Sword Hunt", as it was known, meant that only the singers were allowed to wear swords, which distinguished them from the rest of the population.

Although Torn did much to settle the empire into its pre-strife ways, by the time of his death in 2373 internal disturbances still had not been completely eliminated. Upon his death, civil war broke out in earnest; war that made the prior 300 year turmoil pale in comparison. It was in this period that Frandar Hunding grew up. Hunding belonged to the sword-singers. This element of empire society grew from the desert artisans and was initially recruited from the young sons and daughters of the high families. They built the first temple to the unknown gods of War and build a training hall "The Hall of the Virtues of War". Within a few generations the way of the sword - the song of the blade - had become their life.

The people of the blade kept their poetry and artisanship in building beautiful swords woven with magic and powers from the unknown gods. The greatest among them became known as

* ESD (Redguards, Their History and Their Heroes). ESAR (Redguards, Their Heroes & History). The ESAR edition is introduced by this paraphrase: "Redguards: Their Heroes and History. It talks of Redguard origins and their great heroes, including Hunding, who, with his 5 magical swords drove the Goblins from Hammerfell, and Leki, the Saint of the Spirit Sword."
Ansei or "Saints of the Sword". Each of these began their own training schools teaching their individual way of the sword. Those Ansei of the highest virtue wandered the countryside engaging in battle, righting wrongs, and seeking to end the strife. To sum it up, Hunding, was a sword-singer, a master, no, a Master Ansei at a time when the peak of the strife was reborn out of the chaos of Torn's death. Many singers put up their swords and became artists, for the pull of the artisan heritage was strong; but others, like Hunding pursued the ideal of the warrior searching for enlightenment through the perilous paths of the Sword. Duels of revenge and tests of skill were commonplace, and fencing schools multiplied.

Fig. 15. Hunding (p17)

Frandar do Hunding Hel Ansei No Shira, or as he is commonly known Frandar Hunding, was born in the far desert marches in the province of High Desert. Hunding is the name of the High Desert region near where he was born. No Shira means noble person or person of noble birth and Hel Ansei is his title of Sword Sainthood. Hunding's ancestors reach back to the beginning of recorded time in {the} high desert and were artisans and mystics. His grandfather was a retainer of {the Elden Yokeda, Mansel Sesnit}, and led many of the battles of unification prior to Sesnit's assassination. When he was 14, Hunding's father died in {the one of the} many insurrections, and he was left to support his mother and four brothers. His prowess with the sword however, made his life both difficult and easy. Easy in that his services came in great demand as a guardian and escort. Hard in that his reputation preceded him, and many awaited their turn to face him in battle and gain instant fame through his defeat.

Fig. 16. Leki saint of the Spirit Sword (p21)
By the time Hunding was 30 he had fought and won more than 90 duels killing all his opponents. He became virtually invincible with the sword, gaining such skill and mastery that he finally stopped using the real swords created through the artisanship of his people and began using the Shehai or "way of the spirit sword". All sword singers learn through their intense training and devotion to the gods of war and way of the sword, the forms of discipline that allow the creation of the spirit sword. This is a simple form of magic or mind mastery where by a image of a sword is formed from pure thought. The sword singer forms the sword by concentrating, and it takes shape in his hand - usually a pale thing of light, misty and insubstantial, a thing of beauty perhaps, a symbol of devotion to the Way and the gods, but no weapon. However, those Ansei of the highest level and sensitivity and those with talent in magic, can at times of stress, form a spirit sword, the Shehai which is far more than light and air - it is an unstoppable weapon of great might, a weapon which can never be taken from the owner without also taking his mind.

The Shehai became Hunding's weapon, and with this he slew bands of brigands and wandering monsters than infested the land. Finally upon finishing his 90th duel, defeating the evil Lord Janic and his seven lich followers, he was satisfied that he was indeed invincible. Hunding then turned to formulating his philosophy of "the Way of the Sword". He wrote his Learnings down in the BOOK OF CIRCLES while living as a hermit in a cave in the mountains of high desert in his sixtieth year. In that year Hunding, having enlisted in the many battles of the empire and defeating all opponents, had thought himself ready for death and retired to his cave to capture his strategy and mystical visions to share with other Sword Singers. It was after his completion of the scroll of the Circle that the Singers found him composing his death poem and preparing to join the gods of war in final rest.

At sixty he was a vigorous man, who thought himself through with life, but his people, the sword-singers needed him. They needed him as never before. Torn's Sword Hunt, had separated the Singers from the common people, and the rise of the Last Emperor began the last great strife of the desert empire. The Emperor and his consort Elisa's final effort to wrest control of the empire from the people by destroying the sword-singers. Hira vowed to search out every Singer with his Brigand army composed of Orcs and castoffs of the wars of the empire, and to scourge them from the face of the planet. The Sword Singers were never a numerous people. The harsh desert kept the births few, and growing up in the unforgiving wastes eliminated all but those of iron spirit and will. Thus the final strife which became known as the "War of the Singers" found the people of the sword unprepared and unready to join together their individually great skills into an army that could defend their homes and lives. Frandar Hunding was sought out, his death poem interrupted, and unceremoniously command of the singers was thrust upon him.

To the unknown gods of war great thanks is owed that Hunding had the time in his cave to write down his years of accumulated wisdom, of strategy, of the way of the Shehai. The singers fled from their camps up into the desert hills and mountains. Fled to the foot of Hattu "the father of Mountains" where Hunding had gone to write in peace and to die, and there these remnants formed into the Army of the Circle - they learned Hunding's Way, his strategies his tactics, and the final great vision for a master stroke. Hunding devised a plan of seven battles leading the Armies of Hira further and further into the wilderness to the foot of Hattu, where the final battle could be fought. Hunding called his plan the "Hammer and the Anvil". With each battle Hunding's Singers would further learn his strategies and tactics, grow strong in the use of the Shehai, and be ready to defeat their opponents in the seventh battle. And thus it was, the six first battles were waged, each neither victory or defeat, each leading
to the next. The larger armies of Hira following the small army of Hunding. Outnumbered thirty to one, the singers never faltered from the Way.

The stage was set, Hira and his Army maneuvered to the base of Hattu Mountain, where the hammer blow was delivered. The battle was pitched, and many singers fell that day. Hunding knew, that the singers who lived would be few, but Hira and his empire of evil would not live and so it went. At the end Hunding and less that twenty thousand Singers survived the day, but no army of evil was left to pillage and murder, more than three hundred thousand fell that day on Hattu. Of those who were left to run and live, all were scattered to the four winds, an organized force no more. The singers packed their lives, folded their tents, mourned their dead, and followed Hunding to the great port city of Arch, in the province of Seawind. There Hunding had a flotilla of ships waiting. The Singers left their desert for a new land. No longer welcome in the desert empire, they left to be sung about and spoken of in legend. The final great warrior, the singers of Shehai, the Book of Circles, all leaving that land where their virtue was unappreciated.

Red, red with blood they were in the eyes of the gentle citizenry, never mind that they had saved them from a great evil. The singers vowed to learn new ways as they traveled across the great ocean to their new land. To adopt a new name, but to honor the past. In honor of their final battle, they named their new land Hammerfell and adopted the name Redguards. In honor to Hunding the great warrior prince, each household in Hammerfell has a place by the hearth an alcove really, just a niche, big enough to hold the scroll - The Book of Circles.

NOTES

1 (Ill. and text) ESAR. Not in ESD.
2 ESD. ESAR reads "High Desert".
3 ESD. ESAR reads "craftsmen".
4 ESD. ESAR reads "Mansel Sesnit, the Elden Yokudan".
5 ESD. ESAR reads "one of the region's".
6 (Ill. and text) ESAR. Not in ESD.
Response to Bero's Speech
by Malviser, Battlemage

On the 14th of Last Seed, an illusionist by the name of Berevar Bero gave a very ignorant speech at the Chantry of Julianos in the Imperial City. As ignorant speeches are hardly uncommon, there was no reason to respond to it. Unfortunately, he has since had the speech privately printed as "Bero's Speech to the Battlemages," and it's received some small, undeserved attention in academic circles. Let us put his misconceptions to rest.

Bero began his lecture with an occasionally factual account of famous Battlemages from Zurin Arctus, Tiber Septim's Imperial Battlemage, to Jagar Tharn, Uriel Septim VII's Imperial Battlemage. His intent was to show that where it matters, the Battlemage relies on other Schools of Magicka, not the School of Destruction which is supposedly a Battlemage's particular forte. Allow me first to dispute these so-called historical facts.

Zurin Arctus did not create the golem Numidium by spells of Mysticism and Conjuration as Bero alleges. The truth is that we don't know how Numidium was created or if it was a golem or atronach in any traditional sense of those words. Uriel V's Battlemage Hethoth was not an Imperial Battlemage -- he was simply a sorcerer in the employ of the Empire, thus which spells he cast in the various battles on Akavir are irrelevant, not to mention heresay. Bero calls Empress Morihatha's Battlemage Welloc "an accomplished diplomat" but not "a powerful student of the School of Destruction." I congratulate Bero on correctly identifying an Imperial Battlemage, but there are many written examples of Welloc's skill in the School of Destruction. The sage Celarus, for example, wrote extensively about Welloc casting the Vampiric Cloud on the rebellious army of Blackrose, causing their strength and skill to pass on to their opponents. What is this, but an impressive example of the School of Destruction?

Bero rather pathetically includes Jagar Tharn in his list of underachieving Battlemages. To use an insane traitor as example of rational behavior is an untenable position. What would Bero prefer? That Tharn used the School of Destruction to destroy Tamriel by a more traditional means?

Bero uses his misrepresentation of history as the basis for his argument. Even if he had found four excellent examples from history of Battlemages casting spells outside their School -- and he didn't -- he would only have anecdotal evidence, which isn't enough to support an argument. I could easily find four examples of illusionists casting healing spells, or nightblades teleporting. There is a time and a place for everything.

Bero's argument, built on this shaky ground, is that the School of Destruction is not a true school. He calls it "narrow and shallow" as an avenue of study, and its students impatient, with megalomaniac tendencies. How can one respond to this? Someone who knows nothing about casting a spell of Destruction criticizing the School for being too simple? Summarizing the School of Destruction as learning how to do the "maximum amount of damage in the

* ESM. ESO.
minimum amount of time" is clearly absurd, and he expounds on his ignorance by listing all the complicated factors studied in his own School of Illusion.

Allow me in response to list the factors studied in the School of Destruction. The means of delivering the spell matters more in the School of Destruction than any other school, whether it is cast at a touch, at a range, in concentric circles, or cast once to be triggered later. What forces must be reigned in to cast the spell: fire, lightning, or frost? And what are the advantages and dangers of each? What are the responses from different targets from the assault of different spells of destruction? What are the possible defenses and how may they be assailed? What environmental factors must be taken into consideration? What are the advantages of a spell of delayed damage? Bero suggests that the School of Destruction cannot be subtle, yet he forgets about all the Curses that fall under the mantle of the school, sometimes affecting generation after generation in subtle yet sublime ways.

The School of Alteration is a distinct and separate entity from the School of Destruction, and Bero's argument that they should be merged into one is patently ludicrous. He insists -- again, a man who knows nothing about the Schools of Alteration and Destruction, is the one insisting this -- that "damage" is part of the changing of reality dealt with by the spells of Alteration. The implication is that Levitation, to list a spell of Alteration, is a close cousin of Shock Bolt, a spell of Destruction. It would make as much sense to say that the School of Alteration, being all about the actuality of change, should absorb the School of Illusion, being all about the appearance of change.

It certainly isn't a coincidence that a master of the School of Illusion cast this attack on the School of Destruction. Illusion is, after all, all about masking the truth.
With the acclamations of the Fellows of the Imperial Society still ringing in my ears, I decided to return to Morrowind immediately. It was not without some regret that I bade farewell to the fleshpots of the Imperial City, but I knew that the wonders I had brought back from Raled-Makai had only scratched the surface of the Dwemer ruins in Morrowind. Even more spectacular treasures were out there, I felt, just waiting to be found, and I was eager to be off. I also had before me the salutary example of poor Bannerman, who was still dining out on his single expedition to Black Marsh twenty years ago. That would never be me, I vowed.

With my letter from the Empress in hand, this time I would have the full cooperation of the Imperial authorities. No more need to worry about attacks from superstitious locals. But where should I look next? The ruins at Kemel-Ze were the obvious choice. Unlike Raled-Makai, getting to the ruins would not be a problem. Also known as the "Cliff City", Kemel-Ze lies on the mainland side of the Vvardenfel Rift, sprawling down the sheer coastal cliff. Travelers from the east coast of Vvardenfel often visit the site by boat, and it can also be reached overland from the nearby villages without undue hardship.

Once my expedition had assembled in Seyda Neen, with the usual tedious complications involved in operating in this half-civilized land, we set out for the village of Marog near the ruins, where we hoped to hire a party of diggers. My interpreter, Tuen Panai, an unusually jolly fellow for a Dark Elf who I had hired in Seyda Neen at the recommendation of the local garrison commander, assured me that the local villagers would be very familiar with Kemel-Ze, having looted the site for generations. Incidentally, Ten Penny (as we soon came to call him, to his constant amusement) proved invaluable and I would recommend him without hesitation to any of my colleagues who were planning similar expeditions to the wilds of Morrowind.

At Marog, we ran into our first trouble. The hetman of the village, a reserved, elegant old fellow, seemed willing to cooperate, but the local priest (a representative of the absurd religion they have here, worshipping something called the Tribunal who they claim actually live in palaces in Morrowind) was fervently against us excavating the ruins. He looked likely to sway the villagers to his side with his talk of "religious taboos", but I waved the Empress's letter under his nose and mentioned something about my friend the garrison commander at Seyda Neen and he quieted right down. No doubt this was just a standard negotiating tactic arranged among the villagers to increase their pay. In any event, once the priest had stalked off muttering to himself, no doubt calling down curses upon the heads of the foreign devils, we soon had a line of villagers eager to sign on to the expedition.

While my assistant was working out the mundane details of contracts, supplies, etc., Master Arum and I rode on to the ruins. By land, they can only be reached using narrow paths that wind down the face of the cliff from above, where any misstep threatens to send one tumbling...
into the sea foaming about the jagged rocks below. The city's original entrance to the surface must have been in the part of the city to the northeast - the part that fell into the sea long ago when the eruption of Red Mountain created this mind-bogglingly vast crater. After successfully navigating the treacherous path, we found ourselves in a large chamber, open to the sky on one side, disappearing into the darkness on the other. As we stepped forward, our boots crunched on piles of broken metal, as common in Dwarven ruins as potsherds in other ancient sites. This was obviously where the looters brought their finds from deeper levels, stripping off the valuable outer casings of the Dwarven mechanisms and leaving their innards here - easier than lugging the intact mechanisms back up to the top of the cliff. I laughed to myself, thinking of the many warriors unwittingly walking around Tamriel with pieces of Dwarven mechanisms on their backs. For that, of course, is what most "Dwarven armor" really is - just the armored shells of ancient mechanical men. I sobered when I thought of how exceedingly valuable an intact mechanism would be. This place was obviously full of Dwarven devices, judging from the litter covering the floor of this vast chamber - or had been, I reminded myself. Looters had been working over this site for centuries. Just the casing alone would be worth a small fortune, sold as armor. Most Dwarven armor is made of mismatched pieces from various devices, hence its reputation for being bulky and unwieldy. But a matched set from an intact mechanism is worth more than its weight in gold, for the pieces all fit together smoothly and the wearer hardly notices the bulk. Of course, I had no intention of destroying my finds for armor, no matter how valuable. I would bring it back to the Society for scientific study. I imagined the astonished cries of my colleagues as I unveiled it at my next lecture, and smiled again.

I picked up a discarded gear from the piles at my feet. It still gleamed brightly, as if newly made, the Dwarven alloys resisting the corrosion of time. I wondered what secrets remained hidden in the maze of chambers that lay before me, defying the efforts of looters, waiting to gleam again in the light they had not seen in long eons. Waiting for me. It remained only to find them! With an impatient gesture to Master Arum to follow, I strode forward into the gloom.

Master Arum, Ten Penny and I spent several days exploring the ruins while my assistants set up camp at the top of the cliff and hauled supplies and equipment from the village. I was looking for a promising area to begin excavation -- a blocked passage or corridor untouched by looters that might lead to completely untouched areas of the ruins.

We found two such areas early on, but soon discovered that the many winding passages bypassed the blockage and gave access to the rooms behind. Nevertheless, even these outer areas, for the most part stripped clean of artifacts by generations of looters, were full of interest to the professional archaeologist. Behind a massive bronze door, burst from its hinges by some ancient turmoil of the earth, we discovered a large chamber filled with exquisite wall-carvings, which impressed even the jaded Ten Penny, who claimed to have explored every Dwarven ruin in Morrowind. They seemed to depict an ancient ritual of some kind, with a long line of classically-bearded Dwarven elders processing down the side walls, all seemingly bowing to the giant form of a god carved into the front wall of the chamber, which was caught in the act of stepping forth from the crater of a mountain in a cloud of smoke or steam. According to Master Arum, there are no known depictions of Dwarven religious rituals, so this was an exciting find indeed. I set a team to work prying the carved panels from the wall, but they were unable to even crack the surface. On closer examination the chamber appeared to be faced with a metallic substance with the texture and feel of stone, impervious to any of our tools. I considered having Master Arum try his blasting magic on the walls, but
decided that the risk of destroying the carvings was too great. Much as I would have preferred to bring them back to the Imperial City, I had to settle for taking rubbings of the carvings. If my colleagues in the Society showed enough interest, I was sure a specialist could be found, perhaps a master alchemist, who could find a way to safely remove the panels.

I found another curious room at the top of a long winding stair, barely passable due to the fall of rubble from the roof. At the top of the stair was a domed chamber with a large ruined mechanism at its center. Painted constellations were still visible in some places on the surface of the dome. Master Arum and I agreed that this must have been some kind of observatory, and the mechanism was therefore the remains of a Dwarven telescope. To remove it from ruins down the narrow stairway would require its complete disassembly (which fact no doubt had preserved it from the attention of looters), so I decided to leave it in place for the time being. The existence of this observatory suggested, however, that this room had once been above the surface. Closer examination of the structure revealed that this was indeed a building, not an excavated chamber. The only other doorways from the room were completely blocked, and careful measurements from the top of the cliff to the entry room and then to the observatory revealed that we were still more than 250 feet below the present ground level. A sobering reminder of the forgotten fury of Red Mountain.

This discovery led us to focus our attentions downward. Since we now knew approximately where the ancient surface lay, we could rule out many of the higher blocked passages. One wide passage, impressively flanked with carven pillars, particularly drew my interest. It ended in a massive rockfall, but we could see where looters had begun and then abandoned a tunnel through this debris. With my team of diggers and Master Arum's magery to assist, I believed we could succeed where our predecessors had failed. I therefore set my team of Dark Elves to work on clearing the passage, relieved finally to be beginning the real exploration of Kemel-Ze. Soon, I hoped, my boots would be stirring up dust that had lain undisturbed since the dawn of time.

With this exciting prospect before me, I may have driven my diggers a bit too hard. Ten Penny reported that they were beginning to grumble about the long days, and that some were talking of quitting. Knowing from experience that nothing puts heart back into these Dark Elves like a taste of the lash, I had the ringleaders whipped and the rest confined to the ruins until they had finished clearing the passageway. Thank Stendarr for my foresight in requisitioning a few legionnaires from Seyda Neen! They were sullen at first, but with the promise of an extra day's wages when they broke through, they soon set to work with a will. While these measures may sound harsh to my readers back in the comforts of civilization, let me assure you that there is no other way to get these people to stick to a task.

The blockage was much worse than I had first thought, and in the end it took almost two weeks to clear the passage. The diggers were as excited as I was when their picks finally broke through the far end into emptiness, and we shared a round of the local liquor together (a foul concoction, in truth) to show that all was forgiven. I could hardly restrain my eagerness as they enlarged the hole to allow entry into the chamber beyond. Would the passage lead to entire new levels of the ancient city, filled with artifacts left by the vanished Dwarves? Or would it be only a dead end, some side passage leading nowhere? My excitement grew as I slid through the hole and crouched for a moment in the darkness beyond. From the echoing sounds of the stones rattling beneath my feet, I was in a large room. Perhaps very large. I stood up carefully, and unhooded my lantern. As the light flooded the chamber, I looked around in astonishment. Here were wonders beyond even my wildest dreams!
As the light from my lamp filled the chamber beyond the rock fall, I looked around in astonishment. Everywhere was the warm glitter of Dwarven alloys. I had found an untouched section of the ancient city! My heart pounding with excitement, I looked around me. The room was vast, the roof soaring up into darkness beyond the reach of my lamp, the far end lost in shadows with only a tantalizing glimmer hinting at treasures not yet revealed. Along each wall stood rows of mechanical men, intact except for one oddity: their heads had been ritually removed and placed on the floor at their feet. This could mean only one thing -- I had discovered the tomb of a great Dwarven noble, maybe even a king! Burials of this type had been discovered before, most famously by Ransom's expedition to Hammerfell, but no completely intact tomb had ever been found. Until now.

But if this was truly a royal burial, where was the tomb? I stepped forward gingerly, the rows of headless bodies standing silently as they had for eons, their disembodied eyes seeming to watch me as I passed. I had heard wild tales of the Curse of the Dwarves, but had always laughed it off as superstition. But now, breathing the same air as the mysterious builders of this city, which had lain undisturbed since the cataclysm that spelled their doom, I felt a twinge of fear. There was some power here, I felt, something malevolent that resented my presence. I stopped for a moment and listened. All was silent.

Except... it seemed I heard a faint hiss, regular as breathing. I fought down a sudden surge of panic. I was unarmed, not thinking of danger in my haste to explore past the blocked passage. Sweat dripped down my face as I scanned the gloom for any movement. The room was warm, I suddenly noticed, much warmer than the rest of the labyrinth thus far. My excitement returned. Could I have found a section of the city still connected to a functioning steam grid? Pipes ran along the walls, as in all sections of the city. I walked over and placed my hand on one. It was hot, almost too hot to touch! Now I saw that in places where the ancient piping had corroded, small jets of steam were escaping -- the sound I had heard. I laughed at my own credulity.

I now advanced quickly to the far end of the room, giving a cheerful salute to the ranks of mechanical soldiers who had appeared so menacing only moments before. I smiled with triumph as the light swept back the darkness of centuries to reveal the giant effigy of a Dwarven king standing on a raised dais, his metal hand clutching his rod of office. This was the prize indeed! I circled the dais slowly, admiring the craftsmanship of the ancient Dwarves. The golden king stood twenty feet tall under a freestanding domed cupola, his long upswept beard jutting forward proudly as his glittering metal eyes seemed to follow me. But my superstitious mood had passed, and I gazed benevolently on the old Dwarven king. My king, as I had already begun to think of him. I stepped onto the dais to get a better look at the sculpted armor. Suddenly the eyes of the figure opened and it raised a mailed fist to strike!

I leaped to one side as the golden arm came crashing down, striking sparks from the steps where I had stood a moment before. With a hiss of steam and the whir of gears, the giant figure stepped ponderously out from under its canopy and strode towards me with frightening speed, its eyes tracking me as I scrambled backwards. I dodged behind a pillar as the fist whistled down again. I had dropped my lantern in the confusion, and now I crept into the darkness outside the pool of light, hoping to slip between the headless mechanisms and thus escape back to the safety of the passageway. Where had the monster gone? You would think that a twenty-foot golden kind would be hard to miss, but he was nowhere to be seen. The guttering lamp only illuminated a small part of the room. He could be hiding anywhere in the gloom. I crawled faster. Without warning, the dim ranks of Dwarven soldiers in front of me
went flying as the monstrous guardian loomed before me. He had cut off my escape! As I dodged backwards, blow after blow whistled down as the implacable machine followed me relentlessly, driving me into the far corner of the room. At last there was nowhere left for me to go. My back was to the wall. I glared up at my foe, determined to die on my feet. The huge fists lifted for one final blow.

The room blazed with sudden light. Bolts of purple energy crackled across the metal carapace of the Dwarven monster, and it halted, half-turning to meet this new threat. Master Arum had come! I was about to raise a cheer when the giant figure turned back to me, unharmed by the lightning bolt hurled by Master Arum, determined to destroy this first intruder. I shouted out "Steam! Steam!" as the giant raised his fist to crush me into the floor. There was a hiss and a gust of bitter cold and I looked up. The monster was now covered with a shell of ice, frozen in the very moment of dispatching me. Master Arum had understood. I leaned against the wall with relief.

The ice cracked above me. The giant golden king stood before me, the shell of ice falling away, his head swiveling towards me in triumph. Was there no stopping this Dwarven monstrosity?! But then the light faded from his eyes, and his arms dropped to his sides. The magical frost had worked, cooling its steam-driven energy.

As Master Arum and the diggers crowded around me, congratulating me on my narrow escape, my thoughts drifted. I imagined my return to the Imperial City, and I knew that this would be my greatest triumph yet. How could I possibly top this find? Perhaps it was time to move on. Recovering the fabled Eye of Argonia... now that would be a coup! I smiled to myself, reveling in the glory of the moment but already planning my next adventure.
The hamlet village of Lorikh was a quiet, peaceful Dwemer community nestled in the monochrome grey and tan dunes and boulders of the Dejasyte. No vegetation of any kind grew in Lorikh, though there were blackened vestiges of long dead trees scattered throughout the town. Kamdida arriving by caravan looked at her new home with despair. She was used to the forestland of the north where her father's family had hailed. Here there was no shade, little water, and a great open sky. It looked like a dead land.

Her mother's family took Kamdida and her younger brother Nevith in, and was very kind to the orphans, but she felt lonely in the alien village. It was not until she met an old Argonian woman who worked at the water factory that Kamdida found a friend. Her name was Sigerthe, and she said that her family had lived in Lorikh centuries before the Dwemer arrived, when it was a great and beauteous forest.

"Why did the trees die?" asked Kamdida.

"When there were Argonians only in this land, we never cut trees for we had no need for fuel or wooden structures such as you use. When the Dwemer came, we allowed them to use the plants as they needed them, provided they never touched the Hist, which are sacred to us and to the land. For many years, we lived peaceably. No one wanted for anything."

"What happened?"

"Some of your scientists discovered that distilling a certain tree sap, molding it and drying it, they could create a resilient kind of armor called resin," said Sigerthe. "Most of the trees that grew here had very thin ichor in their branches, but not the Hist. Many of them fairly glistened with sap, which made the Dwemer merchants greedy. They hired a woodsman named Juhnin to start clearing the sacred arbors for profit."

The old Argonian woman looked to the dusty ground and sighed, "Of course, we Argonians cried out against it. It was our home, and the Hist, once gone, would never return. The merchants reconsidered, but Juhnin took it on his own to break our spirit. He proved one terrible, bloody day that his prodigious skill with the axe could be used against people as well as trees. Any Argonian who stood in his way was hewn asunder, children as well. The Dwemer people of Lorikh closed their doors and their ears to the cries of murder."

"Horrible," gasped Kamdida.

"It is difficult to explain," said Sigerthe. "But the deaths of our living ones was not nearly as horrible to us as the death of our trees. You must understand that to my people, the Hist are
where we come from and where we are going. To destroy our bodies is nothing; to destroy our trees is to annihilate us utterly. When Juhnin then turned his axe on the Hist, he killed the land. The water disappeared, the animals died, and all the other life that the trees nourished crumbled and dried to dust."

"But you are still here?" asked Kamdida. "Why didn't you leave?"

"For us, we are trapped. I am one of the last of a dying people. Few of us are strong enough to live away from our ancestral groves, and sometimes, even now, there is a perfume in the air of Lorikh that gives us life. It will not be long until we are all gone."

Kamdida felt tears welling up in her eyes. "Then I will be alone in this horrible place with no trees and no friends."

'Ve Argonians have an expression," said Sigerthe with a sad smile, taking Kamdida's hand. "That the best soil for a seed is found in your heart."

Kamdida looked into the palm of her hand and saw that Sigerthe had given her a small black pellet. It was a seed. "It looks dead."

"It can only grow in one place in all Lorikh," said the old Argonian. "Outside an old cottage in the hills outside town. I cannot go there, for the owner would kill me on sight and like all my people, I am too frail to defend myself now. But you can go there and plant the seed."

"What will happen?" asked Kamdida. "Will the Hist return?"

"No. But some part of their power will."

That night, Kamdida stole from her house and into the hills. She knew the cottage Sigerthe had spoken of. Her aunt and uncle had told her never to go there. As she approached it, the door opened and an old but powerfully built man appeared, a mighty axe slung over his shoulder.

"What are you doing here, child?" he demanded. "In the dark, I almost took you to be a lizard man."

"I've lost my way in the dark," she said quickly. "I'm trying to get back to my home in Lorikh."

"Be on your way then."

"Do you have a candle I might have?" she asked piteously. "I've been walking in circles and I'm afraid I'll only return back here without any light."

The old man grumbled and walked into his house. Quickly, Kamdida dug a hole in the dry dirt and buried the seed as deeply as she could. He returned with a lit candle.

"See to it you don't come back here," he growled. "Or I'll chop you in half."
He returned to his house and fire. The next morning when he awoke and opened the door, he found that his cottage was entirely sealed within an enormous tree. He picked up his axe and delivered blow and after blow to the wood, but he could never break through. He tried side chops, but the wood healed itself. He tried an upper chop followed by an under chop to form a wedge, but the wood sealed.

Much time went by before someone discovered old Juhnin's emaciated body lying in front of his open door, still holding his blunted, broken axe. It was a mystery to all what he had been chopping with it, but the legend began circulating through Lorikh that Hist sap was found on the blade.

Shortly thereafter, small desert flowers began pushing through the dry dirt in the town. Trees and plants newly sown began to live tolerably well, if not luxuriantly. The Hist did not return, but Kamdida and the people of Lorikh noticed that at a certain time around twilight, long, wide shadows of great, bygone trees would fill the streets and hills.

Publisher's Note

"The Seed" is one of Marobar Sul's tales whose origins are well known. This tale originated from the Argonian slaves of southern Morrowind. "Marobar Sul" merely replaced the Dunmer with Dwemer and claimed he found it in a Dwemer ruin. Furthermore, he later claimed that the Argonian version of the tale was merely a retelling of his "original!"

Lorikh, while clearly not a Dwemer name, simply does not exist, and in fact "Lorikh" was a name commonly used, incorrectly, for Dunmer men in Gor Felim's plays. The Argonian versions of the story usually take place on Vvardenfell, usually in the Telvanni city of Sadrith Mora. Of course the so-called "scholars" of Temple Zero will probably claim this story has something to do with "Lorkhan" simply because the town starts with the letter L.
Sithis

Sithis is the start of the house. Before him was nothing, but the foolish Altmer have names for and revere this nothing. That is because they are lazy slaves. Indeed, from the Sermons, 'stasis asks merely for itself, which is nothing.'

Sithis sundered the nothing and mutated the parts, fashioning from them a myriad of possibilities. These ideas ebbed and flowed and faded away and this is how it should have been.

One idea, however, became jealous and did not want to die; like the stasis, he wanted to last. This was the demon Anui-El, who made friends, and they called themselves the Aedra. They enslaved everything that Sithis had made and created realms of everlasting imperfection. Thus are the Aedra the false gods, that is, illusion.

So Sithis begat Lorkhan and sent him to destroy the universe. Lorkhan! Unstable mutant!

Lorkhan had found the Aedric weakness. While each rebel was, by their nature, immeasurable, they were, through jealously and vanity, also separate from each other. They were also unwilling to go back to the nothing of before. So while they ruled their false dominions, Lorkhan filled the void with a myriad of new ideas. These ideas were legion. Soon it seemed that Lorkhan had a dominion of his own, with slaves and everlasting imperfections, and he seemed, for all the world, like an Aedra. Thus did he present himself as such to the demon Anui-El and the Eight Givers: as a friend.

Go unto the Sharmat Dagoth Ur as a friend.

AE HERMA MORA ALTADOON PADHOME LKHAN AE AI.

* ESM. ESO.
When King Maraneon's alchemist had to leave his station
After a laboratory experiment that yielded detonation,
The word went out that the King did want
A new savant
To mix his potions and brews.
But he declared he would only choose
A fellow who knew the tricks and the tools.
The King refused to hire on more fools.

After much deliberation, discussions, and debates,
The King picked two well-learned candidates.
Ianthippus Minthurk and Umphatic Faer,
An ambitious pair,
Vied to prove which one was the best.
Said the King, "There will be a test."
They went to a large chamber with herbs, gems, tomes,
Pots, measuring cups, all under high crystalline domes.

"Make me a tonic that will make me invisible,"
Laughed the King in a tone some would call risible.
So Umphatic Faer and Ianthippus Minthurk
Began to work,
Mincing herbs, mashing metal, refining strange oils,
Cautiously setting their cauldrons to bubbling boils,
Each on his own, sending mixing bowls mixing,
Sometimes peeking to see what the other was fixing.

After they had worked for nearly three-quarters an hour,
Both Ianthippus Minthurk and Umphatic Faer
Winked at the other, certain he won.
Said King Maraneon,
"Now you must taste the potions you've wrought,
Take a spoon and sample it right from your pot."
Minthurk vanished as his lips touched his brew,
But Faer tasted his and remained apparent in view.

"You think you mixed silver, blue diamonds, and yellow grass!"
The King laughed, "Look up, Faer, up to the ceiling glass.
The light falling makes the ingredients you choose
Quite different hues."
"What do you get," asked the floating voice, bold,
"Of a potion of red diamonds, blue grass, and gold?"
"By [Dwemer God]," said Faer, his face in a wince,
"I've made a potion to fortify my own intelligence."

Publisher's Note:

This poetry is so clearly in the style of Gor Felim that it really does not need any commentary. Note the simple rhyming scheme of AA/BB/CC, the sing-song but purposefully clumsy meter, and the recurring jokes at the obviously absurd names, Umphatic Faer and Ianthippus Minthurk. The final joke that the stupid alchemist invents a potion to make himself smarter by pure accident would have appealed to the anti-intellectualism of audiences in the Interregnum period, but would certainly be rejected by the Dwemer.

Note that even "Marobar Sul" refuses to name any Dwemer gods. The Dwemer religion, if it can even be called that, is one of the most complex and difficult puzzles of their culture.

Over the millennia, the song became a popular tavern song in High Rock before eventually disappearing from everything but scholarly books. Much like the Dwemer themselves.
Special Flora of Tamriel
by Hardin (the Herbalist)

(The Poppy, in) both black and white (varieties, may) be found growing wild in the mountains of Hammerfell. Their succulent pods are often the only nourishment for adventurers who find themselves in the wilderness without rations. It is said that (the) black and white poppies (imbibed) together have magical properties. When they are crushed and mixed with the milk of the agile-footed mountain goat, (the resulting) potion (that) allows the user to glide safely (aboveground).

Fire Fern, a perennial herb, (is native to the province of) Morrowind. The flowers are inconspicuous and often hidden. The glossy, evergreen foliage and (blossoms) are resistant to (the) conditions of high heat and bright light. A petal from this plant placed under (the) adventurer's tongue will provide protection from the heat and fire (of) the lava pits and (thermal) streams (found) around Dagoth-Ur.

(Dragon's Tongue, a) common name for a (fernlike) herb found in Black Marsh, is especially prolific around the area of the Ultherus Swamp. It is a beautiful wildflower (whose) name comes from the fire-red fronds that protect its golden (efflorescence). As pretty as it is, however, it is a deadly poison to most living beings and needs to be avoided by adventurers, especially unprotected ones, as it is lethal to the touch. It is said, however, that Argonians can (handle) the plant and use the sap derived from its roots (to enhance) their endurance.

Domica Redwort is an herb grown by many residents of Valenwood for their beautiful and showy flowers. They attain a height of about three feet and (sport) feathery leaves; the flowers are usually bright red. In addition to their beauty, they are said to have the magical (ability of enhancing) the appearance of anyone who carries or wears one of the (blossoms).

Ironwood Nut (is a hard-shelled fruit that) comes from the (ironwood) trees (growing) deep in the forests of Skyrim. The wood (of) these trees is (as) hard as the metal (after) which it is named. The very rare black (variety of) ironwood (tree) is said to produce a nut which is very succulent and (is) believed to (greaten) the strength of the adventurer who is able to crack its shell (and partake of it).

The Ginko leaves which are found along the banks of rivers and lakes in Hammerfell are most inconspicuous, only (their) peculiar half-moon shape (making them) noticeable. (The edible foliage) is very sweet and (quite) tasty. Legend has it that when mixed properly with the pulp of the aloe plant, the (resulting concoction) has the ability (of increasing) one's stamina for a short while.

The Somnalius Fern can be found in the swamps of Black Marsh. The fronds (of) this plant are light green and quite delicate. Picking a frond can be very difficult, (as they usually

* ESD. ESM.
crumble to the touch, but once retrieved it can be used to put an enemy to sleep for a short while by passing it under his nose.

Arrowroot is a thick, rubbery tuber that can be found in the province of Valenwood. The plant is quite difficult to find as its aboveground foliage is very meager and scrawny. But the root itself can be most beneficial to the gatherer as it has magical properties. The paste made from grinding the root is quite wholesome and can improve the user's accuracy with a bow and arrow, or other missile weapon.

Nightshade is reputed to be a very poisonous herb. However, the variety found in many parts of Elsweyr is cherished by Khajiits who have taken up careers in thievery. Many Khajiits will tuck a piece of Nightshade inside their armor to increase their abilities to skulk, hide, and become invisible.

NOTES

1 ESM. Not in ESD.
2 ESM. ESD reads "Poppies."
3 ESM. ESD reads ", can".
4 ESD. Not in ESM.
5 ESM. Not in ESD.
6 ESM. ESD reads "a".
7 ESD. Not in ESM.
8 ESM. ESD reads "above the ground can be made".
9 ESM. ESD reads "native to".
10 ESM. ESD reads "flowers".
11 ESD. Not in ESM.
12 ESM. ESD reads "an".
13 ESM. ESD reads "found in".
14 ESM. Not in ESD.
15 ESD. Not in ESM.
16 ESM. ESD reads "Dragon's-Tongue,".
17 ESM. ESD reads "fernlike".
18 ESM. ESD reads ", It".
19 ESM. ESD reads ", Its".
20 ESM. ESD reads "flower".
21 ESM. Not in ESD.
22 ESM. ESD reads "pick".
23 ESM. ESD reads "as an enhancement to".
24 ESM. ESD reads "have".
25 ESM. ESD reads "abilities to enhance".
26 ESM. ESD reads "flowers".
27 ESM. ESD reads ", this rare nut".
28 ESM. ESD reads "Ironwood".
29 ESM. ESD reads "which grow".
30 ESM. ESD reads "from".
31 ESD. Not in ESM.
32 ESM. ESD reads "for".
33 ESM. Not in ESD.
34 ESD. Not in ESM.
35 ESD. Not in ESM.
36 ESM. ESD reads "strength".
37 ESM. Not in ESD.
38 ESM. ESD reads "its".
39 ESM. ESD reads "makes it".
40 ESM. ESD reads "It".
ESM. Not in ESD.

ESM. ESD reads "potion".

ESM. ESD reads "to increase".

ESM. ESD reads "from".

ESM. Not in ESD.

ESM. ESD reads "very".

ESM. ESD reads "Arrowroot".

ESM. ESD reads "very tasty".

ESM. Not in ESD.

ESM. ESD reads "followed the career path of".
Spirit of the Daedra

HOW YOU SHOULD KNOW US

DEATH, DEFEAT, AND FEAR

We do not die. We do not fear death.

Destroy the Body, and the Animus is cast into The Darkness. But the Animus returns.

But we are not all brave.

We feel pain, and fear it. We feel shame, and fear it. We feel loss, and fear it. We hate the Darkness, and fear it.

The Scamps have small thoughts, and cannot fear greatly.

The Vermai have no thoughts, and cannot fear.

The Dremora have deep thoughts, and must master fear to overcome it.

THE CLAN BOND

We are not born; we have not fathers nor mothers, yet we have kin and clans.

The clan-form is strong. It shapes body and thought.

In the clan-form is strength and purpose.

THE OATH BOND

We serve by choice. We serve the strong, so that their strength might shield us.

Clans serve by long-practice, but practice may change.

Dremora have long served Dagon but not always so.

Practice is secure when oath-bonds are secure, and trust is shared.

When oath-bonds are weak, there is pain, and shame, and loss, and Darkness, and great fear.

* ESM. ESO.
HOW WE THINK ABOUT MAN

Perhaps you find Scamps comic, and Vermai brutish.
How then do you imagine we view you humans?

You are the Prey, and we are the Huntsmen.

The Scamps are the Hounds, and the Vermai the Beaters.

Your flesh is sweet, and the chase is diverting.

As you may sometimes praise the fox or hare, admiring its cunning and speed, and lamenting as the hounds tear its flesh, so do we sometimes admire our prey, and secretly applaud when it cheats our snares or eludes pursuit.

But, like all worldly things, you will in time wear, and be used up. You age, grow ugly, weak, and foolish. You are always lost, late or soon.

Sometimes the prey turns upon us and bites. It is a small thing. When wounded or weary, we fly away to restore. Sometimes a precious thing is lost, but that risk makes the chase all the sweeter.

MAN'S MYSTERY

Man is mortal, and doomed to death and failure and loss.

This lies beyond our comprehension - why do you not despair?
[87] Starlover's Log

{{[Scrawled hastily on a page from a log journal]}}

6th moon ....... "Alas, the Battlespire appears to be falling into the hands of evil. Their many attempts in the past have failed, until now. Dagon seems to have new minions at his side this time. These new horrors are not at all too powerful beyond our magicks and weaponry, but their numbers are feverishly great. We grow low on supplies and soldiers for this holdout. I fear the worst."

8th moon ....... "I have presented to the few remaining Battlemages my last hope plan. I will fight my way to the {bowels} of the Battlespire, where I will mount Dragonne Papre, my Dragon companion. From his lair, we will take flight. Since the Weir Gate has been taken, teleportation is not possible. Only Papre can make such a journey to the Imperial Palace. There, we will report the evil infection and return with a regimental force of rescue. May the Powers be with me."

9th moon........ "It is as I feared. A carcass is all I have come to find. They have sealed the main gate so Papre could not escape. I am not sorrowful though, for I will be eternally reunited with Dragonne Papre. Hope for the living is lost. My name is Samar Starlover. Tell my sister I am dead, and if all the seas were ink, I could not write enough how I shall miss her."

NOTES

1 ESLB. Not in ESM.
2 ESM. ESLB reads "bowells".
This looks interesting," said Indyk, his eyes narrowing to observe the black caravan making its way to the spires of the secluded castle. A gaudy, alien coat of arms marked each carriage, the lacquer glistening in the light of the moons. "Who do you suppose they are?"

"They're obviously well-off," smiled his partner, Heriah. "Perhaps some new Imperial Cult dedicated to the acquisition of wealth?"

"Go into town and find out what you can about the castle," said Indyk. "I'll see if I can learn anything about who these strangers are. We meet on this hill tomorrow night."

Heriah had two great skills: picking locks and picking information. By dusk of the following day, she had returned to the hill. Indyk joined her an hour later.

"The place is called Ald Olyra," she explained. "It dates back to the second era when a collection of nobles built it to protect themselves during one of the epidemics. They didn't want any of the diseased masses to get into their midst and spread the plague, so they built up quite a sophisticated security system for the time. Of course, it's mostly fallen into ruin, but I have a good idea about what kind of locks and traps might still be operational. What did you find out?"

"I wasn't nearly so successful," frowned Indyk. "No one seemed to have any idea about the group, even that that there were here. I was about to give up, but at the charterhouse, I met a monk who said that his masters were a hermetic group called the Order of St Eadnua. I talked to him for some time, this fellow name of Parathion, and it seems they're having some sort of ritual feast tonight."

"Are they wealthy?" asked Heriah impatiently.

"Embarrassingly so according to the fellow. But they're only at the castle for tonight."

"I have my picks on me," winked Heriah. "Opportunity has smiled on us."

She drew a diagram of the castle in the dirt: the main hall and kitchen were near the front gate, and the stables and secured armory were in the back. The thieves had a system that never failed. Heriah would find a way into the castle and collect as much loot as possible, while Indyk provided the distraction. He waited until his partner had scaled the wall before rapping on the gate. Perhaps this time he would be a bard, or a lost adventurer. The details were most fun to improvise.
Heriah heard Indyk talking to the woman who came to the gate, but she was too far away to hear the words exchanged. He was evidently successful: a moment later, she heard the door shut. The man had charm, she would give him that.

Only a few of the traps and locks to the armory had been set. Undoubtedly, many of the keys had been lost in time. Whatever servants had been in charge of securing the Order's treasures had brought a few new locks to affix. It took extra time to maneuver the intricate hasps and bolts of the new traps before proceeding to the old but still working systems, but Heriah found her heart beating with anticipation. Whatever lay beyond the door, she thought, must be of sufficient value to merit such protection.

When at last the door swung quietly open, the thief found her avaricious dreams paled to reality. A mountain of golden treasure, ancient relics glimmering with untapped magicka, weaponry of matchless quality, gemstones the size of her fist, row after row of strange potions, and stacks of valuable documents and scrolls. She was so enthralled by the sight, she did not hear the man behind her approach.

"You must be Lady Tressed," said the voice and she jumped.

It was a monk in a black, hooded robe, intricately woven with silver and gold threads. For a moment, she could not speak. This was the sort of encounter that Indyk loved, but she could think to do nothing but nod her head with what she hoped looked like certainty.

"I'm afraid I'm a little lost," she stammered.

"I can see that," the man laughed. "That's the armory. I'll show you the way to the dining hall. We were afraid you weren't going to arrive. The feast is nearly over."

Heriah followed the monk across the courtyard, to the double doors leading to the dining hall. A robe identical to the one he was wearing hung on a hook outside, and he handed it to her with a knowing smile. She slipped it on. She mimicked him as she lowered the hood over her head and entered the hall.

Torches illuminated the figures within around the large table. Each wore the uniform black robe that covered all features, and from the look of things, the feast was over. Empty plates, platters, and glasses filled every inch of the wood with only the faintest spots and dribbles of the food remaining. It was a breaking of a fast it seemed. For a moment, Heriah stopped to think about poor, lost Lady Tressed who had missed her opportunity for gluttony.

The only unusual item on the table was its centerpiece: a huge golden hourglass which was on its last minute's worth of sand.

Though each person looked alike, some were sleeping, some were chatting merrily to one another, and one was playing a lute. Indyk's lute, she noticed, and then noticed Indyk's ring on the man's finger. Heriah was suddenly grateful for the anonymity of the hood. Perhaps Indyk would not realize that it was she, and that she had blundered.

"Tressed," said the young man to the assembled, who turned as one to her and burst into applause.
The conscious members of the Order arose to kiss her hand, and introduce themselves.

"Nirdla."

"Suelec."

"Kyler."

The names got stranger.

"Toniop."

"Htillyts."

"Noihtarap."

She could not help laughing: "I understand. It's all backwards. Your real names are Aldrin, Celeus, Relyk, Poinot, Styllith, Parathion."

"Of course," said the young man. "Won't you have a seat?"

"Sey," giggled Heriah, getting into the spirit of the masque and taking an empty chair. "I suppose that when the hourglass runs out, the backwards names go back to normal?"

"That's correct, Tressed," said the woman next to her. "It's just one of our Order's little amusements. This castle seemed like the appropriately ironic venue for our feast, devised as it was to shun the plague victims who were, in their way, a walking dead."

Heriah felt herself light-headed from the odor of the torches, and bumped into the sleeping man next to her. He fell face forward onto the table.

"Poor Esruoc Tsrif," said a neighboring man, helping to prop the body up. "He's given us so much."

Heriah stumbled to her feet and began walking uncertainly for the front gate.

"Where are you going, Tressed?" asked one of the figures, his voice taking on an unpleasant mocking quality.

"My name isn't Tressed," she mumbled, gripping Indyk's arm. "I'm sorry, partner. We need to go."

The last crumb of sand fell in the hour glass as the man pulled back his hood. It was not Indyk. It was not even human, but a stretched grotesquerie of a man with hungry eyes and a wide mouth filled with tusk-like fangs.

Heriah fell back into the chair of the figure they called Esruoc Tsrif. His hood fell open, revealing the pallid, bloodless face of Indyk. As she began to scream, they fell on her.
In her last living moment, Heriah finally spelled "Tressed" backwards.
Chimere Graegyn was a retainer of the ambitious Direnni clan. The Direnni derived the bulk of their power from their traffickings with Daedra, a very profitable but risky path to success. Chimere was perhaps the cleverest and most ambitious of the Direnni summoners. He dared to scheme against Lord Dagon, and won. When his trick succeeded, Dagon was cast into Oblivion. However, in the instant of his betrayal, Dagon struck out against the mortal who tricked him. Chimere's pact assured that he would live forever in his home town among the happy voices of his friends and countrylemen. Twisting the literal words of Chimere's pact, Dagon scooped up tiny Caecilly Island (a small island off the coast of Northmoor) and hurled in into the void. All Chimere's friends and countrylemen were instantly killed, though the sounds of their voices remained to torment Chimere's memory. Chimere was condemned to live forever, to grow progressively old and crippled with arthritis, and to contemplate the tragic consequences of his defiance of fate and fortune in cheating a Daedra Lord.

In the earlier, more lucid sections of the journal, you also find other information of relevance to your current plight.

Searching for details of Chimere's successful defeat of Dagon, you find the following:

Armor of the Saviour's Hide:

Created by the Daedra Lord Malacath, this armor has the marvelous property of turning the blow of an oathbreaker. Chimere tricked Dagon into swearing an oath against the Powers which he had no intention of keeping. The Hide of the Savior turned Dagon's titanic fury long enough for Chimere to deliver his own attack -- an incantation invoked upon Dagon's "Protonymic" (i.e., Incantory True Name). Unfortunately, like many of Malacath's gifts, the armor is a mixed blessing. It also makes its wearer exceptionally vulnerable to magical attacks, so one should only wear it for particular occasions.

Dagon's Protonymic:

Chimere used Dagon's Protonymic in an incantation to invoke a sorcery that would gradually drain all of Dagon's power into the void. Chimere miscalculated, however, not realizing that Dagon's resistance could slow the draining of his power, even if it could not stop it. As a
result, Dagon had the time to curse Chimere with a literal fulfillment of the terms of his bargain with Chimere. Rather than let his power drain into the void, Dagon cast it all into his curse. As a result, Caecilly Island was cast into the void, all its citizens were horribly slain, and Chimere was condemned to live forever among the ruins of his greatest ambition.

{Rituals of the Hunt:}{/n}

The Chapel of the Innocent Quarry: Chimere believes that Dagon had Caecilly Island established as the site of the Chapel of the Innocent Quarry to personally mock and torment Chimere. The green crystal structure was created by enchantments, and is the only building on the island erected since it was ripped from Tamriel and loosed in the void.

{The Spear:}{/n}

Supposedly the Spear of Bitter Mercy used in the Wild Hunts could not be handled by any mortal or immortal save the ones sanctified to the Hunt and bound by its strictures. However, Chimere has determined that though the Spear's power is great, it is not unlimited, and that certain enchanted items -- for instance, the Armor of the Savior's Hide, forged by Malacath -- are sufficient to protect a mortal or immortal bearer from its maleficent energies. {/n}
The following text, originally entitled Tamrielic Artifacts, appears twice in The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind, each with a unique introductory note: As Famed Artifacts of Tamriel (bk_Artifacts_Tamriel) from the Tribunal add-on, and as Tamrielic Lore (bk_Yagrum's_Book). To avoid repetitions, I give the text only once, but with both introductions. The left introductory note is from Tamrielic Lore, the right one from Famed Artifacts of Tamriel.

Tamrielic Artifacts

The following are notes I have gathered, over the past centuries, of items of unimaginable significance. All have been seen, owned, and lost, again and again throughout Tamriel. Some may be myth, others may be hoax, but regardless, many have lost their lives attempting to find or protect these very coveted items.

{Listed below are some of the more storied items found throughout Tamrielic lore. The existence of some has been proven, while others may simply be the stuff of legend. Regardless, these items have found their way into the tales we tell our children, and our children will tell their children, and are inextricably linked to the}1

Lord's Mail

Sometimes called the Armor of Morihaus or the gift of Kynareth, this is an ancient cuirass of unsurpassable quality. It grants the wearer power to absorb health, resist the effects of spells, and cure oneself of poison when used. It is said that whenever Kynareth deigns the wearer unworthy, the Lord's Mail will be taken away and hidden for the next chosen one.

Ebony Mail

The Ebony Mail is a breastplate created before recorded history by the Dark Elven goddess Boethiah. It is she who determines who should possess the Ebony Mail and for how long a time. If judged worthy, its power grants the wearer added resistance of fire, magicka, and grants a magical shield. It is Boethiah alone who determines when a person is ineligible to bear the Ebony Mail any longer, and the goddess can be very capricious.

Spell Breaker

Spell Breaker, superficially a Dwemer tower shield, is one of the most ancient relics of Tamriel. Aside from its historical importance in the Battle of Rourken-Shalidor, the Spell Breaker protects its wielder almost completely from any spell caster, either by reflecting magicks or silencing any mage about to cast a spell. It is said that Spell Breaker still searches for its original owner, and will not remain the property of anyone else for long. For most, possessing Spell Breaker for any length of time is power enough.

Chrysamere

The Paladin's Blade is an ancient claymore with offensive capabilities surpassed only by its

1 ESM. ESO.
own defenses. It lends the wielder health, protects him or her from fire, and reflects any spells cast against the wielder back to the caster. Seldom has Chrysamere been wielded by any bladesman for any length of time, for it chooses not to favor one champion.

Staff of Magnus

The Staff of Magnus, one of the elder artifacts of Tamriel, was a metaphysical battery of sorts for its creator, Magnus. When used, it absorbs an enemy's health and mystical energy. In time, the Staff will abandon the mage who wields it before he becomes too powerful and upsets the mystical balance it is sworn to protect.

Warlock's Ring

The Warlock's Ring of the Archmage Syrabane is one of the most popular relics of myth and fable. In Tamriel's ancient history, Syrabane saved all of the continent by judicious use of his Ring, and ever since, it has helped adventurers with less lofty goals. It is best known for its ability to reflect spells cast at its wearer and to improve his or her speed and to restore health. No adventurer can wear the Warlock's Ring for long, for it is said that the Ring is Syrabane's alone to command.

Ring of Phynaster

The Ring of Phynaster was made hundreds of years ago by a man who needed good defenses to survive his adventurous life. Thanks to the Ring, Phynaster lived for hundreds of years, and since then it has passed from person to person. The Ring improves its wearer's overall resistance to poison, magicka, and shock. Still, Phynaster was cunning and cursed the ring so that it eventually disappears from its holder's possessions and returns to another resting place, discontent to stay anywhere but with Phynaster himself.

Ring of Khajiit

The Ring of the Khajiit is an ancient relic, hundreds of years older than Rajhin, the thief that made the Ring famous. It was Rajhin who used the Ring's powers to make himself invisible and as quick as the breath of wind. Using the Ring, he became the most successful burglar in Elsweyr's history. Rajhin's eventual fate is a mystery, but according to legend, the Ring rebelled against such constant use and disappeared, leaving Rajhin helpless before his enemies.

Mace of Molag Bal

Also known as the Vampire's Mace, the Mace of Molag Bal drains its victims of magicka and gives it to the bearer. It also has the ability to transfer an enemy's strength to its wielder. Molag Bal has been quite free with his artifact. There are many legends about the Mace. It seems to be a favorite for vanquishing wizards.

Masque of Clavicus Vile

Ever the vain one, Clavicus Vile made a masque suited to his own personality. The bearer of the Masque is more likely to get a positive response from the people of Tamriel. The higher his personality, the larger the bonus. The best known story of the Masque tells the tale of
Avalea, a noblewoman of some renown. As a young girl, she was grossly disfigured by a spiteful servant. Avalea made a dark deal with Clavicus Vile and received the Masque in return. Though the Masque did not change her looks, suddenly she had the respect and admiration of everyone. A year and a day after her marriage to a well connected baron, Clavicus Vile reclaimed the Masque. Although pregnant with his child, Avalea was banished from the Baron's household. Twenty one years and one day later, Avalea's daughter claimed her vengeance by slaying the Baron.

Mehrunes Razor

The Dark Brotherhood has coveted this ebony dagger for generations. This mythical artifact is capable of slaying any creature instantly. History does not record any bearers of Mehrune's Razor. However, the Dark Brotherhood was once decimated by a vicious internal power struggle. It is suspected that the Razor was involved.

Cuirass of the Savior's Hide

Another of Hircine's artifacts was the Cuirass of the Savior's Hide. The Cuirass has the special ability to resist magicka. Legend has it that Hircine rewarded his peeled hide to the first and only mortal to have ever escaped his hunting grounds. This unknown mortal had the hide tailored into this magical Cuirass for his future adventures. The Savior's Hide has a tendency to travel from hero to hero as though it has a mind of its own.

Spear of Bitter Mercy

One of the more mysterious artifacts is the Spear of Bitter Mercy. Little to nothing is known about the Spear. There are no recorded histories but many believe it to be of Daedric origin. The only known legend about it is its use by a mighty hero during the fall of the Battlespire. The hero was aided by the Spear in the defeat of Mehrunes Dagon and the recapturing of the Battlespire. Since that time, the Spear of Bitter Mercy has made few appearances within Tamriel.

Daedric Scourge

The Daedric Scourge is a mighty mace forged from sacred ebony in the Fires of Fickledire. The legendary weapon of Mackkan, it was once a fierce weapon used to send spirits of black back into Oblivion. The weapon has the ability to summon creatures from Oblivion. Once a tool used against the Daedric Lords in the Battlespire, it now roams the land with adventurers.

Bow of Shadows

Legend has it that the Bow of Shadows was forged by the Daedra Nocturnal. The legendary ranger, Raerlas Ghile, was granted the Bow for a secret mission that failed, and the Bow was lost. Raerlas did not go down without a hearty fight and is said to have, with the aid of the Bow, taken scores of his foes with him. The Bow grants the user the ability of invisibility and increased speed. Many sightings of the Bow of Shadows have been reported, and it is even said that the sinister Dark Elf assassin of the Second Era, Dram, once wielded this bow.
Fists of Randagulf

Randagulf of Clan Begalin goes down in Tamrielic history as one of the mightiest warriors from Skyrim. He was known for his courage and ferocity in battle and was a factor in many battles. He finally met his fate when King Harald conquered Skyrim. King Harald respected this great hero and took Randagulf's gauntlets for his own. After King Harald died, the gauntlets disappeared. The King claimed that the Fists granted the bearer added strength.

Ice Blade of the Monarch

The Ice Blade of the Monarch is truly one of Tamriel's most prized artifacts. Legend has it that the Evil Archmage Almion Celmo enchanted the claymore of a great warrior with the soul of a Frost Monarch, a stronger form of the more common Frost Atronach. The warrior, Thurgnarr Assi, was to play a part in the assassination of a great king in a far off land, and become the new leader. The assassination failed and the Archmage was imprisoned. The Ice Blade freezes all who feel its blade. The Blade circulates from owner to owner, never settling in one place for long.

Ring of Surroundings

Little is known of this prize but it is said that it lends the wearer the ability to blend in with their surroundings.

Boots of the Apostle

The Boots of the Apostle are a true mystery. The wearer of the boots is rumored to be able to levitate, though nobody has ever seen them used.

The Mentor's Ring

This ring is a prized possession for any apprentice to magic. It lends the wearer the ability to increase their intelligence and wisdom, thus making their use of magic more efficient. The High Wizard Carni Asron is said to be the creator of the Ring. It was a construct for his young apprentices while studying under his guidance. After Asron's death, the Ring and several other possessions vanished and have been circulated throughout Tamriel.

Ring of the Wind

No facts are known about this Ring, but the title and the few rumors lend one to think it grants the wearer added speed.

Vampiric Ring

One of the more deadly and rare artifacts in Tamriel is the Vampiric Ring. It is said that the Ring has the power to steal its victim's health and grant it to the wearer. The exact nature and origin of the Ring is wholly unknown, but many elders speak of its evil creation in Morrowind long, long ago by a cult of Vampire followers. The Vampiric Ring is an extremely rare artifact and is only seen every few hundred cycles of the moons.
Eleidon's Ward

Eleidon was a holy knight of legend in Breton history. He was a sought after man for his courage and determination to set all wrongs right. In one story, it is said that he rescued a Baron's daughter from sure death at the hands of an evil warlord. For his reward, the Baron spent all of his riches to have an enchanted shield built for Eidelon. The Shield granted Eleidon the opportunity to heal his wounds.

Staff of Hasedoki

Hasedoki was said to have been a very competitive wizard. He wandered the land in search for a wizard who was greater than he. To the best of all knowledge, he never found a wizard who could meet up to his challenge. It is said that he felt so lonely and isolated because so many feared his power, that he bonded his life-force into his very own staff, where his soul remains to this very day. Magic users all over Tamriel have been searching for this magical staff. Granting its wielder a protection of magicka, it is a sure prize for any magic user.

Bloodworm Helm

The King of Worms was said to have left behind one of his prized possessions, the Bloodworm Helm. The Helm is a construct of magically formed bone. The Helm allows the user to summon skeletons and control the undead. It would be a prized artifact to a necromancer.

Dragonbone Mail

This cuirass is one of the greatest artifacts any collector or hero could own. It is constructed of real dragon bone and was enchanted by the first Imperial Battlemage, Zurin Arctus, in the early years of the Third Era. It is a truly exquisite piece of work and many have sought to possess it. The properties of the Cuirass allow the wearer to resist fire, and to damage an enemy with a blast of fire. Little is known about the involvement of Zurin Arctus with the enchantment of the Cuirass, but an old tale speaks of a debt that he owed to a traveling warrior. Like the warrior, the Dragonbone Mail never stays put for long.

Skull Crusher

The Skull Crusher is an amazingly large, and powerful weapon. The Warhammer was created in a fire, magically fueled by the Wizard, Dorach Gusal, and was forged by the great weaponsmith, Hilbongard Rolamus. The steel is magically hardened and the weight of the weapon is amazingly light, which makes for more powerful swings and deadly blows. The Warhammer was to be put on display for a festival, but thieves got it first. The Skull Crusher still travels Tamriel in search of its creators.

Goldbrand

This magical Sword is almost a complete mystery. Thieves tell tales about its golden make and how it was actually forged by ancient dragons of the North. Their tales claim that it was given to a great knight who was sworn to protect the dragons. The Sword lends its wielder the ability to do fire damage on an enemy. Goldbrand has not been sighted in recent history and is said to be awaiting a worthy hero.
Fang of Haynekhtnamet

Black Marsh was once known to be inhabited with what the Argonians called the Wamasus. Northern men considered them to be intelligent dragons with lightning for blood. One such mighty beast, Haynekhtnamet, was slain by the Northern men, though it took 7 days and nights, and a score of men. One of the surviving men took a fang home as a trophy. The fang was carved down into a blade and fashioned into a small dagger. The Dagger mysteriously houses some of the beast's magical properties and grants the user the ability to do shock damage on an opponent. This unique Dagger is seen occasionally by traveling heroes.

Umbra Sword

The Umbra Sword was enchanted by the ancient witch Naenra Waerr, and its sole purpose was the entrapment of souls. Used in conjunction with a soul gem, the Sword allows the wielder the opportunity to imprison an enemy's soul in the gem. Naenra was executed for her evil creation, but not before she was able to hide the Sword. The Umbra Sword is very choosy when it comes to owners and therefore remains hidden until a worthy one is found.

Denstagmer's Ring

All that is known of this Ring is that it may grant the user protection from certain elements. Even the name Denstagmer is a mystery.

Helm of Oreyn Bearclaw

One of Valenwood's legendary heroes is Oreyn Bearclaw. Son of King Faume Toad-Eye, he was a respected clan hunter and a future leader. Wood Elven legend claims Oreyn single handedly defeated Glenhwyaunva, the witch-serpent of the Elven wood, forever bringing peace to his clan. Oreyn would go on to accomplish numerous other deeds, eventually losing his life to the Knahaten Flu. His Helm stood as a monument of his stature for future generations to remember. The Helm was lost eventually, as the Clan split, and is now a treasured artifact for adventurers. The Helm of Oreyn Bearclaw is rumored to improve the wearers agility and endurance.

Daedric Crescent Blade

Probably the most rare and even outlawed item of all the great prizes is the Daedric Crescent Blade. The Blade was used by Mehrunes Dagon's Daedric forces in the capture of the Imperial Battlespire. These extremely unique Blades were gathered up and destroyed after the Battlespire was recaptured by the Empire. All but one it seems. Though the Empire believes them all to be destroyed, it is rumored that one still remains in existence, somewhere in Tamriel, though none have ever seen it. The Blade lends it's wielder the ability to do great damage on an enemy and allows him to paralyze and put heavy wear on his enemy's armor. Quite the prize for any mighty warrior, if it does indeed exist.

NOTES

1 ESM only. The text ends as abrupt.
I.
I sing of Ellabeth, the Queen of the Axe,
Who could fell a full elm with two hatchet hacks.
She could rip apart Valenwood just for her fun.
She studied under Alhedil in Tel Aruhn.
He taught her the jabs, the strokes, and the stance
To make an ax-swing into an elegant dance.

He taught her the barbed axes of the Orcs bold,
The six-foot-long axes favored in Winterhold,
The hollow-bladed axes of the Elves of the West,
Which whistle when they swing through flesh.
With a single-headed axe, she could behead two men.
With a double-headed axe, she could fell more than ten.
Yet where she lives in legend has most to do
With the man who hacked her own heart in two.

II.
Nienolas Ulwarth the Mighty, who hailed from Blackrose,
The only man who could best Ellabeth with ax blows,
In a minute, she chopped fifty trees; he, fifty-three.
She felt at once that he was the only man for she.
When she professed her love, Nienolas just laughed.
He said he loved more his ax handle and shaft.
And if they weren't enough to slake all his desire
There was another woman named Lorinthyrae.
Fury gripped the Queen of the Axe, the maid Ellabeth,
And her thoughts turned to pondering musings of death.
Mephala and Sheogorath gave her a revengeful scheme
And for weeks, she worked on it in a state like a dream.
In the still of the night, she kidnapped her rival
And then told her choices between doom and survival.

III.

* ESM. ESO.
Lorinthryae awoke in a house in the moors
In a room lightly furnished except for three doors.
Ellabeth explained that behind one of the doors the lass
Would find Ellabeth's and her love, the great Nienolas.
Behind the second lived a ravenous demon.
And behind the third, an exit to freedom.
She must choose a door, and to aid her decision
If she pondered too long, the axe'd make a division.
Lorinthryae wept, and Ellabeth felt contrite,
And opened the door to her immediate right.
It led to the moors, and as she slipped through the gloom,
She advised Lorinthryae to likewise abandon the room.
Lorinthryae ignored her and did not feel her will bend.
Nienolas was largely behind the first door she opened.

IV.

Ellabeth had lied; there was no demon of lore.
The top third of Nienolas was behind the third door.
The True Nature of Orcs

Orcs were born during the latter days of the Dawn Era. History has mislabeled them beastfolk, related to the goblin races, but the Orcs are actually the children of Trinimac, strongest of the Altmeri ancestor spirits. When Trinimac was eaten by the Daedroth Prince Boethiah, and transformed in that foul god's insides, the Orcs were transformed as well. The ancient name for the Orcs is 'Orsimer,' which means 'The Pariah Folk.' They now follow Malauch, the remains of Trinimac.

Who is Malauch?

He is more commonly know as the Daedroth Prince Malacath, 'whose sphere is the patronage of the spurned and ostracized, the sworn oath, and the bloody curse.' He is not technically a Daedra Lord, nor do the other Daedra recognize him as such, but this is fitting for his sphere. Of old he was Trinimac, the champion of the High Elven pantheon, in some places more popular than Auri-El, who protected them against enemies without and within. When Trinimac and his followers attempted to halt the Velothi dissident movement, Boethiah ate him. Trinimac's body and spirit were corrupted, and he emerged as Malacath. His followers were likewise changed for the worse. Despised by everyone, especially the inviolate Auri-El, they quickly fled to the northern wastes, near Saarthal. They fought Nords and Chimer for a place in the world, but did not get much. In Skyrim, Malacath is called Orkey, or Old Knocker, and his battles with Ysmir are legendary.
Almalexia lay in her bed of fur, dreaming. Not until the sun burned through her window, infusing the light wood and flesh colors of her chamber in a milky glow did she open her eyes. It was quiet and serene, a stunning reverse of the flavor of her dreams, so full of blood and celebration. For a few moments, she simply stared at the ceiling, trying to sort through her visions.

In the courtyard of her palace was a boiling pool which steamed in the coolness of the winter morning. At the wave of her hand, it cleared and she saw the face and form of her lover Vivec in his study to the north. She did not want to speak right away: he looked so handsome in his dark red robes, writing his poetry as he did every morning.

"Vivec," she said, and he raised his head in a smile, looking at her face across thousands of miles. "I have seen a vision of the end of the war."

"After eighty years, I don't think anyone can imagine an end," said Vivec with a smile, but he grew serious, trusting Almalexia's prophecies. "Who will win? Morrowind or the Cyrodilic Empire?"

"Without Sotha Sil in Morrowind, we will lose," she replied.

"My intelligence tells me the Empire will strike us to the north in early springtide, by First Seed at the latest. Could you go to Artaeum and convince him to return?"

"I'll leave today," she said, simply.

The Empress paced around her cell. Wintertide gave her wasteful energy, while in the summer she would merely sit by her window and be grateful for each breath of stale swamp wind that came to cool her. Across the room, her unfinished tapestry of a dance at the
Imperial Court seemed to mock her. She ripped it from its frame, tearing the pieces apart as they drifted to the floor.

Then she laughed at her own useless gesture of defiance. She would have plenty of time to repair it and craft a hundred more. The Emperor had locked her up in Castle Giovesse seven years ago, and would likely keep her here until he or she died.

With a sigh, she pulled the cord to call her knight, Zuuk. He appeared at the door within minutes, fully uniformed as befitted an Imperial Guard. Most of the native Kothringi tribesmen of Black Marsh preferred to go about naked, but Zuuk had taken a positive delight to fashion. His silver, reflective skin was scarcely visible, only on his face, neck, and hands.

"Your Imperial Highness," he said with a bow.

"Zuuk," said Empress Tavia. "I'm bored. Let's discuss methods of assassinating my husband today."

14 Morning Star, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

The chimes proclaiming South Wind's Prayer echoed through the wide boulevards and gardens of the Imperial City, calling all to their temples. The Emperor Reman III always attended a service at the Temple of the One, while his son and heir Prince Juilek found it more political to attend a service at a different temple for each religious holiday. This year, it was at the cathedral Benevolence of Mara.

The Benevolence's services were mercifully short, but it was not until well after noon that the Emperor was able to return to the palace. By then, the arena combatants were impatiently waiting for the start of the ceremony. The crowd was far less restless, as the Potentate Versidue-Shaie had arranged for a demonstration from a troupe of Khajiiti acrobats.

"Your religion is so much more convenient than mine," said the Emperor to his Potentate by way of an apology. "What is the first game?"

"A one-on-one battle between two able warriors," said the Potentate, his scaly skin catching the sun as he rose. "Armed befitting their culture."

"Sounds good," said the Emperor and clapped his hands. "Let the sport commence!"

As soon as he saw the two warriors enter the arena to the roar of the crowd, Emperor Reman III remembered that he had agreed to this several months before and forgotten about it. One combatant was the Potentate's son, Savirien-Chorak, a glistening ivory-yellow eel, gripping his katana and wakizashi with his thin, deceptively weak looking arms. The other was the Emperor's son, Prince Juilek, in ebony armor with a savage Orcish helm, shield and longsword at his side.

"This will be fascinating to watch," hissed the Potentate, a wide grin across his narrow face. "I don't know if I've even seen a Cyrodiil fight an Akavir like this. Usually it's army against
army. At last we can settle which philosophy is better -- to create armor to combat swords as your people do, or to create swords to combat armor as mine do."

No one in the crowd, aside from a few scattered Akaviri counselors and the Potentate himself wanted Savirien-Chorak to win, but there was a collective intake of breath at the sight of his graceful movements. His swords seemed to be a part of him, a tail coming from his arms to match the one behind him. It was a trick of counterbalance, allowing the young serpent man to roll up into a circle and spin into the center of the ring in offensive position. The Prince had to plod forward the less impressive traditional way.

As they sprang at each other, the crowd bellowed with delight. The Akaviri was like a moon in orbit around the Prince, effortlessly springing over his shoulder to attempt a blow from behind, but the Prince whirled around quickly to block with his shield. His counter-strike met only air as his foe fell flat to the ground and slithered between his legs, tripping him. The Prince fell to the ground with a resounding crash.

Metal and air melted together as Savirien-Chorak rained strike after strike upon the Prince, who blocked every one with his shield.

"We don't have shields in our culture," murmured Versidue-Shaie to the Emperor. "It seems strange to my boy, I imagine. In our country, if you don't want to get hit, you move out of the way."

When Savirien-Chorak was rearing back to begin another series of blinding attacks, the Prince kicked at his tail, sending him falling back momentarily. In an instant, he had rebounded, but the Prince was also back on his feet. The two circled one another, until the snake man spun forward, katana extended. The Prince saw his foe's plan, and blocked the katana with his longsword and the wakizashi with his shield. Its short punching blade impaled itself in the metal, and Savirien-Chorak was thrown off balance.

The Prince's longblade slashed across the Akaviri's chest and the sudden, intense pain caused him to drop both his weapons. In a moment, it was over. Savirien-Chorak was prostate in the dust with the Prince's longsword at his throat.

"The game's over!" shouted the Emperor, barely heard over the applause from the stadium.

The Prince grinned and helped Savirien-Chorak up and over to a healer. The Emperor clapped his Potentate on the back, feeling relieved. He had not realized when the fight had begun how little chance he had given his son at victory.

"He will make a fine warrior," said Versidue-Shaie. "And a great emperor."

"Just remember," laughed the Emperor. "You Akaviri have a lot of showy moves, but if just one of our strikes comes through, it's all over for you."

"Oh, I'll remember that," nodded the Potentate.

Reman thought about that comment for the rest of the games, and had trouble fully enjoying himself. Could the Potentate be another enemy, just as the Empress had turned out to be? The matter would bear watching.
"Why don't you wear that green gown I gave you?" asked the Duke of Mournhold, watching the young maiden put on her clothes.

"It doesn't fit," smiled Turala. "And you know I like red."

"It doesn't fit because you're getting fat," laughed the Duke, pulling her down on the bed, kissing her breasts and the pouch of her stomach. She laughed at the tickles, but pulled herself up, wrapping her red robe around her.

"I'm round like a woman should be," said Turala. "Will I see you tomorrow?"

"No," said the Duke. "I must entertain Vivec tomorrow, and the next day the Duke of Ebonheart is coming. Do you know, I never really appreciated Almalexia and her political skills until she left?"

"It is the same with me," smiled Turala. "You will only appreciate me when I'm gone."

"That's not true at all," snorted the Duke. "I appreciate you now."

Turala allowed the Duke one last kiss before she was out the door. She kept thinking about what he said. Would he appreciate her more or less when he knew that she was getting fat because she was carrying his child? Would he appreciate her enough to marry her?

The Year Continues in Sun's Dawn.
Sotha Sil watched the initiates float one by one up to the oassom tree, taking a fruit or a flower from its high branches before dropping back to the ground with varying degrees of grace. He took a moment while nodding his head in approval to admire the day. The whitewashed statue of Syrabane, which the great mage was said to have posed for in ancient days, stood at the precipice of the cliff overlooking the bay. Pale purple prosceato flowers waves to and fro in the gentle breeze. Beyond, ocean, and the misty border between Artaeum and the main island of Summurset.

"By and large, acceptable," he proclaimed as the last student dropped her fruit in his hand. With a wave of his hand, the fruit and flowers were back in the tree. With another wave, the students had formed into position in a semicircle around the sorcerer. He pulled a small fibrous ball, about a foot in diameter from his white robes.

"What is this?"

The students understood this test. It asked them to cast a spell of identification on the mysterious object. Each initiate closed his or her eyes and imagined the ball in the realm of the universal Truth. Its energy had a unique resonance as all physical and spiritual matter does, a negative aspect, a duplicate version, relative paths, true meaning, a song in the cosmos, a texture in the fabric of space, a facet of being that has always existed and always will exist.

"A ball," said a young Nord named Welleg, which brought giggles from some of the younger initiates, but a frown from most, including Sotha Sil.

"If you must be stupid, at least be amusing," growled the sorcerer, and then looked at a young, dark-haired Altmer lass who looked confused. "Lilatha, do you know?"

"It's grom," said Lilatha, uncertainly. "What the dreugh meff after they've k-k-kr-krervinasim."

"Karvinasim, but very good, nonetheless," said Sotha Sil. "Now, tell me, what does that mean?"

"I don't know," admitted Lilatha. The rest of the students also shook their heads.

"There are layers to understanding all things," said Sotha Sil. "The common man looks at an object and fits it into a place in his way of thinking. Those skilled in the Old Ways, in the way
of the Psijic, in Mysticism, can see an object and identify it by its proper role. But one more layer is needed to be peeled back to achieve understanding. You must identify the object by its role and its truth and interpret that meaning. In this case, this ball is indeed grom, which is a substance created by the dreugh, an underwater race in the north and western parts of the continent. For one year of their life, they undergo karvinasim when they walk upon the land. Following that, they return to the water and meff, or devour the skin and organs they needed for land-dwelling. Then they vomit it up into little balls like this. Grom. Dreugh vomit."

The students looked at the ball a little queasily. Sotha Sil always loved this lesson.

4 Sun's Dawn, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

"Spies," muttered the Emperor, sitting in his bath, staring at a lump on his foot. "All around me, traitors and spies."

His mistress Rijja washed his back, her legs wrapped around his waist. She knew after all these many years when to be sensual and when to be sexual. When he was in a mood like this, it was best to be calmly, soothingly, seductively sensual. And not to say a word unless he asked her a direct question.

Which he did: "What do you think when a fellow steps on his Imperial Majesty's foot and says 'I'm sorry, Your Imperial Majesty'? Don't you think 'Pardon me, Your Imperial Majesty' is more appropriate? 'I'm sorry,' well that almost sounds like the bastard Argonian was sorry I am his Imperial Majesty. That he hopes we lose the war with Morrowind, that's what it sounds like."

"What would make you feel better?" asked Rijja. "Would you like him flogged? He is only, as you say, the Battlechief of Soulrest. It would teach him to mind where he's stepping."

"My father would have flogged him. My grandfather would have had him killed," the Emperor grumbled. "But I don't mind if they all step on my feet, provided they respect me. And don't plot against me."

"You must trust someone."

"Only you," smiled the Emperor, turning slightly to give Rijja a kiss. "And my son Juilek, I suppose, though I wish he were a little more cautious."

"And your council, and the Potentate?" asked Rijja.

"A pack of spies and a snake," laughed the Emperor, kissing his mistress again. As they began to make love, he whispered, "As long as you're true, I can handle the world."
13 Sun's Dawn, 2920
Mournhold, Morrowind

Turala stood at the black, bejeweled city gates. A wind howled around her, but she felt nothing.

The Duke had been furious upon hearing his favorite mistress was pregnant and cast her from his sight. She tried again and again to see him, but his guards turned her away. Finally, she returned to her family and told them the truth. If only she had lied and told them she did not know who the father was. A soldier, a wandering adventurer, anyone. But she told them that the father was the Duke, a member of the House Indoril. And they did what she knew they would have to do, as proud members of the House Redoran.

Upon her hand was burned the sign of Expulsion her weeping father had branded on her. But the Duke's cruelty hurt her far more. She looked out the gate and into the wide winter plains. Twisted, sleeping trees and skies without birds. No one in Morrowind would take her in now. She must go far away.

With slow, sad steps, she began her journey.

16 Sun's Dawn, 2920
Senchal, Anequina (modern day Elsweyr)

"What troubles you?" asked Queen Hasaama, noticing her husband's sour mood. At the end of most Lovers' Days he was in an excellent mood, dancing in the ballroom with all the guests, but tonight he retired early. When she found him, he was curled in the bed, frowning.

"That blasted bard's tale about Polydor and Eloisa put me in a rotten state," he growled. "Why did he have to be so depressing?"

"But isn't that the truth of the tale, my dear? Weren't they doomed because of the cruel nature of the world?"

"It doesn't matter what the truth is, he did a rotten job of telling a rotten tale, and I'm not going to let him do it anymore," King Dro'Zel sprang from the bed. His eyes were rheumy with tears. "Where did they say he was from again?"

"I believe Gilverdale in easternmost Valenwood," said the Queen, shaken. "My husband, what are you going to do?"

Dro'Zel was out of the room in a single spring, bounding up the stairs to his tower. If Queen Hasaama knew what her husband was going to do, she did not try to stop him. He had been erratic of late, prone to fits and even occasional seizures. But she never suspected the depths of his madness, and his loathing for the bard and his tale of the wickedness and perversity found in mortal man.
19 Sun's Dawn, 2920
Gilverdale, Valenwood

"Listen to me again," said the old carpenter. "If cell three holds worthless brass, then cell two holds the gold key. If cell one holds the gold key, then cell three hold worthless brass. If cell two holds worthless brass, then cell one holds the gold key."

"I understand," said the lady. "You told me. And so cell one holds the gold key, right?"

"No," said the carpenter. "Let me start from the top."

"Mama?" said the little boy, pulling on his mother's sleeve.

"Just one moment, dear, mother's talking," she said, concentrating on the riddle. "You said 'cell three holds the golden key if cell two holds worthless brass,' right?"

"No," said the carpenter patiently. "Cell three holds worthless brass, if cell two --"

"Mama!" cried the boy. His mother finally looked.

A bright red mist was pouring over the town in a wave, engulfing building after building in its wake. Striding before was a red-skinned giant. The Daedra Molag Bal. He was smiling.

29 Sun's Dawn, 2920
Gilverdale, Valenwood

Almalexia stopped her steed in the vast moor of mud to let him drink from the river. He refused to, even seemed repelled by the water. It struck her as odd: they had been making excellent time from Mournhold, and surely he must be thirsty. She dismounted and joined her retinue.

"Where are we now?" she asked.

One of her ladies pulled out a map. "I thought we were approaching a town called Gilverdale."

Almalexia closed her eyes and opened them again quickly. The vision was too much to bear. As her followers watched, she picked up a piece of brick and a fragment of bone, and clutched them to her heart.

"We must continue on to Artaeum," she said quietly.

The Year continues in First Seed.
From their vantage point high in the hills, the Emperor Reman III could still see the spires of the Imperial City, but he knew he was far away from hearth and home. Lord Glavius had a luxurious villa, but it was not close to being large enough to house the entire army within its walls. Tents lined the hillsides, and the soldiers were flocking to enjoy his lordship's famous hot springs. Little wonder: winter chill still hung in the air.

"Prince Juilek, your son, is not feeling well."

When Potentate Versidue-Shaie spoke, the Emperor jumped. How that Akavir could slither across the grass without making a sound was a mystery to him.

"Poisoned, I'd wager," grumbled Reman. "See to it he gets a healer. I told him to hire a taster like I have, but the boy's headstrong. There are spies all around us, I know it."

"I believe you're right, your imperial majesty," said Versidue-Shaie. "These are treacherous times, and we must take precautions to see that Morrowind does not win this war, either on the field or by more insidious means. That is why I would suggest that you not lead the vanguard into battle. I know you would want to, as your illustrious ancestors Reman I, Brazollus Dor, and Reman II did, but I fear it would be foolhardy. I hope you do not mind me speaking frankly like this."

"No," nodded Reman. "I think you're right. Who would lead the vanguard then?"

"I would say Prince Juilek, if he were feeling better," replied the Akavir. "Failing that, Storig of Farrun, with Queen Naghea of Riverhold at left flank, and Warchief Ulaqth of Lilmoth at right flank."

"A Khajiit at left flank and an Argonian at right," frowned the Emperor. "I never do trust beastfolk."

The Potentate took no offense. He knew that "beastfolk" referred to the natives of Tamriel, not to the Tsaesci of Akavir like himself. "I quite agree your imperial majesty, but you must agree that they hate the Dunmer. Ulaqth has a particular grudge after all the slave-raids on his lands by the Duke of Mournhold."
The Emperor conceded it was so, and the Potentate retired. It was surprising, thought Reman, but for the first time, the Potentate seemed trustworthy. He was a good man to have on one's side.

18 First Seed, 2920
Ald Erfoud, Morrowind

"How far is the Imperial Army?" asked Vivec.

"Two days' march," replied his lieutenant. "If we march all night tonight, we can get higher ground at the Pryai tomorrow morning. Our intelligence tells us the Emperor will be commanding the rear, Storig of Farrun has the vanguard, Naghea of Riverhold at left flank, and Ulaqth of Lilmoth at right flank."

"Ulaqth," whispered Vivec, an idea forming. "Is this intelligence reliable? Who brought it to us?"

"A Breton spy in the Imperial Army," said the lieutenant and gestured towards a young, sandy-haired man who stepped forward and bowed to Vivec.

"What is your name and why is a Breton working for us against the Cyrodiils?" asked Vivec, smiling.

"My name is Cassyr Whitley of Dwynnen," said the man. "And I am working for you because not everyone can say he spied for a god. And I understood it would be, well, profitable."

Vivec laughed, "It will be, if your information is accurate."

19 First Seed, 2920
Bodrums, Morrowind

The quiet hamlet of Bodrum looked down on the meandering river, the Pryai. It was an idyllic site, lightly wooded where the water took the bend around a steep bluff to the east with a gorgeous wildflower meadow to the west. The strange flora of Morrowind met the strange flora of Cyrodiil on the border and commingled gloriously.

"There will be time to sleep when you've finished!"

The soldiers had been hearing that all morning. It was not enough that they had been marching all night, now they were chopping down trees on the bluff and damming the river so its waters spilled over. Most of them had reached the point where they were too tired to complain about being tired.

"Let me be certain I understand, my lord," said Vivec's lieutenant. "We take the bluff so we can fire arrows and spells down on them from above. That's why we need all the trees cleared out. Damming the river floods the plain below so they'll be trudging through mud, which should hamper their movement."
"That's exactly half of it," said Vivec approvingly. He grabbed a nearby soldier who was hauling off the trees. "Wait, I need you to break off the straightest, strongest branches of the trees and whittle them into spears. If you recruit a hundred or so others, it won't take you more than a few hours to make all we need."

The soldier wearily did as he was bade. The men and women got to work, fashioning spears from the trees.

"If you don't mind me asking," said the lieutenant. "The soldiers don't need any more weapons. They're too tired to hold the ones they've got."

"These spears aren't for holding," said Vivec and whispered, "If we tired them out today, they'll get a good night's sleep tonight" before he got to work supervising their work.

It was essential that they be sharp, of course, but equally important that they be well balanced and tapered proportionally. The perfect point for stability was a pyramid, not the conical point of some lances and spears. He had the men hurl the spears they had completed to test their strength, sharpness, and balance, forcing them to begin on a new one if they broke. Gradually, out of sheer exhaustion from doing it wrong, the men learned how to create the perfect wooden spears. Once they were through, he showed them how they were to be arranged and where.

That night, there was no drunken pre-battle carousing, and no nervous neophytes stayed up worrying about the battle to come. As soon as the sun sank beneath the wooded hills, the camp was at rest, but for the sentries.

20 First Seed, 2920
Bodrum, Morrowind

Miramor was exhausted. For last six days, he had gambled and whored all night and then marched all day. He was looking forward to the battle, but even more than that, he was looking forward to some rest afterwards. He was in the Emperor's command at the rear flank, which was good because it seemed unlikely that he would be killed. On the other hand, it meant traveling over the mud and waste the army ahead left in their wake.

As they began the trek through the wildflower field, Miramor and all the soldiers around him sank ankle-deep in cold mud. It was an effort to even keep moving. Far, far up ahead, he could see the vanguard of the army led by Lord Storig emerging from the meadow at the base of a bluff.

That was when it all happened.

An army of Dunmer appeared above the bluff like rising Daedra, pouring fire and floods of arrows down on the vanguard. Simultaneously, a company of men bearing the flag of the Duke of Mournhold galloped around the shore, disappearing along the shallow river's edge where it dipped to a timbered glen to the east. Warchief Ulaqth nearby on the right flank let out a bellow of revenge at the sight and gave chase. Queen Naghea sent her flank towards the embankment to the west to intercept the army on the bluff.
The Emperor could think of nothing to do. His troops were too bogged down to move forward quickly and join the battle. He ordered them to face east towards the timber, in case Mournhold's company was trying to circle around through the woods. They never came out, but many men, facing west, missed the battle entirely. Miramor kept his eyes on the bluff.

A tall Dunmer he supposed must have been Vivec gave a signal, and the battlemages cast their spells at something to the west. From what transpired, Miramor deduced it was a dam. A great torrent of water spilled out, washing Naghea's left flank into the remains of the vanguard and the two together down river to the east.

The Emperor paused, as if waiting for his vanquished army to return, and then called a retreat. Miramor hid in the rushes until they had passed by and then waded as quietly as he could to the bluff.

The Morrowind army was retiring as well back to their camp. He could hear them celebrating above him as he padded along the shore. To the east, he saw the Imperial Army. They had been washed into a net of spears strung across the river, Naghea's left flank on Storig's vanguard on Ulaqth's right flank, bodies of hundreds of soldiers strung together like beads.

Miramor took whatever valuables he could carry from the corpses and then ran down the river. He had to go many miles before the water was clear again, unpolluted by blood.

29 First Seed, 2920
Hegathe, Hammerfell

"You have a letter from the Imperial City," said the chief priestess, handing the parchment to Corda. All the young priestesses smiled and made faces of astonishment, but the truth was that Corda's sister Rijja wrote very often, at least once a month.

Corda took the letter to the garden to read it, her favorite place, an oasis in the monochromatic sand-colored world of the conservatorium. The letter itself was nothing unusual: filled with court gossip, the latest fashions which were tending to winedark velvets, and reports of the Emperor's ever-growing paranoia.

"You are so lucky to be away from all of this," wrote Rijja. "The Emperor is convinced that his latest battlefield fiasco is all a result of spies in the palace. He has even taken to questioning me. Ruptga keep it so you never have a life as interesting as mine."

Corda listened to the sounds of the desert and prayed to Ruptga the exact opposite wish.

The Year is Continued in Rain's Hand.
Sotha Sil proceeded as quickly as he could through the blackened halls of the palace, half-submerged in brackish water. All around him, nasty gelatinous creatures scurried into the reeds, bursts of white fire lit up the upper arches of the hall before disappearing, and smells assaulted him, rancid death one moment, sweet flowered perfume the next. Several times he had visited the Daedra princes in their Oblivion, but every time, something different awaited him.

He knew his purpose, and refused to be distracted.

Eight of the more prominent Daedra princes were awaiting him in the half-melted, domed room. Azura, Prince of Dusk and Dawn; Boethiah, Prince of Plots; Herma-Mora, Daedra of Knowledge; Hircine, the Hunter; Malacath, God of Curses; Mehrunes Dagon, Prince of Disaster; Molag Bal, Prince of Rage; Sheogorath, the Mad One.

Above them, the sky cast tormented shadows upon the meeting.

Immediately, the initiates obeyed, rolling aside the great boulder that blocked the entrance to the Dreaming Cavern. Sotha Sil emerged, his face smeared with ash, weary. He felt he had been away for months, years, but only a few days had transpired. Lilatha took his arm to help him walk, but he refused her help with a kind smile and a shake of his head.

"Were you ... successful?" she asked.

"The Daedra princes I spoke with have agreed to our terms," he said flatly. "Disasters such as befell Gilverdale should be averted. Only through certain intermediaries such as witches or sorcerers will they answer the call of man and mer."

"And what did you promise them in return?" asked the Nord boy Welleg.

"The deals we make with Daedra," said Sotha Sil, continuing on to Iachesis's palace to meet with the Master of the Psijic Order. "Should not be discussed with the innocent."
A storm billeted the windows of the Prince's bedchamber, bringing a smell of moist air to mix with the censors filled with burning incense and herbs.

"A letter has arrived from the Empress, your mother," said the courier. "Anxiously inquiring after your health."

"What frightened parents I have!" laughed Prince Juilek from his bed.

"It is only natural for a mother to worry," said Savirien-Chorak, the Potentate's son.

"There is everything unnatural about my family, Akavir. My exiled mother fears that my father will imagine me of being a traitor, covetous of the crown, and is having me poisoned," the Prince sank back into his pillow, annoyed. "The Emperor has insisted on me having a taster for all my meals as he does."

"There are many plots," agreed the Akavir. "You have been abed for nearly three weeks with every healer in the empire shuffling through like a slow ballroom dance. At least, all can see that you're getting stronger."

"Strong enough to lead the vanguard against Morrowind soon, I hope," said Juilek.

The initiates stood quietly in a row along the arbor loggia, watching the long, deep, marble-lined trench ahead of them flash with fire. The air above it vibrated with the waves of heat. Though each student kept his or her face sturdy and emotionless, as a true Psijic should, their terror was nearly as palpable as the heat. Sotha Sil closed his eyes and uttered the charm of fire resistance. Slowly, he walked across the basin of leaping flames, climbing to the other side, unscathed. Not even his white robe had been burned.

"The charm is intensified by the energy you bring to it, by your own skills, just as all spells are," he said. "Your imagination and your willpower are the keys. There is no need for a spell to give you a resistance to air, or a resistance to flowers, and after you cast the charm, you must forget there is even a need for a spell to give you resistance to fire. Do not confuse what I am saying: resistance is not about ignoring the fire's reality. You will feel the substance of flame, the texture of it, its hunger, and even the heat of it, but you will know that it will not hurt or injure you."

The students nodded and one by one, they cast the spell and made the walk through the fire. Some even went so far as to bend over and scoop up a handful of fire and feed it air, so it expanded like a bubble and melted through their fingers. Sotha Sil smiled. They were fighting their fear admirably.

The Chief Proctor Thargallith came running from the arbor arches, "Sotha Sil! Almalexia has arrived on Artaeum. Iachesis told me to fetch you."
Sotha Sil turned to Thargallith for only a moment, but he knew instantly from the screams what had transpired. The Nord lad Wellig had not cast the spell properly and was burning. The smell of scorched hair and flesh panicked the other students who were struggling to get out of the basin, pulling him with them, but the incline was too steep away from the entry points. With a wave of his hand, Sotha Sil extinguished the flame.

Wellig and several other students were burned, but not badly. The sorcerer cast a healing spell on them, before turning back to Thargallith.

"I'll be with you in a moment, and give Almalexia the time to shake the road dust from her train," Sotha Sil turned back to the students, his voice flat. "Fear does not break spells, but doubt and incompetence are the great enemies of any spellcaster. Master Welleg, you will pack your bags. I'll arrange for a boat to bring you to the mainland tomorrow morning."

The sorcerer found Almalexia and Iachesis in the study, drinking hot tea, and laughing. She was more beautiful than he had remembered, though he had never before seen her so disheveled, wrapped in a blanket, dangling her damp long black tresses before the fire to dry. At Sotha Sil's approach, she leapt to her feet and embraced him.

"Did you swim all the way from Morrowind?" he smiled.

"It's pouring rain from Skywatch down to the coast," she explained, returning his smile.

"Only a half a league away, and it never rains here," said Iachesis proudly. "Of course, I sometimes miss the excitement of Summurset, and sometimes even the mainland itself. Still, I'm always very impressed by anyone out there who gets anything accomplished. It is a world of distractions. Speaking of distractions, what's all this I hear about a war?"

"You mean the one that's been bloodying the continent for the last eighty years, Master?" asked Sotha Sil, amused.

"I suppose that's the one I mean," said Iachesis with a shrug of his shoulders. "How is that war going?"

"We will lose it, unless I can convince Sotha Sil to leave Artaeum," said Almalexia, losing her smile. She had meant to wait and talk to her friend in private, but the old Altmer gave her courage to press on. "I have had visions; I know it to be true."

Sotha Sil was silent for a moment, and then looked at Iachesis, "I must return to Morrowind."

"Knowing you, if you must do something, you will," sighed the old Master. "The Psijics' way is not to be distracted. Wars are fought, Empires rise and fall. You must go, and so must we."

"What do you mean, Iachesis? You're leaving the island?"

"No, the island will be leaving the sea," said Iachesis, his voice taking on a dreamy quality. "In a few years, the mists will move over Artaeum and we will be gone. We are counselors by nature, and there are too many counselors in Tamriel as it is. No, we will go, and return when the land needs us again, perhaps in another age."
The old Altmer struggles to his feet, and drained the last sip of his drink before leaving Sotha Sil and Almalexia alone: "Don't miss the last boat."

The Year Continues in Second Seed.
Your Imperial Majesty," said the Potentate Versidue-Shaie, opening the door to his chamber with a smile. "I have not seen you lately. I thought perhaps you were ... indisposed with the lovely Rijja."

"She's taking the baths at Mir Corrup," the Emperor Reman III said miserably.

"Please, come in."

"I've reached the stage where I can only trust three people: you, my son the Prince, and Rijja," said the Emperor petulantly. "My entire council is nothing but a pack of spies."

"What seems to be the matter, your imperial majesty?" asked the Potentate Versidue-Shaie sympathetically, drawing closed the thick curtain in his chamber. Instantly all sound outside the room was extinguished, echoing footsteps in the marble halls and birds in the springtide gardens.

"I've discovered that a notorious poisoner, an Orma tribeswoman from Black Marsh called Catchica, was with the army at Caer Suvio while we were encamped there when my son was poisoned, before the battle at Bodrum. I'm sure she would have preferred to kill me, but the opportunity didn't present itself," The Emperor fumed. "The Council suggests that we need evidence of her involvement before we prosecute."

"Of course they would," said the Potentate thoughtfully. "Particularly if one or more of them was in on the plot. I have a thought, your imperial majesty."

"Yes?" said Reman impatiently. "Out with it!"

"Tell the Council you're dropping the matter, and I will send out the Guard to track this Catchica down and follow her. We will see who her friends are, and perhaps get an idea of the scope of this plot on your imperial majesty's life."

"Yes," said Reman with a satisfied frown. "That's a capital plan. We will track this scheme to whomever it leads to."

"Decidedly, your imperial majesty," smiled the Potentate, parting the curtain so the Emperor could leave. In the hallway outside was Versidue-Shaie's son, Savirien-Chorak. The boy bowed to the Emperor before entering the Potentate's chamber.
"Are you in trouble, father?" whispered the Akaviri lad. "I heard the Emperor found out about whatshername, the poisoner."

"The great art of speechcraft, my boy," said Versidue-Shaie to his son. "Is to tell them what they want to hear in a way that gets them to do what you want them to do. I need you to get a letter to Catchica, and make certain that she understands that if she does not follow the instructions perfectly, she is risking her own life more than ours."

13 Second Seed, 2920
Mir Corrup, Cyrodiil

Rijja sank luxuriantly into the bubbling hot spring, feeling her skin tingle like it was being rubbed by millions of little stones. The rock shelf over her head sheltered her from the misting rain, but let all the sunshine in, streaming in layers through the branches of the trees. It was an idyllic moment in an idyllic life, and when she was finished she knew that her beauty would be entirely restored. The only thing she needed was a drink of water. The bath itself, while wonderfully fragrant, tasted always of chalk.

"Water!" she cried to her servants. "Water, please!"

A gaunt woman with rags tied over her eyes ran to her side and dropped a goatskin of water. Rijja was about to laugh at the woman's prudery -- she herself was not ashamed of her naked body -- but then she noticed through a crease in the rags that the old woman had no eyes at all. She was like one of those Orma tribesmen Rijja had heard about, but never met. Born without eyes, they were masters of their other senses. The Lord of Mir Corrup hired very exotic servants, she thought to herself.

In a moment, the woman was gone and forgotten. Rijja found it very hard to concentrate on anything but the sun and the water. She opened the cork, but the liquid within had a strange, metallic smell to it. Suddenly, she was aware that she was not alone.

"Lady Rijja," said the captain of the Imperial Guard. "You are, I see, acquainted with Catchica?"

"I've never heard of her," stammered Rijja before becoming indignant. "What are you doing here? This body is not for your leering eyes."

"Never heard of her, when we saw her with you not a minute ago," said the captain, picking up the goatskin and smelling it. "Brought you neivous ichor, did she? To poison the Emperor with?"

"Captain," said one of the guards, running up to him quickly. "We cannot find the Argonian. It is as if she disappeared into the woods."

"Yes, they're good at that," said the captain. "No matter though. We've got her contact at court. That should please his Imperial Majesty. Seize her."
As the guards pulled the writhing naked woman from the pool, she screamed, "I'm innocent! I don't know what this is all about, but I've done nothing! The Emperor will have your heads for this!"

"Yes, I imagine he will," smiled the captain. "If he trusts you."

21 Second Seed, 2920
Gideon, Black Marsh

The Sow and Vulture tavern was the sort of out-of-the-way place that Zuuk favored for these sorts of interviews. Besides himself and his companion, there were only a couple of old seadogs in the shadowy room, and they were more unconscious from drink than aware. The grime of the unwashed floor was something you felt rather than saw. Copious dust hung in the air unmoving in the sparse rays of dying sunlight.

"You have experience in heavy combat?" asked Zuuk. "The reward is good for this assignment, but the risks are great as well."

"Certainly I have combat experience," replied Miramor haughtily. "I was at the Battle of Bodrum just two months ago. If you do your part and get the Emperor to ride through Dozs Pass with a minimal escort on the day and the time we've discussed, I'll do my part. Just be certain that he's not traveling in disguise. I'm not going to slaughter every caravan that passes through in the hopes that it contains Emperor Reman."

Zuuk smiled, and Miramor looked at himself in the Kothringi's reflective face. He liked the way he looked: the consummate confident professional.

"Agreed," said Zuuk. "And then you shall have the rest of your gold."

Zuuk placed the large chest onto the table between them. He stood up.

"Wait a few minutes before leaving," said Zuuk. "I don't want you following me. Your employers wish to maintain their anonymity, if by chance you are caught and tortured."

"Fine by me," said Miramor, ordering more grog.

Zuuk rode his mount through the cramped labyrinthine streets of Gideon, and both he and his horse were happy to pass through the gates into the country. The main road to Castle Giovese was flooded as it was every year in springtide, but Zuuk knew a shorter way over the hills. Riding fast under trees drooping with moss and treacherous slime-coated rocks, he arrived at the castle gates in two hours' time. He wasted no time in climbing to Tavia's cell at the top of the highest tower.

"What did you think of him?" asked the Empress.

"He's a fool," replied Zuuk. "But that's what we want for this sort of assignment."
Rijja screamed and screamed and screamed. Within her cell, her only audience was the giant gray stones, crusted with moss but still sturdy. The guards outside were deaf to her as they were deaf to all prisoners. The Emperor, miles away in the Imperial City, had likewise been deaf to her cries of innocence.

She screamed knowing well that no one would likely hear her ever again.

It had been days, weeks since Turala had seen another human face, Cyrodiil or Dunmer. As she trod the road, she thought to herself how strange it was that such an uninhabited place as Cyrodiil had become the Imperial Province, seat of an Empire. Even the Bosmer in Valenwood must have more populated forests than this Heartland wood.

She thought back. Was it a month ago, two, when she crossed the border from Morrowind into Cyrodiil? It had been much colder then, but other than that, she had no sense of time. The guards had been brusque, but as she was carrying no weaponry, they elected to let her through. Since then, she had seen a few caravans, even shared a meal with some adventurers camping for the night, but met no one who would give her a ride to a town.

Turala stripped off her shawl and dragged it behind her. For a moment, she thought she heard someone behind her and spun around. No one was there. Just a bird perched on a branch making a sound like laughter.

She walked on, and then stopped. Something was happening. The child had been kicking in her belly for some time now, but this was a different kind of spasm. With a groan, she lurched over to the side of the path, collapsing into the grass. Her child was coming.

She lay on her back and pushed, but she could barely see with her tears of pain and frustration. How had it come to this? Giving birth in the wilderness, all by herself, to a child whose father was the Duke of Mournhold? Her scream of rage and agony shook the birds from the trees.

The bird that had been laughing at her earlier flew down to the road. She blinked, and the bird was gone and in its place, a naked Elf man stood, not as dark as a Dunmer, but not as pale as the Altmer. She knew at once it was an Ayleid, a Wild Elf. Turala screamed, but the man held her down. After a few minutes of struggle, she felt a release, and then fainted away.

When she awoke, it was to the sound of a baby crying. The child had been cleaned and was lying by her side. Turala picked up her baby girl, and for the first time that year, felt tears of happiness stream down her face.

She whispered to the trees, "Thank you" and began walking with babe in her arms down the road to the west.
The Year Is Continued in Mid Year.
2 Mid Year, 2920
Balmora, Morrowind

The Imperial army is gathered to the south," said Cassyr. "They are a two weeks march from Ald Iuval and Lake Coronati, heavily armored."

Vivec nodded. Ald Iuval and its sister city on the other side of the lake Ald Malak were strategically important fortresses. He had been expecting a move against them for some time. His captain pulled down a map of southwestern Morrowind from the wall and smoothed it out, fighting a gentle summer sea breeze wafting in from the open window.

"They were heavily armored, you say?" asked the captain.

"Yes, sir," said Cassyr. "They were camped out near Bethal Gray in the Heartland, and I saw nothing but Ebony, Dwarven, and Daedric armor, fine weaponry, and siege equipment."

"How about spellcasters and boats?" asked Vivec.


"As heavily armored as they are, it will take them at least two weeks, like you said, to get from Bethal Gray to Lake Coronati," Vivec studied the map carefully. "They'd be dragged down in the bogs if they then tried to circle around to Ald Marak from the north, so they must be planning to cross the straits here and take Ald Iuval. Then they'd proceed around the lake to the east and take Ald Marak from the south."

"They'll be vulnerable along the straits," said the captain. "Provided we strike when they are more than halfway across and can't retreat back to the Heartland."

"Your intelligence has once again served us well," said Vivec, smiling to Cassyr. "We will beat back the Imperial aggressors yet again."

3 Mid Year, 2920
Bethal Gray, Cyrodiil

"Will you be returning back this way after your victory?" asked Lord Bethal.
Prince Juilek barely paid the man any attention. He was focused on the army packing its camp. It was a cool morning in the forest, but there were no clouds. All the makings of a hot afternoon march, particularly in such heavy armor.

"If we return shortly, it will be because of defeat," said the Prince. He could see down in the meadow, the Potentate Versidue-Shaie paying his lordship's steward for the use of the village's food, wine, and whores. An army was an expensive thing, for certes.

"My Prince," said Lord Bethal with concern. "Is your army beginning a march due east? That will just lead you to the shores of Lake Coronati. You'll want to go south-east to get to the straits."

"You just make certain your merchants get their share of our gold," said the Prince with a grin. "Let me worry about my army's direction."

16 Mid Year, 2920
Lake Coronati, Morrowind

Vivec stared across the blue expanse of the lake, seeing his reflection and the reflection of his army in the cool blue waters. What he did not see was the Imperial Army's reflection. They must have reached the straits by now, barring any mishaps in the forest. Tall feather-thin lake trees blocked much of his view of the straits, but an army, particularly one clan in slow-moving heavy armor could not move invisibly, silently.

"Let me see the map again," he called to his captain. "Is there no other way they could approach?"

"We have sentries posted in the swamps to the north in case they're fool enough to go there and be bogged under," said the captain. "We would at least hear about it. But there is no other way across the lake except through the straits."

Vivec looked down again at his reflection, which seemed to be distorting his image, mocking him. Then he looked back on the map.

"Spy," said Vivec, calling Cassyr over. "When you said the army had a horde of battlemages, what made you so certain they were battlemages?"

"They were wearing gray robes with mystical insignia on them," explained Cassyr. "I figured they were mages, and why else would such a vast number travel with the army? They couldn't have all been healers."

"You fool!" roared Vivec. "They're mystics schooled in the art of Alteration. They've cast a spell of water breathing on the entire army."

Vivec ran to a new vantage point where he could see the north. Across the lake, though it was but a small shadow on the horizon, they could see gouts of flame from the assault on Ald Marak. Vivec bellowed with fury and his captain got to work at once redirecting the army to circle the lake and defend the castle.
"Return to Dwynnen," said Vivec flatly to Cassyr before he rode off to join the battle. "Your services are no longer needed nor wanted."

It was already too late when the Morrowind army neared Ald Marak. It had been taken by the Imperial Army.

19 Mid Year, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

The Potentate arrived in the Imperial City amid great fanfare, the streets lined with men and women cheering him as the symbol of the taking of Ald Marak. Truth be told, a greater number would have turned out had the Prince returned, and the Versidue-Shaie knew it. Still, it pleased him to no end. Never before had citizens of Tamriel cheered the arrival of an Akaviri into their land.

The Emperor Reman III greeted him with a warm embrace, and then tore into the letter he had brought from the Prince.

"I don't understand," he said at last, still joyous but equally confused. "You went under the lake?"

"Ald Marak is a very well-fortified fortress," explained the Potentate. "As, I might add, the army of Morrowind has rediscovered, now that they are on the outside. To take it, we had to attack by surprise and with our soldiery in the sturdiest of armor. By casting the spell that allowed us to breathe underwater, we were able to travel faster than Vivec would have guessed, the weight of the armor made less by the aquatic surroundings, and attack from the waterbound west side of the fortress where their defenses were at their weakest."

"Brilliant!" the Emperor crowed. "You are a wonderous tactician, Versidue-Shaie! If your fathers had been as good at this as you are, Tamriel would be Akaviri domain!"

The Potentate had not planned to take credit for Prince Juilek's design, but on the Emperor's reference to his people's fiasco of an invasion two hundred and sixteen years ago, he made up his mind. He smiled modestly and soaked up the praise.

21 Mid Year, 2920
Ald Marak, Morrowind

Savirien-Chorak slithered to the wall and watched through the arrow slit the Morrowind army retreating back to the forestland between the swamps and the castle grounds. It seemed like the idea opportunity to strike. Perhaps the forests could be burned and the army within them. Perhaps with Vivec in their enemies' hands, the army would allow them possession of Ald Iuval as well. He suggested these ideas to the Prince.

"What you seem to be forgetting," laughed Prince Juilek. "Is that I gave my word that no harm to the army or to their commanders during the truce negotiations. Do you not have honor during warfare on Akavir?"
"My Prince, I was born here in Tamriel, I have never been to my people's home," replied the snake man. "But even so, your ways are strange to me. You expected no quarter and I gave you none when we fought in the Imperial Arena five months ago."

"That was a game," replied the Prince, before nodding to his steward to let the Dunmer battle chief in.

Juilek had never seen Vivec before, but he had heard he was a living god. What came before him was but a man. A powerfully built man, handsome, with an intelligent face, but a man nonetheless. The Prince was pleased: a man he could speak with, but not a god.

"Greetings, my worthy adversary," said Vivec. "We seem to be at an impasse."

"Not necessarily," said the Prince. "You don't want to give us Morrowind, and I can't fault you for that. But I must have your coastline to protect the Empire from overseas aggressions, and certain key strategic border castles, such as this one, as well as Ald Umbeil, Tel Aruhn, Ald Lambasi, and Tel Mothrivra."

"And in return?" asked Vivec.

"In return?" laughed Savirien-Chorak. "You forget we are the victors here, not you."

"In return," said Prince Juilek carefully. "There will be no Imperial attacks on Morrowind, unless in return to an attack by you. You will be protected from invaders by the Imperial navy. And your land may expand by taking certain estates in Black Marsh, whichever you choose, provided they are not needed by the Empire."

"A reasonable offer," said Vivec after a pause. "You must forgive me, I am unused to Cyrodiils who offer something in return for what they take. May I have a few days to decide?"

"We will meet again in a week's time," said the Prince, smiling. "In the meantime, if your army provokes no attacks on mine, we are at peace."

Vivec left the Prince's chamber, feeling that Almalexia was right. The war was at an end. This Prince would make an excellent Emperor.

The Year is Continued in Sun's Height.
The Emperor Reman III and his Potentate Versidue-Shaie took a stroll around the Imperial Gardens. Studded with statuary and fountains, the north gardens fit the Emperor's mood, as well as being the coolest acreage in the City during the heat of summertime. Austere, tiered flowerbeds of blue-gray and green towered all around them as they walked.

"Vivec has agreed to the Prince's terms for peace," said Reman. "My son will be returning in two weeks' time."

"This is excellent news," said the Potentate carefully. "I hope the Dunmer will honor the terms. We might have asked for more. The fortress at Black Gate, for example. But I suppose the Prince knows what is reasonable. He would not cripple the Empire just for peace."

"I have been thinking lately of Rijja and what caused her to plot against my life," said the Emperor, pausing to admire a statue of the Slave Queen Alessia before continuing. "The only thing I can think of to account for it is that she admired my son too much. She may have loved me for my power and my personality, but he, after all, is young and handsome and will one day inherit my throne. She must have thought that if I were dead, she could have an Emperor who had both youth and power."

"The Prince ... was in on this plot?" asked Versidue-Shaie. It was a difficult game to play, anticipating where the Emperor's paranoia would strike next.

"Oh, I don't think so," said Reman, smiling. "No, my son loves me well."

"Are you aware that Corda, Raja's sister in an initiate of the Morwha conservatorium in Hegathe?" asked the Potentate.

"Morwha?" asked the Emperor. "I've forgotten: which god is that?"

"Lusty fertility goddess of the Yokudans," replied the Potentate. "But not too lusty, like Dibella. Demure, but certainly sexual."

"I am through with lusty women. The Empress, Rijja, all too lusty, a lust for love leads to a lust for power," the Emperor shrugged his shoulders. "But a priestess-in-training with a certain healthy appetite sounds ideal. Now what were you saying about the Black Gate?"
Rijja stood quietly looking at the cold stone floor while the Emperor spoke. He had never before seen her so pale and joyless. She might at least be pleased that she was being freed, being returned to her homeland. Why, if she left now, she could be in Hammerfell by the Merchant's Festival. Nothing he said seemed to register any reaction from her. A month and a half's stay in Thurzo Fortress seemed to have killed her spirit.

"I was thinking," said the Emperor at last. "Of having your younger sister Corda up to the palace for a time. I think she would prefer it over the conservatorium in Hegathe, don't you?"

Reaction, at last. Rijja looked at the Emperor with animal hatred, flinging herself at him in a rage. Her fingernails had grown long since her imprisonment and she raked them across his face, into his eyes. He howled with pain, and his guards pulled her off, pummeling her with blows from the back of their swords, until she was knocked unconscious.

A healer was called at once, but the Emperor Reman III had lost his right eye.

Vivec pulled himself from the water, feeling the heat of the day washed from his skin, taking a towel from one of his servants. Sotha Sil watched his old friend from the balcony.

"It looks like you've picked up a few more scars since I last saw you," said the sorcerer.

"Azura grant it that I have no more for a while," laughed Vivec. "When did you arrive?"

"A little over an hour ago," said Sotha Sil, walking down the stairs to the water's edge. "I thought I was coming to end a war, but it seems you've done it without me."

"Yes, eighty years is long enough for ceaseless battle," replied Vivec, embracing Sotha Sil. "We made concessions, but so did they. When the old Emperor is dead, we may be entering a golden age. Prince Juilek is very wise for his age. Where is Almalexia?"

"Collecting the Duke of Mournhold. They should be here tomorrow afternoon."

The men were distracted at a sight from around the corner of the palace - a rider was approaching through the town, heading for the front steps. It was evident that the woman had been riding hard for some time. They met her in the study, where she burst in, breathing hard.

"We have been betrayed," she gasped. "The Imperial Army has seized the Black Gate."
24 Sun's Height, 2920  
Balmora, Morrowind

It was the first time in seventeen years that the three members of the Morrowind Tribunal had met in the same place, since Sotha Sil had left for Artaeum. All three wished that the circumstances of their reunion were different.

"From what we've learned, while the Prince was returning to Cyrodiil to the south, a second Imperial Army came down from the north," said Vivec to his stony-faced compatriots. "It is reasonable to assume Juilek didn't know about the attack."

"But neither would it be unreasonable to suppose that he planned on being a distraction while the Emperor launched the attack on Black Gate," said Sotha Sil. "This must be considered a break of the truce."

"Where is the Duke of Mournhold?" asked Vivec. "I would hear his thoughts on the matter."

"He is meeting with the Night Mother in Tel Aruhn," said Almalexia, quietly. "I told him to wait until he had spoken with you, but he said that the matter had waited long enough."

"He would involve the Morag Tong? In outside affairs?" Vivec shook his head, and looked to Sotha Sil: "Please, do what you can. Assassination will only move us backwards. This matter must be settled with diplomacy or battle."

25 Sun's Height, 2920  
Tel Aruhn, Morrowind

The Night Mother met Sotha Sil in her salon, lit only by the moon. She was cruelly beautiful dressed in a simple silk black robe, lounging across her divan. With a gesture, she dismissed her red-cloaked guards and offered the sorcerer some wine.

"You've only just missed your friend, the Duke," she whispered. "He was very unhappy, but I think we will solve his problem for him."

"Did he hire the Morag Tong to assassinate the Emperor?" asked Sotha Sil.

"You are straight-forward, aren't you? That's good. I love plain-speaking men: it saves so much time. Of course, I cannot discuss with you what the Duke and I talked about," she smiled. "It would be bad for business."

"What if I were to offer you an equal amount of gold for you not to assassinate the Emperor?"

"The Morag Tong murders for the glory of Mephala and for profit," she said, speaking into her glass of wine. "We do not merely kill. That would be sacrilege. Once the Duke's gold has arrived in three days time, we will do our end of the business. And I'm afraid we would not dream of entertaining a counter offer. Though we are a business as well as a religious order, we do not bow to supply and demand, Sotha Sil."
Sotha Sil had been watching the waters for two days now, waiting for a particular vessel, and now he saw it. A heavy ship with the flag of Mournhold. The sorcerer took the air and intercepted it before it reached harbor. A caul of flame erupted over his figure, disguising his voice and form into that of a Daedra.

"Abandon your ship!" he bellowed. "If you would not sink with it!"

In truth, Sotha Sil could have exploded the vessel with but a single ball of fire, but he chose to take his time, to give the crew a chance to dive off into the warm water. When he was certain there was no one living aboard, he focused his energy into a destructive wave that shook the air and water as it discharged. The ship and the Duke's payment to the Morag Tong sank to the bottom of the Inner Sea.

"Night Mother," thought Sotha Sil, as he floated towards shore to alert the harbormaster that some sailors were in need of rescue. "Everyone bows to supply and demand."

The Year is Continued in Last Seed.
1 Last Seed, 2920
Mournhold, Morrowind

They were gathered in the Duke's courtyard at twilight, enjoying the smell and warmth of a fire of dry branches and bittergreen leaves. Tiny embers flew into the sky, hanging for a few moments before vanishing.

"I was rash," agreed the Duke, soberly. "But Lorkhan had his laugh, and all is well. The Morag Tong will not assassinate the Emperor now that my payment to them is at the bottom of the Inner Sea. I thought you had made some sort of a truce with the Daedra princes."

"What your sailors called a daedra may not have been one," said Sotha Sil. "Perhaps it was a rogue battlemage or even a lightning bolt that destroyed your ship."

"The Prince and the Emperor are en route to take possession of Ald Lambasi as our truce agreed. It is certainly typical of the Cyrodiil to assume that their concessions are negotiable, while ours are not," Vivec pulled out a map. "We can meet them here, in this village to the north-west of Ald Lambasi, Fervinthil."

"But will we meet them to talk," ask Almalexia. "Or to make war?"

No one had an answer to that.

15 Last Seed, 2920
Fervinthil, Morrowind

A late summer squall blew through the small village, darkening the sky except for flashing of lightning which leapt from cloud to cloud like acrobats. Water rushed down the narrow streets ankle-deep, and the Prince had to shout to be heard by his captains but a few feet away from him.

"There's an inn up ahead! We'll wait there for the storm to pass before pressing on to Ald Lambasi!"

The inn was warm and dry, and bustling with business. Barmaids were rushing back and forth, bringing greef and wine to a back room, evidently excited about a famous visitor. Someone who was attracting more attention than the mere heir to the Empire of Tamriel. Amused, Juulek watched them run until he overheard the name of "Vivec."
"My Lord Vivec," he said, bursting into the back room. "You must believe me, I knew nothing about the attack on Black Gate until after it happened. We will, of course, be returning it to your care forthwith. I wrote you a letter to that effect at your palace in Balmora, but obviously you're not there," he paused, taking in the many new faces in the room. "I'm sorry, let me introduce myself. I'm Juilek Cyrodiil."

"My name is Almalexia," said the most beautiful woman the Prince had ever seen. "Won't you join us?"

"Sotha Sil," said a serious-looking Dunmer in a white cloak, shaking the Prince's hand and showing him to a seat.

"Indoril Brindisi Dorom, Duke-Prince of Mournhold," said the massively-built man next to him as he sat down.

"I recognize that the events of the last month suggest, at best, that the Imperial Army is not under my control," said the Prince after ordering some wine. "This is true. The army is my father's."

"I understood that the Emperor was going to be coming to Ald Lambasi as well," said Almalexia.

"Officially, he is," said the Prince cautiously. "Unofficially, he's still back in the Imperial City. He's met with an unfortunate accident."

Vivec glanced the Duke quickly before looking at the Prince: "An accident?"

"He's fine," said the Prince quickly. "He'll live, but it looks like he'll lose an eye. It was an altercation that has nothing to do with the war. The only good news is that while he recovers, I have the use of his seal. Any agreement we make here and now will be binding to the Empire, both in my father's reign and in mine."

"Then let's start agreeing," smiled Almalexia.

16 Last Seed, 2920

Wroth Naga, Cyrodiil

The tiny hamlet of Wroth Naga greeted Cassyr with its colorful houses perched on a promontory overlooking the stretch of the Wrothgarian mountain plain and High Rock beyond. Had he been in a better mood, the sight would have been breathtaking. As it was, he could only think that in practical terms, a small village like this would have meager provisions for himself and his horse.

He rode down into the main square, where an inn called the Eagle's Cry stood. Directing the stable boy to house and feed his horse, Cassyr walked into the inn and was surprised by its ambience. A minstrel he had heard play once in Gilderdale was performing a jaunty old tune to the clapping of the mountain men. Such forced merriment was not what Cassyr wanted at that moment. A glum Dunmer woman was seated at the only table far from the noise, so he
took his drink there and sat down without invitation. It was only when he did so that he noticed that she was holding a newborn baby.

"I've just come from Morrowind," he said rather awkwardly, lowering his voice. "I've been fighting for Vivec and the Duke of Mournhold against the Imperial army. A traitor to my people, I guess you'd call me."

"I am also a traitor to my people," said the woman, holding up her hand which was scarred with a branded symbol. "It means that I can never go back to my homeland."

"Well, you're not thinking of staying here, are you?" laughed Cassyr. "It's certainly quaint, but come wintertide, there's going to be snow up to your eyelashes. It's no place for a new baby. What is her name?"

"Bosriel. It means 'Beauty of the Forest.' Where are you going?"

"Dwynnen, on the bay in High Rock. You're welcome to join me, I could use the company." He held out his hand. "Cassyr Whitley."

"Turala," said the woman after a pause. She was going to use her family's name first, as is tradition, but she realized that it was no longer her name. "I would love to accompany you, thank you."

19 Last Seed, 2920
Ald Lambasi, Morrowind

Five men and two women stood in the silence of the Great Room of the castle, the only sound the scrawl of quill on parchment and the gentle tapping of rain on the large picture window. As the Prince set the seal of Cyrodiil on the document, the peace was made official. The Duke of Mournhold broke out in a roar of delight, ordering wine brought in to commemorate the end of eighty years of war.

Only Sotha Sil stood apart from the group. His face betrayed no emotion. Those who knew him best knew he did not believe in endings or beginnings, but in the continuous cycle of which this was but a small part.

"My Prince," said the castle steward, unhappy at breaking the celebration. "There is a messenger here from your mother, the Empress. He asked to see your father, but as he did not arrive --"

Juilek excused himself and went to speak with the messenger.

"The Empress does not live in the Imperial City?" asked Vivec.

"No," said Almalexia, shaking her head sadly. "Her husband has imprisoned her in Black Marsh, fearing that she was plotting a revolution against him. She is extremely wealthy and has powerful allies in the western Colovian estates so he could not marry another or have her executed. They've been at an impasse for the last seventeen years since Juilek was a child."
The Prince returned a few minutes later. His face betrayed his anxiety, though he took
troubles to hide it.

"My mother needs me," he said simply. "I'm afraid I must leave at once. If I may have a copy
of the treaty, I will bring it with me to show the Empress the good we have done today, and
then I will carry it on to the Imperial City so it may be made official."

Prince Juilek left with the fond farewells of the Three of Morrowind. As they watched him
ride out into the rainswept night south towards Black Marsh, Vivec said, "Tamriel will be
much healed when he has the throne."

31 Last Seed, 2920
Dorsza Pass, Black Marsh

The moon was rising over the desolate quarry, steaming with swamp gas from a particularly
hot summer as the Prince and his two guard escort rode out of the forest. The massive piles of
earth and dung had been piled high in antiquity by some primitive, long-dead tribe of Black
Marsh, hoping to keep out some evil from the north. Evidently, the evil had broken through at
Dorsza Pass, the large crack in the sad, lonely rampart that stretched for miles.

The black twisted trees that grew on the barrier cast strange shadows down, like a net
tangling. The Prince's mind was on his mother's cryptic letter, hinting at the threat of an
invasion. He could not, of course, tell the Dunmer about it, at the very least until he knew
more and had notified his father. After all, the letter was meant for him. It was its urgent tone
that made him decide to go directly to Gideon.

The Empress had also warned him about a band of former slaves who attacked caravans going
into Dorsza Pass. She advised him to be certain to make his Imperial shield visible, so they
would know he was not one of the hated Dunmer slavers. Upon riding into the tall weeds that
flooded through the pass like a noxious river, the Prince ordered that his shield be displayed.

"I can see why the slaves use this," said the Prince's captain. "It's an excellent location for an
ambush."

Juilek nodded his head, but his thoughts were elsewhere. What threat of invasion could the
Empress have discovered? Were the Akaviri on the seas again? If so, how could his mother
from her cell in Castle Giovese know of it? A rustle in the weeds and a single sharp human
cry behind him interrupted his ponderings.

Turning around, the Prince discovered that he was alone. His escort had vanished.

The Prince peered over the stretch of the moonlit sea of grass which waved in almost hypnotic
patterns to the ebb and flow of the night wind billowing through the pass. It was impossible to
tell if a struggling soldier was beneath this system of vibrations, a dying horse behind another.
A high, whistling wind drowned out any sound the victims of the ambush might be making.

Juilek drew his sword, and thought about what to do, his mind willing his heart not to panic.
He was closer to the exit of the pass than the entrance. Whatever had slain his escort must
have been behind him. If he rode fast enough, perhaps he could outrun it. Spurring his horse to gallop, he charged for the hills ahead, framed by the mighty black piles of dirt.

When he was thrown, it happened so suddenly, he was hurling forward before he was truly conscious of the fact. He landed several yards beyond where his horse had fallen, breaking his shoulder and his back on impact. A numbness washed over him as he stared at his poor, dying steed, its belly sliced open by one of several spears jutting up just below the surface of the grass.

Prince Juilek was not able to turn and face the figure that emerged from the grass, nor able to move to defend himself. His throat was cut without ceremony.

Miramor cursed when he saw the face of his victim more clearly in the moonlight. He had seen the Emperor at the Battle of Bodrum when he had fought in His Imperial Majesty's command, and this was clearly not the Emperor. Searching the body, he found the letter and a treaty signed by Vivec, Almalexia, Sotha Sil, and the Duke of Mournhold representing Morrowind and the Prince Juilek Cyrodiil, representing the Cyrodiil Empire.

"Curse my luck," muttered Miramor to himself and the whispering grass. "I've only killed a Prince. Where's the reward in that?"

Miramor destroyed the letter, as Zuuk had instructed him to do, and pocketed the treaty. At the very least, such a curiosity would have some market value. He disassembled the traps as he pondered his next step. Return to Gideon and ask his employer for a lesser reward for killing the heir? Move on to other lands? At the very least, he considered, he had picked up two useful skills from the Battle of Bodrum. From the Dunmer, he had learned the excellent spear trap. And abandoning the Imperial army, he had learned how to skulk in the grass.

The Year is Continued in Hearth Fire.
The Empress Tavia lay across her bed, a hot late summer wind she could not feel banging the shutters of her cell to and fro against the iron bars. Her throat felt like it was on fire but still she sobbed, uncontrollably, wringing her last tapestry in her hands. Her wailing echoed throughout the hollow halls of Castle Giovese, stopping maids in their washing and guards in their conversation. One of her women came up the narrow stairs to see her mistress, but her chief guard Zuuk stood at the doorway and shook his head.

"She's just heard that her son is dead," he said quietly.

"Your Imperial Majesty," said the Potentate Versidue-Shaie through the door. "You can open the door. I assure you, you're perfectly safe. No one wants to kill you."

"Mara's blood!" came the Emperor Reman III's voice, muffled, hysterical, tinged with madness. "Someone assassinated the Prince, and he was holding my shield! They could have thought he was me!"

"You're certainly correct, your Imperial Majesty," replied the Potentate, expunging any mocking qualities from his voice while his black-slitted eyes rolled contemptuously. "And we must find and punish the evildoer responsible for your son's death. But we cannot do it without you. You must be brave for your Empire."

There was no reply.

"At the very least, come out and sign the order for Lady Rijja's execution," called the Potentate. "Let us dispose of the one traitor and assassin we know of."

A brief pause, and then the sound of furniture scraping across the floor. Reman opened the door just a crack, but the Potentate could see his angry, fearful face, and the terrible mound of ripped tissue that used to be his right eye. Despite the best healers in the Empire, it was still a ghastly souvenir of the Lady Rijja's work in Thurzo Fortress.

"Hand me the order," the Emperor snarled. "I'll sign it with pleasure."
6 Hearth Fire, 2920
Gideon, Cyrodiil

The strange blue glow of the will o' the wisps, a combination, so she'd be told, of swamp gas and spiritual energy, had always frightened Tavia as she looked out her window. Now it seemed strangely comforting. Beyond the bog lay the city of Gideon. It was funny, she thought, that she had never stepped foot in its streets, though she had watched it ever day for seventeen years.

"Can you think of anything I've forgotten?" she asked, turning to look back on the loyal Kothringi Zuuk.

"I know exactly what to do," he said simply. He seemed to smile, but the Empress realized that it was only her own face reflected in his silvery skin. She was smiling, and she didn't even realize it.

"Make certain you aren't followed," she warned. "I don't want my husband to know where my gold's been hiding all these years. And do take your share of it. You've been a good friend."

The Empress Tavia stepped forward and dropped from sight into the mists. Zuuk replaced the bars on the tower window, and threw a blanket over some pillows on her bed. With any luck, they would not discover her body on the lawn until morning, at which time he hoped to be halfway to Morrowind.

9 Hearth Fire, 2920
Phrygias, High Rock

The strange trees on all sides resembled knobby piles crowned with great bursts of reds, yellows, and oranges, like insect mounds caught fire. The Wrothgarian mountains were fading into the misty afternoon. Turala marveled at the sight, so alien, so different from Morrowind, as she plodded the horse forward into an open pasture. Behind her, head nodding against his chest, Cassyr slept, cradling Bosriel. For a moment, Turala considered jumping the low painted fence that crossed the field, but she thought better of it. Let Cassyr sleep for a few more hours before giving him the reigns.

As the horse passed into the field, Turala saw the small green house on the next hill, half-hidden in forest. So picturesque was the image, she felt herself lull into a pleasant half-sleeping state. A blast of a horn brought her back to reality with a shudder. Cassyr opened his eyes.

"Where are we?" he hissed.

"I don't know," Turala stammered, wide-eyed. "What is that sound?"

"Orcs," he whispered. "A hunting party. Head for the thicket quickly."

Turala trotted the horse into the small collection of trees. Cassyr handed her the child and dismounted. He began pulling their bags off next, throwing them into the bushes. A sound started then, a distant rumbling of footfall, growing louder and closer. Turala climbed off
carefully and helped Cassyr unburden the horse. All the while, Bosriel watched open-eyed. Turala sometimes worried that her baby never cried. Now she was grateful for it. With the last of the luggage off, Cassyr slapped the horse's rear, sending it galloping into the field. Taking Turala's hand, he hunkered down in the bushes.

"With luck," he murmured. "They'll think she's wild or belongs to the farm and won't go looking for the rider."

As he spoke, a horde of orcs surged into the field, blasting their horns. Turala had seen orcs before, but never in such abundance, never with such bestial confidence. Roaring with delight at the horse and its confused state, they hastened past the timber where Cassyr, Turala, and Bosriel hid. The wildflowers flew into the air at their stampede, powdering the air with seeds. Turala tried to hold back a sneeze, and thought she succeeded. One of the orcs heard something though, and brought another with him to investigate.

Cassyr quietly unsheathed his sword, mustering all the confidence he could. His skills, such as they were, were in spying, not combat, but he vowed to protect Turala and her babe for as long as he could. Perhaps he would slay these two, he reasoned, but not before they cried out and brought the rest of the horde.

Suddenly, something invisible swept through the bushes like a wind. The orcs flew backwards, falling dead on their backs. Turala turned and saw a wrinkled crone with bright red hair emerge from a nearby bush.

"I thought you were going to bring 'em right to me," she whispered, smiling. "Best come with me."

The three followed the old woman through a deep crevasse of bramble bushes that ran through the field toward the house on the hill. As they emerged on the other side, the woman turned to look at the orcs feasting on the remains of the horse, a blood-soaked orgy to the beat of multiple horns.

"That horse yours?" she asked. When Cassyr nodded, she laughed loudly. "That's rich meat, that is. Those monsters'll have bellyaches and flatulence in the morning. Serves 'em right."

"Shouldn't we keep moving?" whispered Turala, unnerved by the woman's laughter.

"They won't come up here," she grinned, looking at Bosriel who smiled back. "They're too afraid of us."

Turala turned to Cassyr, who shook his head. "Witches. Am I correct in assuming that this is Old Barbyn's Farm, the home of the Skeffington Coven?"

"You are, pet," the old woman giggled girlishly, pleased to be so infamous. "I am Mynista Skeffington."

"What did you do to those orcs?" asked Turala. "Back there in the thicket?"

"Spirit fist right side the head," Mynista said, continuing the climb up the hill. Ahead of them was the farmhouse grounds, a well, a chicken coop, a pond, women of all ages doing chores,
the laughter of children at play. The old woman turned and saw that Turala did not understand. "Don't you have witches where you come from, child?"

"None that I know of," she said.

"There are all sorts of wielders of magic in Tamriel," she explained. "The Psijics study magic like its their painful duty. The battlemages in the army on the other end of the scale hurl spells like arrows. We witches commune and conjure and celebrate. To fell those orcs, I merely whispered to the spirits of the air, Amaro, Pina, Tallatha, the fingers of Kynareth, and the breath of the world, with whom I have an intimate acquaintance, to smack those bastards dead. You see, conjuration is not about might, or solving riddles, or agonizing over musty old scrolls. It's about fostering relations. Being friendly, you might say."

"Well, we certainly appreciate you being friendly with us," said Cassyr.

"As well you might," coughed Mynista. "Your kind destroyed the orc homeland two thousand years ago. Before that, they never came all the way up here and bothered us. Now let's get you cleaned up and fed."

With that, Mynista led them into the farm, and Turala met the family of the Skeffington Coven.

11 Hearth Fire, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

Rijja had not even tried to sleep the night before, and she found the somber music played during her execution to have a soporific effect. It was as if she was willing herself to be unconscious before the ax stroke. Her eyes were bound so she could not see her former lover, the Emperor, seated before her, glaring with his one good eye. She could not see the Potentate Versidue-Shaie, his coil neatly wrapped beneath him, a look of triumph in his golden face. She could feel, numbly, the executioner's hand touch her back to steady her. She flinched like a dreamer trying to awake.

The first blow caught the back of her head and she screamed. The next hacked through her neck, and she was dead.

The Emperor turned to the Potentate wearily, "Now that's done. You said she had a pretty sister in Hammerfell named Corda?"

18 Hearth Fire, 2920
Dwynnen, High Rock

The horse the witches had sold him was not as good as his old one, Cassyr considered. Spirit worship and sacrifice and sisterhood might be all well and good for conjuring spirits, but it tends to spoil beasts of burden. Still, there was little to complain about. With the Dunmer woman and her child gone, he had made excellent time. Ahead were the walls surrounding the city of his homeland. Almost at once, he was set upon by his old friends and family.
"How went the war?" cried his cousin, running to the road. "Is it true that Vivec signed a peace with the Prince, but the Emperor refuses to honor it?"

"That's not how it was, was it?" asked a friend, joining them. "I heard that the Dunmer had the Prince murdered and then made up a story about a treaty, but there's no evidence for it."

"Isn't there anything interesting happening here?" Cassyr laughed. "I really don't have the least interest in discussing the war or Vivec."

"You missed the procession of the Lady Corda," said his friend. "She came across the bay with full entourage and then east to the Imperial City."

"But that's nothing. What was Vivec like?" asked his cousin eagerly. "He supposed to be a living god."

"If Sheogorath steps down and they need another God of Madness, he'll do," said Cassyr haughtily.

"And the women?" asked the lad, who had only seen Dunmer ladies on very rare occasions.

Cassyr merely smiled. Turala Skeffington flashed into his mind for an instant before fading away. She would be happy with the coven, and her child would be well cared for. But they were part of the past now, a place and a war he wanted to forget forever. Dismounting his horse, he walked it into the city, chatting of trivial gossip of life on the Iliac Bay.
The creature before them blinked, senseless, its eyes glazed, mouth opening and closing as if relearning its function. A thin glob of saliva burbled down between its fangs, and hung suspended. Turala had never seen anything of its kind before, reptilian and massive, perched on its hind legs like a man. Mynistera applauded enthusiastically.

"My child," she crowed. "You have come so far in so short a time. What were you thinking when you summoned this daedroth?"

It took Turala a moment to recall whether she was thinking anything at all. She was merely overwhelmed that she had reached out across the fabric of reality into the realm of Oblivion, and plucked forth this loathsome creature, conjuring it into the world by the power of her mind.

"I was thinking of the color red," Turala said, concentrating. "The simplicity and clarity of it. And then -- I desired, and spoke the charm. And this is what I conjured up."

" Desire is a powerful force for a young witch," said Mynistera. "And it is well matched in this instance. For this daedroth is nothing if not a simple force of the spirits. Can you release your desire as easily?"

Turala closed her eyes and spoke the dismissal invocation. The monster faded away like a painting in sunlight, still blinking confusedly. Mynistera embraced her Dark Elf pupil, laughing with delight.

"I never would have believed it, a month and a day you've been with the coven, and you're already far more advanced than most of the women here. There is powerful blood in you, Turala, you touch spirits like you were touching a lover. You'll be leading this coven one day -- I have seen it!"

Turala smiled. It was good to be complimented. The Duke of Mournhold had praised her pretty face; and her family, before she had dishonored them, praised her manners. Cassyr had been nothing more than a companion: his compliments meant nothing. But with Mynistera, she felt she was home.

"You'll be leading the coven for many years yet, great sister," said Turala.
"I certainly intend to. But the spirits, while marvelous companions and faultless tellers of truth, are often hazy about the when and hows. You can't blame them really. When and how mean so little to them," Mynistera opened the door to the shed, allowing the brisk autumn breeze in to dispel the bitter and fetid smells of the daedroth. "Now, I need you to run an errand to Wayrest. It's only a week's ride there, and a week's ride back. Bring Doryatha and Celephyna with you. As much as we try to be self-sufficient, there are herbs we can't grow here, and we seem to run through an enormous quantity of gems in no time at all. It's important that the people of the city learn to recognize you as one of the wise women of Skeffington coven. You'll find the benefits of being notorious far outweigh the inconveniences."

Turala did as she was bade. As she and her sisters climbed aboard their horses, Mynistera brought her child, little five-month-old Bosriel to kiss her mother good-bye. The witches were in love with the little Dunmer infant, fathered by a wicked Duke, birthed by wild Ayleid elves in the forest heart of the Empire. Turala knew her nursemaids would protect her child with their lives. After many kisses and a farewell wave, the three young witches rode off into the bright woods, under a covering of red, yellow, and orange.

12 Frostfall, 2920
Dwynnen, High Rock

For a Middas evening, the Least Loved Porcupine tavern was wildly crowded. A roaring fire in the pit in the center of the room cast an almost sinister glow on all the regulars, and made the abundance of bodies look like a punishment tapestry inspired by the Arcturian Heresies. Cassyr took his usual place with his cousin and ordered a flagon of ale.

"Have you been to see the Baron?" asked Palyth.

"Yes, he may have work for me in the palace of Urvaius," said Cassyr proudly. "But more than that I can't say. You understand, secrets of state and all that. Why are there so many damned people here tonight?"

"A shipload of Dark Elves just came in to harbor. They've come from the war. I was just waiting until you got here to introduce you as another veteran."

Cassyr blushed, but regained his composure enough to ask: "What are they doing here? Has there been a truce?"

"I don't know the full story," said Palyth. "But apparently, the Emperor and Vivec are in negotiations again. These fellas here have investments they were keen to check on, and they figured things on the Bay were quiet enough. But the only way we can get the full story is to talk to the chaps."

With that, Palyth gripped his cousin's arm and pulled him to the other side of the bar so suddenly, Cassyr would have had to struggle violently to resist. The Dunmer travelers were spread out across four of the tables, laughing with the locals. They were largely amiable young men, well-dressed, befitting merchants, animated in gesture made more extravagant by liquor.
"Excuse me," said Palyth, intruding on the conversation. "My shy cousin Cassyr was in the war as well, fighting for the living god, Vivec."

"The only Cassyr I ever heard of," said one of the Dunmer drunkenly with a wide, friendly smile, shaking Cassyr's free hand. "Was a Cassyr Whitley, who Vivec said was the worst spy in history. We lost Ald Marak due to his bungling intelligence work. For your sake, friend, I hope the two of you were never confused."

Cassyr smiled and listened as the lout told the story of his failure with bountiful exaggerations which caused the table to roar with laughter. Several eyes looked his way, but none of the locals sought to explain that the fool of the tale was standing at attention. The eyes that stung the most were his cousin's, the young man who had believed that he had returned to Dwynnen a great hero. At some point, certainly, the Baron would hear about it, his idiocy increasing manifold with each retelling.

With every fiber in his soul, Cassyr cursed the living god Vivec.

21 Frostfall, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

Corda, in a robe of blinding whiteness, a uniform of the priestesses of the Hegathe Morwha conservatorium, arrived in the City just as the first winter storm was passing. The clouds broke with sunlight, and the beauteous teenaged Redguard girl appeared in the wide avenue with escort, riding toward the Palace. While her sister was tall, thin, angular, and haughty, Corda was a small, round-faced lass with wide brown eyes. The locals were quick to draw comparisons.

"Not a month after Lady Rijja's execution," muttered a housemaid, peering out the window, and winking to her neighbor.

"And not a month out of the nunnery neither," the other woman agreed, reveling in the scandal. "This one's in for a ride. Her sister weren't no innocent, and look where she ended up."

24 Frostfall, 2920
Dwynnen, High Rock

Cassyr stood on the harbor and watched the early sleet fall on the water. It was a pity, he thought, that he was prone to sea-sickness. There was nothing for him now in Tamriel to the east or to the west. Vivec's tale of his poor spycraft had spread to taverns everywhere. The Baron of Dwynnen had released him from his contract. No doubt they were laughing about him in Daggerfall, too, and Dawnstar, Lilmoth, Rimmen, Greenheart, probably in Akavir and Yokuda for that matter. Perhaps it would be best to drop into the waves and sink. The thought, however, did not stay long in his mind: it was not despair that haunted him, but rage. Impotent fury that he could not assuage.
"Excuse me, sir," said a voice behind him, making him jump. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but I was wondering whether you could recommend an inexpensive tavern for me to spend the night."

It was a young man, a Nord, with a sack over his shoulder. Obviously, he had just disembarked from one of the boats. For the first time in weeks, someone was looking at Cassyr as something other than a colossal, famous idiot. He could not help, black as his mood was, but be friendly.

"You've just arrived from Skyrim?" asked Cassyr.

"No, sir, that's where I'm going," said the fellow. "I'm working my way home. I've come up from Sentinel, and before that Stros M'kai, and before that Woodhearth in Valenwood, and before that Artaeum in Summerset. Welleg's my name."

Cassyr introduced himself and shook Welleg's hand. "Did you say you came from Artaeum? Are you a Psijic?"

"No, sir, not anymore," the fellow shrugged. "I was expelled."

"Do you know anything about summoning daedra? You see, I want to cast a curse against a particularly powerful person, one might say a living god, and I haven't had any luck. The Baron won't allow me in his sight, but the Baroness has sympathy for me and allowed me the use of their Summoning Chambers."

"Cassyr spat. "I did all the rituals, made sacrifices, but nothing came of it."

"That'd be because of Sotha Sil, my old master," replied Welleg with some bitterness. "The Daedra princes have agreed not to be summoned by any amateurs at least until the war ends. Only the Psijics may counsel with the daedra, and a few nomadic sorcerers and witches."

"Witches, did you say?"

29 Frostfall, 2920
Phrygias, High Rock

Pale sunlight flickered behind the mist bathing the forest as Turala, Doryatha, and Celephyna drove their horses on. The ground was wet with a thin layer of frost, and laden down with goods, it was a slippery way over unpaved hills. Turala tried to contain her excitement about coming back to the coven. Wayrest had been an adventure, and she adored the looks of fear and respect the cityfolk gave her. But for the last few days, all she could think of was returning to her sisters and her child.

A bitter wind whipped her hair forward so she could see nothing but the path ahead. She did not hear the rider approach to her side until he was almost upon her. When she turned and saw Cassyr, she shouted with as much surprise as pleasure at meeting an old friend. His face was pale and drawn, but she took it to be merely from travel.

"What brings you back to Phrygias?" she smiled. "Were you not treated well in Dwynnen?"
"Well enough," said Cassyr. "I have need of the Skeffington coven."

"Ride with us," said Turala. "I'll bring you to Mynistera."

The four continued on, and the witches regaled Cassyr with tales of Wayrest. It was evident that it was also a rare treat for Doryatha and Celephyna to leave Old Babyn's Farm. They had been born there, as daughters and grand-daughters of Skeffington witches. Ordinary High Rock city life was exotic to them as it was to Turala. Cassyr said little, but smiled and nodded his head, which was encouragement enough. Thankfully, none of the stories they had heard were about his own stupidity. Or at the very least, they did not tell him.

Doryatha was in the midst of a tale she had heard in a tavern about a thief who had been locked overnight in a pawnshop when they crossed over a familiar hill. Suddenly, she halted in her story. The barn was supposed to be visible, but it was not. The other three followed her gaze into the fog, and a moment later, they rode as fast as they could towards what was once the site of the Skeffington coven.

The fire had long since burned out. Nothing but ashes, skeletons, and broken weaponry remained. Cassyr recognized at once the signs of an orc raid.

The witches fell from their horses, racing through the remains, wailing. Celephyna found a tattered, bloody piece of cloth that she recognized from Mynistera's cloak. She held it to her ashen face, sobbing. Turala screamed for Bosriel, but the only reply was the high whistling wind through the ashes.

"Who did this?" she cried, tears streaking down her face. "I swear I'll conjure up the very flames of Oblivion! What have they done with my baby?"

"I know who did it," said Cassyr quietly, dropping from his horse and walking towards her. "I've seen these weapons before. I fear I met the very fiends responsible in Dwynnen, but I never thought they'd find you. This is the work of assassins hired by the Duke of Mournhold."

He paused. The lie came easily. Adopt and improvise. What's more, he could tell instantly that she believed it. Her resentment over the cruelty the Duke had shown her had quieted, but never disappeared. One look at her burning eyes told him that she would summon the daedra and wreak his, and her, revenge upon Morrowind. And what's more, he knew they'd listen.

And listen they did. For the power that is greater than desire is rage. Even rage misplaced.
2 Sun's Dusk, 2920
Tel Aruhn, Morrowind

A man to see you, Night Mother," said the guard. "A Kothringi tribesman who presents his credentials as Lord Zuuk of Black Marsh, part of the Imperial Garrison of Gideon."

"What makes you think I'd have even the slightest possible interest in seeing him?" asked the Night Mother with venomous sweetness.

"He brings a letter from the late Empress of the Cyrodilic Empire."

"We are having a busy day," she smiled, clapping her hands together with delight. "Show him in."

Zuuk entered the chamber. His metallic skin, though exposed only at his face and hands, caught the light of the fireplace and the lightning of the stormy night from the window. The Night Mother noted also that she could see herself as he saw her: serene, beautiful, fear-inspiring. He handed her his letter from the Empress without a word. Sipping her wine, she read it.

"The Duke of Morrowind also offered me an appreciable sum to have the Emperor murdered earlier this year," she said, folding the letter. "His payment sunk, and never was delivered. It was a considerable annoyance, particularly as I had already gone to the trouble of putting one of my agents in the palace. Why should I assume that your more-than-generous payment, from a dead woman, will arrive?"

"I brought it with me," said Zuuk simply. "It is in the carriage outside."

"Then bring it in and our business is complete," smiled the Night Mother. "The Emperor will be dead by year's end. You may leave the gold with Apaladith. Unless you'd care for some wine?"

Zuuk declined the offer and withdrew. The moment he left the room, Miramor slipped noiselessly back from behind the dark tapestry. The Night Mother offered him a glass of wine, and he accepted it.

"I know that fellow, Zuuk," said Miramor carefully. "I didn't know he worked for the old Empress though."
"Let's talk about you some more, if you don't mind," she said, knowing he would, in fact, not mind.

"Let me show you my worth," said Miramor. "Let me be the one to do the Emperor in. I've already killed his son, and you saw there how well I can hide myself away. Tell me you saw one ripple in the tapestry."

The Night Mother smiled. Things were falling into place rather nicely.

"If you know how to use a dagger, you will find him at Bodrum," she said, and described to him what he must do.

3 Sun's Dusk, 2920
Mournhold, Morrowind

The Duke stared out the window. It was early morning, and for the fourth straight day, a red mist hung over the city, flashing lightning. A freakish wind blew through the streets, ripping his flags from the castle battlements, forcing all his people to close their shudders tightly. Something terrible was coming to his land. He was not a greatly learned man, but he knew the signs. So too did his subjects.

"When will my messengers reach the Three?" he growled, turning to his castellan.

"Vivec is far to the north, negotiating the treaty with the Emperor," the man said, his face and voice trembling with fear. "Almalexia and Sotha Sil are in Necrom. Perhaps they can be reached in a few days time."

The Duke nodded. He knew his messengers were fast, but so too was the hand of Oblivion.

6 Sun's Dusk, 2920
Bodrum, Morrowind

Torchlight caught in the misting snow gave the place an otherworldly quality. The soldiers from both camps found themselves huddled together around the largest of the bonfires: winter bringing enemies of four score of warring close together. While only a few of the Dunmer guard could speak Cyrodilic, they found common ground battling for warmth. When a pretty Redguard maiden passed into their midst to warm herself before moving back to the treaty tent, many a man from both army raised their eyes in approval.

The Emperor Reman III was eager to leave negotiations before they had ever begun. A month earlier, he thought it would be a sign of good will to meet at the site of his defeat to Vivec's army, but the place brought back more bad memories than he thought it would. Despite the protestations of Potentate Versidue-Shaie that the rocks of the river were naturally red, he could swear he saw splatters of his soldier's blood.

"We have all the particulars of the treaty," he said, taking a glass of hot yuelle from his mistress Corda. "But here and now is not the place for signing. We should do it at the Imperial
Palace, with all the pomp and splendor this historic occasion demands. You must bring Almalexia with you too. And that wizard fellow."

"Sotha Sil," whispered the Potentate.

"When?" asked Vivec with infinite patience.

"In exactly a month's time," said the Emperor, smiling munificently and clambering awkwardly to his feet. "We will hold a grand ball to commemorate. Now I must take a walk. My legs are all cramped up with the weather. Corda, my dear, will you walk with me?"

"Of course, your Imperial Majesty," she said, helping him toward the tent's entrance.

"Would you like me to come with you as well, your Imperial Majesty?" asked Versidue-Shaie.

"Or I?" asked King Dro'Zel of Senchal, a newly appointed advisor to the court.

"That won't be necessary, I won't be gone a minute," said Reman.

Miramor crouched in the same rushes he had hidden in nearly eight months before. Now the ground was hard and snow-covered, and the rushes slick with ice. Every slight movement he made issued forth a crunch. If it were not for the raucous songs of the combined Morrowind and Imperial army gathered about the bonfire, he would not have dared creep as close to the Emperor and his concubine. They were standing at the curve in the frozen creek below the bluff, surrounded by trees sparkling with ice.

Carefully, Miramor removed the dagger from its sheath. He had slightly exaggerated his abilities with a short blade to the Night Mother. True, he had used one to cut the throat of Prince Juilek, but the lad was not in any position to fight back at the time. Still, how difficult could it be to stab an old man with one eye? What sort of blade skill would such an easy assassination require?

His ideal moment presented itself before his eyes. The woman saw something deeper in the woods, an icicle of an unusual shape she said, and darted off to get it. The Emperor remained behind, laughing. He turned to the face of the bluff to see his soldiers singing their song's refrain, his back to his assassin. Miramor knew the moment had come. Mindful of the sound of his footfall on the icy ground, he stepped forward and struck. Very nearly.

Almost simultaneously, he was aware of a strong arm holding back his striking arm and another one punching a dagger into his throat. He could not scream. The Emperor, still looking up at the soldiers, never saw Miramor pulled back into the brush and a hand much more skilled than his slicing into his back, paralyzing him.

His blood pooling out and already crystallizing on the frozen ground, Miramor watched, dying, as the Emperor and his courtesan returned to join the camp up on the bluff.
12 Sun's Dusk, 2920
Mournhold, Morrowind

A gout of ever-erupting flame was all that remained of the central courtyard of Castle Mournhold, blasting skyward into the boiling clouds. A thick, tarry smoke rolled through the streets, igniting everything that was wood or paper on fire. Winged bat-like creatures harried the citizens from their hiding places out into the open, where they were met by the real army. The only thing that kept all of Mournhold from burning to the ground was the wet, sputtering blood of its people.

Mehrunes Dagon smiled as he surveyed the castle crumbling.

"To think I nearly didn't come," he said aloud, his voice booming over the chaos. "Imagine missing all this fun."

His attention was arrested by a needle-thin shaft of light piercing through his black and red shadowed sky. He followed it to its source, two figures, a man and a woman standing on the hill above town. The man in the white robe he recognized immediately as Sotha Sil, the sorcerer who had talked all the Princes of Oblivion into that meaningless truce.

"If you've come for the Duke of Mournhold, he isn't here," laughed Mehrunes Dagon. "But you might find pieces of him the next time it rains."

"Daedra, we cannot kill you," said Almalexia, her face hard and resolute. "But that you will soon regret."

With that, two living gods and a prince of Oblivion engaged in battle on the ruins of Mournhold.

17 Sun's Dusk, 2920
Tel Aruhn, Morrowind

"Night Mother," said the guard. "Correspondence from your agent in the Imperial Palace."

The Night Mother read the note carefully. The test had been a success: Miramor had been successfully detected and slain. The Emperor was in very unsafe hands. The Night Mother responded immediately.

18 Sun's Dusk, 2920
Balmora, Morrowind

Sotha Sil, face solemn and unreadable, greeted Vivec at the grand plaza in front of his palace. Vivec had ridden day and night after hearing about the battle in his tent in Bodrum, crossing mile after mile, cutting through the dangerous ground at Dagoth-Ur at blinding speed. To the south, during all the course of the voyage, he could see the whirling red clouds and knew that the battle was continuing, day after day. In Gnisis, he met a messenger from Sotha Sil, asking him to meet at Balmora.
"Where is Almalexia?"

"Inside," said Sotha Sil wearily. There was a long, ugly gash running across his jaw. "She's gravely injured, but Mehrunes Dagon will not return from Oblivion for many a moon."

Almalexia lay on a bed of silk, tended to by Vivec's own healers. Her face, even her lips, was gray as stone, and blood stained through the gauze of her bandages. Vivec took her cold hand. Almalexia's mouth moved wordlessly. She was dreaming.

She was battling Mehrunes Dagon again amid a firestorm. All around her, the blackened husk of a castle crumbled, splashing sparks into the night sky. The Daedra's claws dug into her belly, spreading poison through her veins while Almalexia throttled him. As she sank to the ground beside her defeated foe, she saw that the castle consumed by fire was not Castle Mournhold. It was the Imperial Palace.

24 Sun's Dusk, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

A winter gale blew over the city, splashing the windows and glass domes of the Imperial Palace. Quivering light rays illuminated the figures within in surreal patterns.

The Emperor barked orders to his staff in preparations for the banquet and ball. This was what he enjoyed best, more than battle. King Dro'Zel was supervising the entertainment, having strong opinions on the matter. The Emperor himself was arranging the details of the dinner. Roast nebfish, vegetable marrow, cream soups, buttered helerac, codscrumb, tongue in aspic. Potentate Versidue-Shaie had made a few suggestions of his own, but the tastes of the Akaviri were very peculiar.

The Lady Corda accompanied the Emperor to his chambers as night fell.

The Year is Concluded in Evening Star.
The winter morning sun glinted through the cobweb of frost on the window, and Almalexia opened her eyes. An ancient healer mopped a wet cloth across her head, smiling with relief. Asleep in the chair next to her bed was Vivec. The healer rushed to a side cabinet and returned with a flagon of water.

"How are you feeling, goddess?" asked the healer.

"Like I've been asleep for a very long time," said Almalexia.

"So you have. Fifteen days," said the healer, and touched Vivec's arm. "Master, wake up. She speaks."

Vivec rose with a start, and seeing Almalexia alive and awake, his face broke into a wide grin. He kissed her forehead, and took her hand. At last, there was warmth again in her flesh.

Almalexia's peaceful repose suddenly snapped: "Sotha Sil --"

"He's alive and well," replied Vivec. "Working on one of his machines again somewhere. He would have stayed here too, but he realized he could do you more good working that peculiar sorcery of his."

The castellan appeared in the doorway. "Sorry to interrupt you, master, but I wanted to tell you that your fastest messenger left late last night for the Imperial City."

"Messenger?" asked Almalexia. "Vivec, what has happened?"

"I was to go and sign a truce with the Emperor on the sixth, so I sent him word that it had to be postponed."

"You can't do me any good here," said Almalexia, pulling herself up with effort. "But if you don't sign that truce, you'll put Morrowind back to war, maybe for another eighty years. If you leave today with an escort and hurry, perhaps you can get to the Imperial City only a day or two late."

"Are you certain you don't need me here?" asked Vivec.
"I know that Morrowind needs you more."

6 Sun's Dusk, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

The Emperor Reman III sat on his throne, surveying the audience chamber. It was a spectacular sight: silver ribbons dangled from the rafters, burning cauldrons of sweet herbs simmered in every corner, Pyandonean swallowtails sweeping through the air, singing their songs. When the torches were lit and servants began fanning, the room would be transfigured into a shimmering fantasy land. He could smell the kitchen already, spices and roasts.

The Potentate Versidue-Shaie and his son Savirien-Chorak slithered into the room, both bedecked in the headdress and jewelry of the Tsaesci. There was no smile on their golden face, but there seldom was one. The Emperor still greeted his trusted advisor with enthusiasm.

"This ought to impress those savage Dark Elves," he laughed. "When are they supposed to arrive?"

"A messenger's just arrived from Vivec," said the Potentate solemnly. "I think it would be best if your Imperial Majesty met him alone."

The Emperor lost his laughter, but nodded to his servants to withdraw. The door then opened and the Lady Corda walked into the room, with a parchment in her hand. She shut the door behind her, but did not look up to meet the Emperor's face.

"The messenger gave his letter to my mistress?" said Reman, incredulous, rising to take the note. "That's a highly unorthodox way of delivering a message."

"But the message itself is very orthodox," said Corda, looking up into his one good eye. With a single blinding motion, she brought the letter up under the Emperor's chin. His eyes widened and blood poured down the blank parchment. Blank that is, except for a small black mark, the sign of the Morag Tong. It fell to the floor, revealing the small dagger hidden behind it, which she now twisted, severing his throat to the bone. The Emperor collapsed to the floor, gasping soundlessly.

"How long do you need?" asked Savirien-Chorak.

"Five minutes," said Corda, wiping the blood from her hands. "If you can give me ten, though, I'll be doubly grateful."

"Very well," said the Potentate to Corda's back as she raced from the audience chamber. "She ought to have been an Akaviri, the way the girl handles a blade is truly remarkable."

"I must go and establish our alibi," said Savirien-Chorak, disappearing behind one of the secret passages that only the Emperor's most trusted knew about.

"Do you remember, close to a year ago, your Imperial Majesty," the Potentate smiled, looking down at the dying man. "When you told me to remember 'You Akaviri have a lot of showy
moves, but if just one of our strikes comes through, it's all over for you.' I remembered that, you see."

The Emperor spat up blood and somehow said the word: "Snake."

"I am a snake, your Imperial Majesty, inside and out. But I didn't lie. There was a messenger from Vivec. It seems he'll be a little late in arriving," the Potentate shrugged before disappearing behind the secret passage. "Don't worry yourself. I'm sure the food won't go bad."

The Emperor of Tamriel died in a pool of his own blood in his empty audience chamber decorated for a grand ball. He was found by his bodyguard fifteen minutes later. Corda was nowhere to be found.

8 Sun's Dusk, 2920
Caer Suvio, Cyrodiil

Lord Glavius, apologizing profusely for the quality of the road through the forest, was the first emissary to greet Vivec and his escort as they arrived. A string of burning globes decorated the leafless trees surrounding the villa, bobbing in the gentle but frigid night breeze. From within, Vivec could smell the simple feast and a high sad melody. It was a traditional Akaviri wintertide carol.

Versidue-Shaie greeted Vivec at the front door.

"I'm glad you received the message before you got all the way to the City," said the Potentate, guiding his guest into the large, warm drawing room. "We are in a difficult transition time, and for the moment, it is best not to conduct our business at the capitol."

"There is no heir?" asked Vivec.

"No official one, though there are distant cousins vying for the throne. While we sort the matter out, at least temporarily the nobles have decided that I may act in the office of my late master," Versidue-Shaie signaled for the servants to draw two comfortable chairs in front of the fireplace. "Would you feel most comfortable if we signed the treaty officially right now, or would you like to eat something first?"

"You intend to honor the Emperor's treaty?"

"I intend to do everything as the Emperor," said the Potentate.

14 Sun's Dusk, 2920
Tel Aruhn, Morrowind

Corda, dusty from the road, flew into the Night Mother's arms. For a moment, they stayed locked together, the Night Mother stroking her daughter's hair, kissing her forehead. Finally, she reached into her sleeve and handed Corda a letter.
"What is it?" asked Corda.

"A letter from the Potentate, expressing his delight at your expertise," replied the Night Mother. "He's promised to send us payment, but I've already sent him back a reply. The late Empress paid us enough for her husband's death. Mephala would not have us be greedy beyond our needs. You should not be paid twice for the same murder, so it is written."

"He killed Rijja, my sister," said Corda quietly.

"And so it should be that you struck the blow."

"Where will I go now?"

"Whenever any of our holy workers becomes too famous to continue the crusade, we send them to an island called Vounoura. It's not more than a month's voyage by boat, and I've arranged for a delightful estate for your sanctuary," the Night Mother kissed the girl's tears. "You meet many friends there, and I know you will find peace and happiness at last, my child."

19 Sun's Dusk, 2920
Mournhold, Morrowind

Almalexia surveyed the rebuilding of the town. The spirit of the citizens was truly inspirational, she thought, as she walked among the skeletons of new buildings standing in the blackened, shattered remains of the old. Even the plantlife showed a remarkable resilience. There was life yet in the blasted remains of the comberry and roobrush shrubs that once lined the main avenue. She could feel the pulse. Come springtide, green would bolt through the black.

The Duke's heir, a lad of considerable intelligence and sturdy Dunmer courage, was coming down from the north to take his father's place. The land would do more than survive: it would strengthen and expand. She felt the future much more strongly than she saw the present.

Of all the things she was most certain of, she knew that Mournhold was forever home to at least one goddess.

22 Sun's Dusk, 2920
The Imperial City, Cyrodiil

"The Cyrodiil line is dead," announced the Potentate to the crowd gathered beneath the Speaker's Balcony of the Imperial Palace. "But the Empire lives. The distant relatives of our beloved Emperor have been judged unworthy of the throne by the trusted nobility who advised his Imperial Majesty throughout his long and illustrious reign. It has been decided that as an impartial and faithful friend of Reman III, I will have the responsibility of continuing on in his name."

The Akaviri paused, allowing his words to echo and translate into the ears of the populace. They merely stared up at him in silence. The rain had washed through the streets of the city, but the sun, for a brief time, appeared to be offering a respite from the winter storms.
"I want to make it clear that I am not taking the title Emperor," he continued. "I have been and will continue to be Potentate Versidue-Shaie, an alien welcomed kindly to your shores. It will be my duty to protect my adopted homeland, and I pledge to work tirelessly at this task until someone more worthy takes the burden from me. As my first act, I declare that in commemoration of this historical moment, beginning on the first of Morning Star, we will enter year one of the Second Era as time will be reckoned. Thus, we mourn the loss of our Imperial family, and look forward to the future."

Only one man clapped at these words. King Dro'Zel of Senchal truly believed that this would be the finest thing to happen to Tamriel in history. Of course, he was quite mad.

31 Sun's Dusk, 2920
Ebonheart, Morrowind

In the smoky catacombs beneath the city where Sotha Sil forged the future with his arcane clockwork apparatus, something unforeseen happened. An oily bubble seeped from a long trusted gear and popped. Immediately, the wizard's attention was drawn to it and to the chain that tiny action triggered. A pipe shifted half an inch to the left. A tread skipped. A coil rewound itself and began spinning in a counter direction. A piston that had been thrusting left-right, left-right, for millennia suddenly began shifting right-left. Nothing broke, but everything changed.

"It cannot be fixed now," said the sorcerer quietly.

He looked up through a crick in the ceiling into the night sky. It was midnight. The second era, the age of chaos, had begun.
"...but take care, lest power enfeeble the fundaments, and curtail the flow through the Congeries, except when functions be warranted. And safeguard that the Congeries shall not be abused by pridenful wizards, confident in their skill and blinded by their ambitions. In this, hold the ordering of the Congeries among the oldest and most trusted of mages, and make secure this ordering through arcane codes and keys to confound even the most clever students.

"The Restorals must be most carefully guarded, for how often have even the wise lusted to overreach their bodies and souls with vitality and mana. And also must the {Magicka}\textsuperscript{1} Fountains be damped and banked, sanctioning their engendering only to the reconsecration of essential arcane engines and templates, and then only by common assent of the Council."

\textbf{NOTES}

\textsuperscript{1} ESM. ESLB reads "Magica".

\textsuperscript{1} ESLB. ESM.
Hallgerd walked into the King's Ham that Loredas evening, his face clouded with sadness. While he ordered a mug of greef, his mates Garaz and Xiomara joined him with moderately sincere concern.

"What's wrong with you, Hallgerd?" asked Xiomara. "You're later than usual, and there's a certain air of tragedy you've dragged in with you. Have you lost money, or a nearest and dearest?"

"I haven't lost any money," Hallgerd grimaced. "But I've just received word from my nephew than my cousin Allioch has died. Perfectly natural, he says, just old age. Allioch was ten years younger than me."

"Aw, that's terrible. But it goes to show that it's important to savor all of life's possibilities, 'cause you never know when your time is coming," said Garaz, who had been sitting at the same stool at the smoky cornerclub for the last several hours. He was not one cursed with self-awareness.

"Life's short all right," agreed Xiomara. "But if you'll pardon a sentimental thought, few of us are aware of the influence we'll have after our deaths. Perhaps there's comfort there. For example, have I told you the story about Vernaccus and Bourlor?"

"I don't believe so," said Hallgerd.

Vernaccus was a daedra (said Xiomara, throwing a few dribbles on flin on the hearth to cast the proper mood), and though our tale took place many, many years ago, it would be fair to say that Vernaccus still is one. For what after all is time to the immortal daedra?

"Actually," Garaz interrupted. "I understand that the notion of immortality--"

"I am trying to offer our friend an inspirational tale in his hour of need," Xiomara growled. "I don't have all bloody night to tell it, if you don't mind."

You wouldn't have heard of Vernaccus (said Xiomara, abandoning the theme of immortality for the time being) for even at the height of his power and fame, he was considered feeble by the admittedly high standards of the day. Of course, this lack of respect infuriated him, and his reaction was typical of lesser daedra. He went on a murderous rampage.

Soon word spread through all the villages in the Colovian West of the unholy terror. Whole families had been butchered, castles destroyed, orchards and fields torched and cursed so nothing would ever grow there again.
To make things even worse for the villagers, Vernaccus began getting visitations from an old rival of his from Oblivion. She was a daedra seducer named Horavatha, and she delighted in taunting him to see how angry she could make him become.

"You've flooded a village and that's supposed to be impressive?" she would sneer. "Try collapsing a continent, and maybe you'll get a little attention."

Vernaccus could become pretty angry. He didn't come very close to collapsing the continent of Tamriel, but it wasn't for lack of trying.

A hero was needed to face the mad daedra, and fortunately, one was available.

His name was Bourlor, and it was said that he had been blessed by the goddess Kynareth. That was the only explanation for his inhuman accuracy with his bow and arrow, for he never missed a target. As a child he had driven his marksmanship tutors wild with frustration. They would tell him how to plant his feet, how to nock a bolt, the proper grip for the cord, the best method of release. He ignored all the rules, and somehow, every time, the arrow would catch a breath of wind and sail directly to his target. It did not matter if the quarry was moving or still, at very close range or miles away. Whatever he wanted to strike with his arrow would be struck.

Bourlor answered the call when one of the village mayors begged him for help. Unfortunately, he was not as great a horseman as he was an archer. As he rode through the forest toward the mayor's town, a place called Evensacon, Vernaccus was already murdering everyone there. Horavatha watched, and stifled back a yawn.

"Murdering a small town mayor isn't going to put you in famous company, you know. What you need is a great champion to defeat. Someone like Ysgramor or Pelinal Whitestrake or--" she stared at the figure emerging from the forest. "That fellow!"

"Who's he?" growled Vernaccus between bites of the mayor's quivering body.

"The greatest archer in Tamriel. He's never missed."

Bourlor had his bow strung and was pointing it at the daedra. For a moment, Vernaccus felt like laughing -- the fellow was not even aiming straight -- but he had a well-honed sense of self-preservation. There was something about the man's look of confidence that convinced the daedra that Horavatha wasn't lying. As the bolt left the bow, Vernaccus vanished in a sheet of flame.

The arrow impaled a tree. Bourlor stood and stared. He had missed a target.

In Oblivion, Vernaccus raged. Fleeing before a mortal man like that -- not even the basest scamp would have been so craven. He had exposed himself for the weak, cowardly creature he was. As he considered what steps to take to salvage the situation, he found himself face-to-knee with the most fearsome of the Daedra Princes, Molag Bal.

"I never thought anything much of you, Vernaccus," the giant boomed. "But you have more than proven your worth. You have shown the creatures of Mundus that the daedra are more powerful than the blessings of the Gods."
The other denizens of Oblivion quickly agreed (as they always did) with the view of Molag Bal. The daedra are, after all, always very sensitive about their various defeats at the hands of mortal champions. Vernaccus was proclaimed The Elusive Beast, The Unpursuable One, He Who Cannot Be Touched, The Bane of Kynareth. Shrines devoted to him began to be built in remote corners of Morrowind and Skyrim.

Bourlor meanwhile, now found flawed, was never again called to rescue a village. He was so heartbroken over his failure to strike his target that he became a hermit, and never restrung his bow again. Some months later, he died, unmourned and unremembered.

"Is this really the tale you thought would cheer me?" asked Hallgerd incredulously. "I've heard the King of Worms told more inspirational stories."

"Wait," smiled Xiomara. "I'm not finished yet."

For a year's time, Vernaccus was content to watch his legend grow and his fledging worship spread from his home in Oblivion. He was, in addition to being cowardly and inclined toward murderous rages, also a very lazy creature. His worshippers told tales of their Master avoiding the bolts of a thousand archers, of moving through oceans without getting wet, and other feats of avoidance that he would rather not have to demonstrate in person. The real story of his ignominious retreat from Bourlor was thankfully forgotten.

The bad news, when it came, was delivered to him with some relish by Horavatha. He had delighted in her jealousy at his growing reputation, so it was with a cruel smile she told him, "Your shrines are being assaulted."

"Who dares?" he roared.

"Everyone who passes them in the wilderness feels the need to throw a stone," Horavatha purred. "You can hardly blame them. After all, they represent He Who Cannot Be Touched. How could anyone be expected to resist such a target?"

Vernaccus peered through the veil into the world of Mundus and saw that it was true. One of his shrines in Colovian West country was surrounded by a large platoon of mercenary soldiers, who delighted in pelting it with rocks. His worshippers huddled inside, praying for a miracle.

In an instant, he appeared before the mercenaries and his rage was terrifying to behold. They fled into the woods before he even had a chance to murder one of them. His worshippers threw open the wooden door to the shrine and dropped to their knees in joy and fear. His anger melted. Then a stone struck him.

Then another. He turned to face his assailants, but the air was suddenly filled with rocks.

Vernaccus could not see them, but he heard mercenaries in the woods laugh, "It's not even trying to move out of the way!"

"It's impossible not to hit him!" guffawed another.
With a roar of humiliation, the daedra bounded into the shrine, chased by the onslaught. One of the stones knocked the door closed behind him, striking him in the back. His face broke, anger and embarrassment disappearing, replaced by pain. He turned, shaking, to his worshippers who huddled in the shadows of the shrine, their faith shattered.

"Where did you get the wood to build this shrine?" Vernaccus groaned.

"Mostly from an copse of trees near the village of Evensacon," his high-priest shrugged.

Vernaccus nodded. He dropped forward, revealing the deep wound in his back. A rusted arrowhead buried in a whorl in the wood of the door had jolted loose in the assault and impaled him. The daedra vanished in a whirlwind of dust.

The shrines were abandoned shortly thereafter, though Vernaccus did have a brief resurgence as the Patron Spirit of Limitations and Impotence before fading from memory altogether. The legend of Bourlor himself never became very well known either, but there are still some who tell the tale, like myself. And we have the advantage of knowing what the Great Archer himself didn't know on his deathbed -- his final arrow found its target after all.
Little boys shouldn't summon up the forces of eternal darkness unless they have an adult supervising, I know, I know. But on that sunny night on the 5th of First Seed, I didn't want an adult. I wanted Hermaeus Mora, the daedra of knowledge, learning, gums, and varnishes. You see, I was told by a beautiful, large breasted man who lived under the library in my home town that the 5th of First Seed was Hermaeus Mora's night. And if I wanted the Oghma Infinium, the book of knowledge, I had to summon him. When you're the new king of Solitude, every bit of knowledge helps.

Normally, you need a witches coven, or a mages guild, or at least matching pillow case and sheets to invoke a prince of Oblivion. The Man Under the Library showed me how to do it myself. He told me to wait until the storm was at its height before shaving the cat. I've forgotten the rest of the ceremony. It doesn't matter.

Someone appeared who I thought was Hermaeus Mora. The only thing that made me somewhat suspicious was Hermaeus Mora, from what I read, was a big blobby multi-eyed clawed monstrosity, and this guy looked like a waistcoated banker. Also, he kept calling himself Sheogorath, not Hermaeus Mora. Still, I was so happy to have successfully summoned Hermaeus Mora, these inconsistencies did not bother me. He had me do some things that didn't make any sense to me (beyond the mortal scope, breadth, and ken, I suppose), and then his servant happily gave me something he called the Wabbajack.

Maybe the Wabbajack is the Book of Knowledge. Maybe I'm smarter because I know cats can be bats can be rats can be hats can be gnats can be thises can be thises. And that doors can be boars can be snores can be floors can be roars can be spores can be yours can be mine. I must be smart, for the interconnective system is very clear to me. Then why, or wherefore do people keep calling me mad?

NOTES

1 ESD only.

ESD. ESO.
The Warrior's Charge

An old poem of the Redguards

The star sung far-flung tales
Wreathed in the silver of Yokuda fair,
Of a Warrior who, arrayed in hue sails
His charges through the serpent's snare

And the Lord of runes, so bored so soon,
Leaves the ship for an evening's dare,
Perchance to wake, the coiled snake,
To take its shirt of scales to wear

And the Lady East, who e'ery beast,
Asleep or a'prowl can rouse a scare,
Screams as her eye, alight in the sky
A worm no goodly sight can bear

And the mailed Steed, ajoins the deed
Not to be undone from his worthy share,
Rides the night, towards scale bright,
Leaving the seasoned Warrior's care

Then the serpent rose, and made stead to close,
The targets lay plain and there,
But the Warrior's blade the Snake unmade,
And the charges wander no more, they swear

* ESM. ESO.
A hundred and twenty numbered ages in the void that fated folk had grown deep-schooled in evil. Then the Bright Gods resolved to punish those faithless spirits, and shatter the unruly caitiffs, those huge, unholy scathers, loathsome to the Light. They repented exceedingly that they had gazed upon Oblivion, and seen there the first of dark kin, and welcomed them as brothers and sisters.

The Principalities of Victory beheld how great was the wickedness of the wayward spirits, and saw that they were bold in sin and full of wiles. They resolved then to chasten the tribes of daedra, and smite darkkind with hammer and hand.

But ever shall Darkness contest the Light, and great were the Powers that breathed the void and laid waste upon one another, and no oath might bind them, so deep were they in envy and perfidy. For once the portals are opened, who shall shut them upon the rising tide?

Notes

1 ESLB only.
2 ESLB only.

ESLB. ESM. ESO.
"All right," said Kazagha. "Why don't you want to talk?"

Zaki put down his mug of mead and just stared at his wife for a few seconds. Finally, grudgingly: "Because everything I have a conversation, darling, it flows in alphabetical order. Just like I told you. I think the only way to stop it is not to talk at all."

"Couldn't you just be imagining this?" said Kazagha patiently. "It wouldn't be the first time you had an insane paranoid delusion. Remember when you thought the royal battlemage of Black Marsh was hiding behind every tree with lewd intent, intent on making you -- a middle-aged, fat, balding tailor -- into his personal sex slave? You don't need to be ashamed, but it's Sheogorath's way to make us all a little crazy sometimes. If you go to the healer--"

"Damn it, Kazagha!" snarled Zaki and stomped out, slamming the door behind him. He nearly collided with Siyasat, his neighbor.

"Excuse me," she said to Zaki's back. He clamped his hands over his ears as he stormed down the street, turning the corner to his tailor shop. His first customer was waiting out front, smiling widely. Zaki tried to keep his temper under control and took out his keys, returning the customer's smile.

"Fine day," said the young man.

"Gods!" hollered Zaki, sending the young man flying with a well-placed punch, and dashing away.

As much as he hated to admit that Kazagha was right, it was evidently time, once again, for one of the healer's herbal cocktails. Tarsu's temple to health, mental and physical, was several streets north, an impressive obelisk. Halqa, the chief herbalist, met him before he came in the hall.

"How are you today, Sa'Zaki Saf?"

"I need to make an appointment with Tarsu," said Zaki in his calmest voice.

"Just one moment, let me see how his schedule looks." Halqa said, looking over a scroll. "Is this an emergency?"

"Kind of," said Zaki, and slapped his head. Why couldn't he say yes, or absolutely, or sure?"
"Let's see," said Halqa, frowning. "The best I can do is next Middas. Would that work for you?"

"Middas!" cried Zaki. "I'll be a complete psychotic by Middas. Isn't there anything earlier?"

He knew what the answer would be before she said it. There was no alternative. In a way, he had forced the response. If only he had kept the conversation going until "Y."

"No," said Halqa. "I'm sorry. Do you want me to make the appointment--?"

Zaki walked away, gritting his teeth. He wandered the streets, his head down to avoid all conversations, until he looked up and discovered that he had walked all the way to the wharf. A sweet breeze was blowing along the water and he took several deep breaths until he felt almost normal. When his temper cooled, he could think again. What if this alphabetical conversation wasn't a delusion at all? What if what he felt wasn't paranoia, but acute awareness? He knew it was the classic dilemma: am I crazy or is there really something weird going on?

Across the road was a shop called ParaDocks, featuring a display of herbs, crystals, and vapors trapped in orbs. The sign in the window read "Mystical Consultation sunrise to noon." It was worth a shot, though Zaki was dubious. The only people who generally came down the wharf for healing were stupid adventurers who didn't know any better.

Incense burned in copious billows of pink and gold, obscuring and then revealing the clutter within. Jijjic death masks glowered down from the walls, smoking censors hung by chains from the ceiling, and the floor was a maze of bookshelves. At a wellworn table in the back a small man wearing a headdress was tabulating a young lady's purchases.

"Okay," said the man. "Your total comes to fifty-seven gold pieces. I threw in the restorative scale conditioner for free. Just remember, the candle should be lit only after you invoke Goroflox The Unholy, and mandrake root does best in partial shade."

The customer gave a quick, shy smile to Zaki and left the store.

"Please help me," said Zaki. "Every conversation I hear or get involved in seems to be arranged alphabetically. I don't know if I'm going insane or if there are some kind of bizarre forces at work. To be honest with you, I'm normally a skeptic when it comes to your type of business, but I'm at the end of my rope. Can you do anything to make this madness end?"

"Quite a common problem, actually," said the man, patting Zaki on the arm. "When you get to the end of the alphabet, do conversations then go to reverse alphabetical order or start at the beginning of the alphabet?"

"Reverse alphabetical order," said Zaki, and then corrected himself. "Damn it! I mean, it starts from the beginning, all over again. I'm in agony. Can you call on the spirits and tell me, am I insane?"

"Sauriki," said the man with a reassuring smile. "I don't have to. You're quite sane."

"Thank you," said Zaki, frowning. "By the way, my name's Zaki, not Sauriki."
"Unusually close, eh?" said the man, patting Zaki on the back. "My name's Octoplasm. Follow me, please. I think I have just what you need."

Octoplasm lead Zaki down the narrow corridor behind the desk. The two men pushed past dusty cabinets filled with strange creatures in liquids, past heaps of neolithic stones, past stack after stack of moldering leather-bound books, into the dank heart of the store. There he picked up a small, squat cylindrical drum and a book, and handed them to Zaki.

"Vampirism, Daedric Possession, and Withershins Therapy," said Zaki, squinting his eyes to read the book in the gloom. "What in Oblivion does this have to do with me? I'm not a vampire, look at this tan. And what's Withershins Therapy, and how much will it cost me?"

"Withershins, from the Old Cyrodilic withersynes, which means backwards," said Octoplasm in a serious tone. "It's the art of reversing the direction of things in order to gain access to the spirit world, and break curses, cure vampirism, and trigger all manners of apotropaic healing. You know the story about the guy who was told that slaughterfish live in hot water, so he said, 'Well, let's boil them in cold water'?"

"Xenophus," said Zaki instinctively, his brother having taken a rather esoteric upper level course in Cyrodilic philosophy as an elective in at the Imperial College thirty-one years before, and immediately wishing he hadn't. "And what do you do with the cylindrical thingy?"

Octoplasm lit a candle and held the object over it so Zaki could see more clearly. All along the cylinder were narrow slits and when Zaki peered within them, he saw a succession of old black and white drawings of a naked man leaping over boxes, one frame after the next.

"You spin it like so," said Octoplasm, slowly whirling the device clockwise so the man within leapt over the boxes over and over again. "It's called a zoetrope. Pretty neat, eh? Now, you take it and start spinning it counterclockwise, and while you're doing it, read this incantation I've marked in the book."

Zaki took the zoetrope and began spinning it counterclockwise over the candle, so the little naked man within seemed to bound backwards over the boxes. It took a little coordination and concentration to keep whirling at a steady pace, but gradually the man's awkward and jerky backjumps became more and more fluid until Zaki could no longer see the individual frames flipping. It looked just like a little humanoid hamster on an endless reverse treadmill. While he continued to spin the zoetrope with one hand, Zaki took the book in the other and read the underlined passage.

"Zoetrope counter-spin, counter-spin, counter-spin / Pull my life from the rut that it's in / I invoke the Goddesses Boethiah, Kynareth, and Drisis / To invert my potentially metaphysical crisis / My old life may have been rather pointless and plain / But I dislike the prospect of going insane / Make the pattern reverse by this withershin / Zoetrope, counter-spin, counter-spin, counter-spin."

As he chanted the spell, Zaki noticed that the little naked man in the zoetrope began to look more like himself. The moustache vanished, and the hairline receded. The man's waistline expanded, and the buttocks sagged to the shape and texture of half-inflated balloons. Scales approximating his own Argonian pattern appeared. The man began to trip as he bounded backwards over the boxes, taking bigger breaths and sweating. By the time Zaki reached the
end of the incantation, his twin was clutching his chest and tumbling end-over-end over the boxes in a free-fall.

Octoplasm took the zoetrope and the book from Zaki's hands. Nothing seemed to have changed. No thunder had rumbled. No winged serpents had sprung out of Zaki's head. No fiery explosions. But Zaki felt that something was different. Good different. Normal.

At the counter, when Zaki pulled out his sachel of gold pieces, Octoplasm merely shook his head: "Are treatment radical such of effects term long the what sure be can't we, naturally. Charge no."

Feeling the first real relief he had felt in days, Zaki walked backwards out of the shop and down the road to his shop.
The Wolf Queen, Book One
by Waughin Jarth

From the pen of the first century third era sage Montocai:

3E 63:
In the autumn tide of the year, Prince Pelagius, son of Prince Uriel, who is son of the Empress Kintyra, who is niece of the great Emperor Tiber Septim, came to the High Rock city-state of Camlorn to pay court to the daughter of King Vulstaed. Her name was Quintilla, the most beauteous princess in Tamriel, skilled at all the maidenly skills and an accomplished sorceress.

Eleven years a widower with a young son named Antiochus, Pelagius arrived at court to find that the city-state was being terrorized by a great demon werewolf. Instead of wooing, Pelagius and Quintilla together went out to save the kingdom. With his sword and her sorcery, the beast was slain and by the powers of mysticism, Quintilla chained the beast's soul to a gem. Pelagius had the gem made into a ring and married her.

But it was said that the soul of the wolf stayed with the couple until the birth of their first child.

3E 80
"The ambassador from Solitude has arrived, your majesty," whispered the steward Balvus.

"Right in the middle of dinner?" muttered the Emperor weakly. "Tell him to wait."

"No, father, it's important that you see him," said Pelagius, rising. "You can't make him wait and then give him bad news. It's undiplomatic."

"Don't go then, you're much better at diplomacy than I am. We should have all the family here," Emperor Uriel II added, suddenly aware how few people were present at his dinner table. "Where's your mother?"

"Sleeping with the archpriest of Kynareth," Pelagius would have said, but he was, as his father said, diplomatic. Instead he said, "At prayer."

"And your brother and sister?"

"Amiel is in Firsthold, meeting with the Archmagister of the Mages Guild. And Galana, though we won't be telling this to the ambassador, of course, is preparing for her wedding to the Duke of Narsis. Since the ambassador expects her to be marrying his patron the King of

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1 ESM (The Wolf Queen, Book ...). ESO.
Solitude instead, we'll tell him that she's at the spa, having a cluster of pestilent boils removed. Tell him that, and he won't press too hard for the marriage, politically expedient though it may be," Pelagius smiled. "You know how queasy Nords are about warty women."

"But dash it, I feel like I should have some family around, so I don't look like some old fool despised by his nearest and dearest," growled the Emperor, correctly suspecting this to be the case. "What about your wife? Where's she and the grandchildren?"

"Quintilla's in the nursery with Cephorusr and Magnus. Antiochus is probably whoring around the City. I don't know where Potema is, probably at her studies. I thought you didn't like children around."

"I do during meetings with ambassadors in damp staterooms," sighed the Emperor. "They lend an air of, I don't know, innocence and civility. Ah, show the blasted ambassador in," he said to Balvus.

Potema was bored. It was the rainy season in the Imperial Province, wintertide, and the streets and the gardens of the City were all flooded. She could not remember a time when it was not raining. Had it been only days, or had it been weeks or months since the sun shone? There was no judging of time any more in the constant flickering torch-light of the palace, and as Potema walked through marble and stone hallways, listening to the pelting of the rain, she could think nothing but that she was bored.

As thepehe, her tutor, would be looking for her now. Ordinarily, she did not mind studying. Rote memorization came easily to her. She quizzed herself as she walked down through the empty ballroom. When did Orsinium fall? 1E 980. Who wrote Tamrilean Tractates? Khosey. When was Tiber Septim born? 2E 288. Who is the current King of Daggerfall? Mortyn, son of Gothlyr. Who is the current Silvenar? Varbarenth, son of Varbaril. Who is the Warlord of Llomoth? Trick question: it's a lady, Ioaph.

What will I get if I'm a good girl, and don't get into any trouble, and my tutor says I'm an excellent student? Mother and father will renege on their promise to buy me a daedric katana of my own, saying they never remembered that promise, and it's far too expensive and dangerous for a girl my age.

There were voices coming from the Emperor's stateroom. Her father, her grandfather, and a man with a strange accent, a Nord. Potema moved a stone she had loosened behind a tapestry and listened in.

"Let us be frank, your imperial majesty," came the Nord's voice. "My sire, the King of Solitude, doesn't care if Princess Galana looked like an orc. He wants an alliance with the Imperial family, and you agreed to give him Galana or give back the millions of gold he gave to you to quell the Khajiiti rebellion in Torval. This was the agreement you swore to honor."

"I remember no such agreement," came her father's voice, "Can you, my liege?"

There was a mumbling noise that Potema took to be her grandfather, the ancient Emperor.
"Perhaps we should take a walk to the Hall of Records, my mind may be going," the Nord's voice sounded sarcastic. "I distinctly remember your seal being placed on the agreement before it was locked away. Of course, I may verily be mistaken."

"We will send a page to the Hall to get the document you refer to," replied her father's voice, with the cruel, soothing quality he used whenever he was about to break a promise. Potema knew it well. She replaced the loose stone and hurried out of the ballroom. She knew well how slowly the pages walked, used to running errands for a doddering emperor. She could make it to the Hall of Records in no time at all.

The massive ebony door was locked, of course, but she knew what to do. A year ago, she caught her mother's Bosmer maid pilfering some jewelry, and in exchange for her silence, forced the young woman to teach her how to pick locks. Potema pulled two pins off her red diamond broach and slid the first into the first lock, holding her hand steady, and memorizing the pattern of tumblers and grooves within the mechanism.

Each lock had a geography of its own.

The lock to the kitchen larder: six free tumblers, a frozen seventh, and a counter bolt. She had broken into that just for fun, but if she had been a poisoner, the whole Imperial household would be dead by now, she thought, smiling.

The lock to her brother Antiochus' secret stash of Khajiiti pornography: just two free tumblers and a pathetic poisoned quill trap easily dismantled with pressure on the counterweight. That had been a profitable score. It was strange that Antiochus, who seemed to have no shame, proved so easy to blackmail. She was, after all, only twelve, and the differences between the perversions of the cat people and the perversions of the Cyrodiils seemed pretty academic. Still, Antiochus had to give her the diamond broach, which she treasured.

She had never been caught. Not when she broke into the archmage's study and stole his oldest spellbook. Not when she broke into the guest room of the King of Gilane, and stole his crown the morning before Magnus's official Welcoming ceremony. It had become too easy to torment her family with these little crimes. But here was a document the Emperor wanted, for a very important meeting. She would get it first.

But this, this was the hardest lock she ever opened. Over and over, she massaged the tumblers, gently pushing aside the forked clamp that snatched at her pins, drumming the counterweights. It nearly took her a half a minute to break through the door to the Hall of Records, where the Elder Scrolls were housed.

The documents were well organized by year, province, and kingdom, and it took Potema only a short while to find the Promise of Marriage between Uriel Septim II, by the Grace of the Gods, Emperor of the Holy Cyrodiilic Empire of Tamriel and his daughter the Princess Galana, and His Majesty King Mantiarco of Solitude. She grabbed her prize and was out of the Hall with the door well-locked before the page was even in sight.

Back in the ball room, she loosened the stone and listened eagerly to the conversation within. For a few minutes, the three men, the Nord, the Emperor, and her father just spoke of the weather and some boring diplomatic details. Then there was the sound of footsteps and a young voice, the page.
"Your Imperial Majesty, I have searched the Hall of Records and cannot find the document you asked for."

"There, you see," came Potema's father's voice. "I told you it didn't exist."

"But I saw it!" The Nord's voice was furious. "I was there when my liege and the emperor signed it! I was there!"

"I hope you aren't doubting the word of my father, the sovereign Emperor of all Tamriel, not when there's now proof that you must have been ... mistaken," Pelagius's voice was low, dangerous.

"Of course not," said the Nord, conceding quickly. "But what will I tell my king? He is to have no connection with the Imperial family, and no gold returned to him, as the agreement -- as he and I believed the agreement to be?"

"We don't want any bad feelings between the kingdom of Solitude and us," came the Emperor's voice, rather feeble, but clear enough. "What if we offered King Mantiarco our granddaughter instead?"

Potema felt the chill of the room descend on her.

"The Princess Potema? Is she not too young?" asked the Nord.

"She is thirteen years old," said her father. "That's old enough to wed."

"She would an ideal mate for your king," said the Emperor. "She is, admittedly, from what I see of her, very shy and innocent, but I'm certain she would quickly grasp the ways of court -- she is, after all, a Septim. I think she would be an excellent Queen of Solitude. Not too exciting, but noble."

"The granddaughter of the Emperor is not as close as his daughter," said the Nord, rather miserably. "But I don't see how we can refuse the offer. I will send word to my king."

"You have our leave," said the Emperor, and Potema heard the sound of the Nord leaving the stateroom.

Tears streamed down Potema's eyes. She knew who the King of Solitude was from her studies. Mantiarco. Sixty-two years old, and quite fat. And she knew how far Solitude was, and how cold, in the northernmost clime. Her father and grandfather were abandoning her to the barbaric Nords. The voices in the room continued talking.

"Well-acted, my boy. Now, make sure you burn that document," said her father.

"My Prince?" asked the page's querulous voice.

"The agreement between the Emperor and the King of Solitude, you fool. We don't want its existence known."
"My Prince, I told the truth. I couldn't find the document in the Hall of Records. It seems to be missing."

"By Lorkhan!" roared her father. "Why is everything in this palace always misplaced? Go back to the Hall and keep searching until you find it!"

Potema looked at the document. Millions of gold pieces promised to the kingdom of Solitude in the event of Princess Galana not marrying the king. She could bring it into her father, and perhaps as a reward he would not marry her to Mantiarco. Or perhaps not. She could blackmail her father and the Emperor with it, and make a tidy sum of money. Or she could produce it when she became Queen of Solitude to fill her coffers, and buy anything she wanted. More than a daedric katana, that was for certain.

So many possibilities, Potema thought. And she found herself not bored anymore.
From the pen of the first century third era sage Montocai:

3E 82:
A year after the wedding of his 14-year-old granddaughter the Princess Potema to King Mantarico of the Nordic kingdom of Solitude, the Emperor Uriel Septim II passed on. His son Pelagius Septim II was made emperor, and he faced a greatly depleted treasury, thanks to his father's poor management.

As the new Queen of Solitude, Potema faced opposition from the old Nordic houses, who viewed her as an outsider. Mantarico had been widowed, and his former queen was loved. She had left him a son, Prince Bathorgh, who was two years older than his stepmother, and loved her not. But the king loved his queen, and suffered with her through miscarriage, until her 29th year, when she bore him a son.

3E 97:
"You must do something to help the pain!" Potema cried, baring her teeth. The healer Kelmeth immediately thought of a she-wolf in labor, but he put the image from his mind. Her enemies called her the Wolf Queen for certes, but not because of any physical resemblance.

"Your Majesty, there is no injury for me to heal. The pain you feel is natural and helpful for the birth," he was going to add more words of consolation, but he had to break off to duck the mirror she flung at him.

"I'm not a pignosed peasant girl!" She snarled, "I am the Queen of Solitude, daughter of the Emperor! Summon the daedra! I'll trade the soul of every last subject of mine for a little comfort!"

"My Lady," said the healer nervously, drawing the curtains and blotting out the cold morning sun. "It is not wise to make such offers even in jest. The eyes of Oblivion are forever watching for just such a rash interjection."

"What would you know of Oblivion, healer?" she growled, but her voice was calmer, quieter. The pain had relaxed. "Would you fetch me that mirror I hurled at you?"

"Are you going to throw it again, your Majesty?" said the healer with a taut smile, obeying her.

"Very likely," she said, looking at her reflection. "And next time I won't miss. But I do look a fright. Is Lord Vhokken still waiting for me in the hall?"

"Yes, your Majesty."
"Well, tell him I just need to fix my hair and I'll be with him. And leave us. I'll howl for you when the pain returns."

"Yes, your Majesty."

A few minutes later, Lord Vhokken was shown into the chamber. He was an enormous bald man whose friends and enemies called Mount Vhokken, and when he spoke it was with the low grumble of thunder. The Queen was one of the very few people Vhokken knew who was not the least bit intimidated by him, and he offered her a smile.

"My queen, how are you feeling?" he asked.

"Damned. But you're looking like Springtide has come to Mount Vhokken. I take it from your merry disposition that you've been made warchief."

"Only temporarily, while your husband the King investigates whether there is evidence behind the rumors of treason on the part of my predecessor Lord Thone."

"If you've planted it as I've instructed, he'll find it," Potema smiled, propping herself up in the bed. "Tell me, is Prince Bathorgh still in the city?"

"What a question, your highness," laughed the mountain. "It's the Tournament of Stamina today, you know the prince would never miss that. The fellow invents new strategies of self-defense every year to show off during the games. Don't you recall last year, where he entered the ring unarmored and after twenty minutes of fending off six bladesmen, left the games without a scratch? He dedicated that bout to his late mother, Queen Amodetha."

"Yes, I recall."

"He's no friend to me or you, your highness, but you must give the man his due respect. He moves like lightning. You wouldn't think it of him, but he always seems to use his awkwardness to his advantage, to throw his opponents off. Some say he learned the style from the orcs to the south. They say he learned from them how to anticipate a foe's attack by some sort of supernatural power."

"There's nothing supernatural about it," said the Queen, quietly. "He gets it from his father."

"Mantiarco never moved like that," Vhokken chuckled.

"I never said he did," said Potema. Her eyes closed and her teeth gritted together. "The pain's returning. You must fetch the healer, but first, I must ask you one other thing -- has the new summer palace construction begun?"

"I think so, your Highness."

"Do not think!" she cried, gripping the sheets, biting her lips so a stream of blood dripped down her chin. "Do! Make certain that the construction begins at once, today! Your future, my future, and the future of this child depend on it! Go!"
Four hours later, King Mantiarco entered the room to see his son. His queen smiled weakly as he gave her a kiss on the forehead. When she handed him the child, a tear ran down his face. Another one quickly followed, and then another.

"My Lord," she said fondly. "I know you're sentimental, but really!"

"It's not only the child, though he is beautiful, with all the fair features of his mother," Mantiarco turned to his wife, sadly, his aged features twisted in agony. "My dear wife, there is trouble at the palace. In truth, this birth is the only thing that keeps this day from being the darkest in my reign."

"What is it? Something at the tournament?" Potema pulled herself up in bed. "Something with Bathorgh?"

"No, it's isn't the tournament, but it does relate to Bathorgh. I shouldn't worry you at a time like this. You need your rest."

"My husband, tell me!"

"I wanted to surprise you with a gift after the birth of our child, so I had the old summer palace completely renovated. It's a beautiful place, or at least it was. I thought you might like it. Truth to tell, it was Lord Vhokken idea. It used to be Amodetha's favorite place." Bitterness crept into the king's voice. "Now I've learned why."

"What have you learned?" asked Potema quietly.

"Amodetha deceived me there, with my trusted warchief, Lord Thone. There were letters between them, the most perverse things you've ever read. And that's not the worst of it."

"No?"

"The dates on the letters correspond with the time of Bathorgh's birth. The boy I raised and loved as a son," Mantiarco's voice choked up with emotion. "He was Thone's child, not mine."

"My darling," said Potema, almost feeling sorry for the old man. She wrapped her arms around his neck, as he heaved his sobs down on her and their child.

"Henceforth," he said quietly. "Bathorgh is no longer my heir. He will be banished from the kingdom. This child you have borne me today will grow to rule Solitude."

"And perhaps more," said Potema. "He is the Emperor's grandson as well."

"We will name him Mantiarco the Second."

"My darling, I would love that," said Potema, kissing the king's tear-streaked face. "But may I suggest Uriel, after my grandfather the Emperor, who brought us together in marriage?"

King Mantiarco smiled at his wife and nodded his head. There was a knock at the door.
"My liege," said Mount Vhokken. "His highness Prince Bathorgh has finished the tournament and awaits you to present his award. He has successfully withstood attacks by nine archers and the giant scorpion we brought in from Hammerfell. The crowd is roaring his name. They are calling him The Man Who Cannot Be Hit."

"I will see him," said King Mantiarco sadly, and left the chamber.

"Oh he can be hit, all right," said Potema wearily. "But it does take some doing."
From the pen of the first century third era sage Montocai:

3E 98
The Emperor Pelagius Septim II died a few weeks before the end of the year, on the 15th of Evening Star during the festival of North Wind's Prayer, which was considered a bad omen for the Empire. He had ruled over a difficult seventeen years. In order to fill the bankrupt treasury, Pelagius had dismissed the Elder Council, forcing them to buy back their positions. Several good but poor councilors had been lost. Many say the Emperor had died as a result of being poisoned by a vengeful former Council member.

His children came to attend his funeral and the coronation of the next Emperor. His youngest son Prince Magnus, 19 years of age, arrived from Almalexia, where he had been a councilor to the royal court. 21-year-old Prince Cephorus arrived from Gilane with his Redguard bride, Queen Bianki. Prince Antiochus at 43 years of age, the eldest child and heir presumptive, had been with his father in the Imperial City. The last to appear was his only daughter, Potema, the so-called Wolf Queen of Solitude. Thirty years old and radiantly beautiful, she arrived with a magnificent entourage, accompanied by her husband, the elderly King Mantiarco and her year-old son, Uriel.

All expected Antiochus to assume the throne of the Empire, but no one knew what to expect from the Wolf Queen.

3E 99
"Lord Vhokken has been bringing several men to your sister's chambers late at night every night this week," offered the Spymaster. "Perhaps if her husband were made aware --"

"My sister is a devotee of the conqueror gods Reman and Talos, not the love goddess Dibella. She is plotting with those men, not having orgies with them. I'd wager I've slept with more men than she has," laughed Antiochus, and then grew serious. "She's behind the delay of the council offering me the crown, I know it. Six weeks now. They say they need to update records and prepare for the coronation. I'm the Emperor! Crown me, and to Oblivion with the formalities!"

"Your sister is surely no friend of yours, your majesty, but there are other factors at play. Do not forget how your father treated the Council. It is they who need following, and if need be, strong convincing," The Spymaster added, with a suggestive stab of his dagger.

"Do so, but keep your eye on the damnable Wolf Queen as well. You know where to find me."

"At which brothel, your highness?" inquired the Spymaster.
"Today being Fredas, I'll be at the Cat and Goblin."

The Spymaster noted in his report that night that Queen Potema had no visitors, for she was dining across the Imperial Garden at the Blue Palace with her mother, the Dowager Empress Quintilla. It was a warm night for wintertide and surprisingly cloudless though the day had been stormy. The saturated ground could not take any more, so the formal, structured gardens looked as if they had been glazed with water. The two women took their wine to the wide balcony to look over the grounds.

"I believe you are trying to sabotage your half-brother's coronation," said Quintilla, not looking at her daughter. Potema saw how the years had not so much wrinkled her mother as faded her, like the sun on a stone.

"It's not true," said Potema. "But would it bother you very much if it were true?"

"Antiochus is not my son. He was eleven years old when I married your father, and we've never been close. I think that being heir presumptive has stunted his growth. He is old enough to have a family with grown children, and yet he spends all his time at debauchery and fornication. He will not make a very good Emperor," Quintilla sighed and then turned to Potema. "But it is bad for the family for seeds of discontent to be sown. It is easy to divide up into factions, but very difficult to unite again. I fear for the future of the Empire."

"Those sound like the words -- are you, by any chance, dying, mother?"

"I've read the omens," said Quintilla with a faint, ironic smile. "Don't forget -- I was a renowned sorceress in Camlorn. I will dead in a few months time, and then, not a year later, your husband will die. I only regret that I will not live to see your child Uriel assume the throne of Solitude."

"Have you seen whether --" Potema stopped, not wanting to reveal too many of her plans, even to a dying woman.

"Whether he will be Emperor? Aye, I know the answer to that too, daughter. Don't fear; you'll live to see the answer, one way or the other. I have a gift for him when he is of age," the Dowager Empress removed a necklace with a single great yellow gem from around her neck. "It's a soul gem, infused with the spirit of a great werewolf your father and I defeated in battle thirty-six years ago. I've enchanted it with spells from the School of Illusion so its wearer may charm whoever he chooses. An important skill for a king."

"And an emperor," said Potema, taking the necklace. "Thank you, mother."

An hour later, passing the black branches of the sculpted douad shrubs, Potema noticed a dark figure, which vanished into the shadows under the eaves at her approach. She had noticed people following her before: it was one of the hazards of life in the Imperial court. But this man was too close to her chambers. She slipped the necklace around her neck.

"Come out where I can see you," she commanded.

The man emerged from the shadows. A dark little fellow of middle-age dressed in black-dyed goatskin. His eyes were fixed, frozen, under her spell.
"Who do you work for?"

"Prince Antiochus is my master," he said in a dead voice. "I am his spy."

A plan formed. "Is the Prince in his study?"

"No, milady."

"And you have access?"

"Yes, milady."

Potema smiled widely. She had him. "Lead the way."

The next morning, the storm reappeared in all its fury. The pelting on the walls and ceiling was agony to Antiochus, who was discovering that he no longer had his youthful immunity to a late night of hard drinking. He shoved hard against the Argonian wench sharing his bed.

"Make yourself useful and close the window," he moaned.

No sooner had the window been bolted then there was a knock at the door. It was the Spymaster. He smiled at the Prince and handed him a sheet of paper.

"What is this?" said Antiochus, squinting his eyes. "I must still be drunk. It looks like orcish."

"I think you will find it useful, your majesty. Your sister is here to see you."

Antiochus considered getting dressed or sending his bedmate out, but thought better of it. "Show her in. Let her be scandalized."

If Potema was scandalized, she did not show it. Swathed in orange and silver silk, she entered the room with a triumphant smile, followed by the man-mountain Lord Vhokken.

"Dear brother, I spoke to my mother last night, and she advised me very wisely. She said I should not battle with you in public, for the good of our family and the Empire. Therefore," she said, producing from the folds of her robe a piece of paper. "I am offering you a choice."

"A choice?" said Antiochus, returning her smile. "That does sound friendly."

"Abdicate your rights to the Imperial throne voluntarily, and there is no need for me to show the Council this," Potema said, handing her brother the letter. "It is a letter with your seal on it, saying that you knew that your father was not Pelagius Septim II, but the royal steward Fondoukth. Now, before you deny writing the letter, you cannot deny the rumors, nor that the Imperial Council will believe that your father, the old fool, was quite capable of being cuckolded. Whether it's true or not, or whether the letter is a forgery or not, the scandal of it would ruin your chances of being the Emperor."

Antiochus's face had gone white with fury.
"Don't fear, brother," said Potema, taking back the letter from his shaking hands. "I will see to it that you have a very comfortable life, and all the whores your heart, or any other organ, desires."

Suddenly Antiochus laughed. He looked over at his Spymaster and winked. "I remember when you broke into my stash of Khajiiti erotica and blackmailed me. That was close to twenty years ago. We've got better locks now, you must have noticed. It must have killed you that you couldn't use your own skills to get what you wanted."

Potema merely smiled. It didn't matter. She had him.

"You must have charmed my servant here into getting you into my study to use my seal," Antiochus smirked. "A spell, perhaps, from your mother, the witch?"

Potema continued to smile. Her brother was cleverer than she thought.

"Did you know that Charm spells, even powerful ones, only last so long? Of course, you didn't. You never were one for magic. Let me tell you, a generous salary is a stronger motivation for keeping a servant in the long run, sister," Antiochus took out his own sheet of paper. "Now I have a choice for you."

"What is that?" said Potema, her smile faltering.

"It looks like nonsense, but if you know what you're looking for, it's very clear. It's a practice sheet -- your handwriting attempting to look like my handwriting. It's a good gift you have. I wonder if you haven't done this before, imitating another person's handwriting. I understand a letter was found from your husband's dead wife saying that his first son was a bastard. I wonder if you wrote that letter. I wonder if I showed this evidence of your gift to your husband whether he would believe you wrote that letter. In the future, dear Wolf Queen, don't lay the same trap twice."

Potema shook her head, furious, unable to speak.

"Give me your forgery and go take a walk in the rain. And then, later today, unhatch whatever other plots you have to keep me from the throne." Antiochus fixed his eyes on Potema's. "I will be Emperor, Wolf Queen. Now go."

Potema handed her brother the letter and left the room. For a few moments, out in the hallway, she said nothing. She merely glared at the slivers of rainwater dripping down the marble wall from a tiny, unseen crack.

"Yes, you will, brother," she said. "But not for very long."
From the pen of the first century third era sage Montocai:

3E 109:
Ten years after being crowned Emperor of Tamriel, Antiochus Septim had impressed his subjects with little but the enormity of his lust for carnal pleasures. By his second wife, Gysilla, he had a daughter in the year 104, who he named Kintyra, after his great-great-great grandaunt, the Empress. Enormously fat and marked by every venereal disease known to the Healers, Antiochus spent little time on politics. His siblings, by marked contrast, excelled in this field. Magnus had married Hellena, the Cyrodiil Queen of Lilmoth -- the Argonian priest-king having been executed -- and was representing the Imperial interests in Black Marsh admirably. Cephorus and his wife Bianki were ruling the Hammerfell kingdom of Gilane with a healthy brood of children. But no one was more politically active than Potema, the Wolf-Queen of the Skyrim kingdom of Solitude.

Nine years after the death of her husband, King Mantiarco, Potema still ruled as regent for her young son, Uriel. Their court had become very fashionable, particularly for rulers who had a grudge to bear against the Emperor. All the kings of Skyrim visited Castle Solitude regularly, and over the years, emissaries from the lands of Morrowind and High Rock did as well. Some guests came from even farther away.

3E 110:
Potema stood at the harbor and watched the boat from Pyandonea arrive. Against the gray, breaking waves where she had seen so many vessels of Tamrielic manufacture, it looked less than exotic. Insectoid, certainly, with its membranous sails and rugged chitin hull, but she had seen similar if not identical seacraft in Morrowind. No, if not for the flag which was markedly alien, she would not have picked out the ship from others in the harbor. As the salty mist ballooned around her, she held out her hand in welcome to the visitors from another island empire.

The men aboard were not merely pale, they were entirely colorless, as if their flesh were made of some white limpid jelly, but she had been forewarned. At the arrival of the King and his translator, she looked directly into their blank eyes and offered her hand. The King made noises.

"His Great Majesty, King Orgnum," said the translator, haltingly. "Expresses his delight at your beauty. He thanks you for giving him refuge from these dangerous seas."

"You speak Cyrodilic very well," said Potema.
"I am fluent in the languages of four continents," said the translator. "I can speak to the denizens of my own country Pyandonea, as well as those of Atmora, Akavir, and here, in Tamriel. Yours is the easiest, actually. I was looking forward to this voyage."

"Please tell his highness that he is welcome here, and that I am entirely at his disposal," said Potema, smiling. Then she added, "You understand the context? That I am just being polite?"

"Of course," said the translator, and then made several noises at the King, which the King reacted to with a smile. While they conversed, Potema looked up the dock and saw the now familiar gray cloaks watching her while they spoke with Levlet, Antiochus's man. The Psijic Order from the Summerset Isle. Very bothersome.

"My diplomatic emissary Lord Vhokken will show you to your rooms," said Potema. "Unfortunately, I have some other guests as well who require my attention. I hope your great majesty understands."

His Great Majesty King Orgnum did understand, and Potema made arrangements to dine with the Pyandoneans that evening. Meeting with the Psijic Order required all of her concentration. She dressed in her simplest black and gold robe and went to her stateroom to prepare. Her son, Uriel, was on the throne, playing with his pet joughat.

"Good morning, mom."

"Good morning, darling," said Potema, lifting her son in the air with feigned stain. "Talos, but you're heavy. I don't think I've ever carried such a heavy ten-year-old."

"That's probably because I'm eleven," said Uriel, perfectly aware of his mother's tricks. "And you're going to say that as an eleven-year-old, I should probably be with my tutor."

"I was fanatical about studying at your age," said Potema.

"I am king," said Uriel petulantly.

"But don't be satisfied with that," said Potema. "By all rights, you should be emperor already, you understand that, don't you?"

Uriel nodded his head. Potema took a moment to marvel at his likeness to the portraits of Tiber Septim. The same ruthless brow and powerful chin. When he was older and lost his baby fat, he'd be a splitting image of his great great great great granduncle. Behind her, she heard the door opening and an usher bringing in several gray cloaks. She stiffened slightly, and Uriel, on cue, jumped down from the throne and left the stateroom, pausing to greet the most important of the Psijics.

"Good Morning, Master Iachesis," he said, enunciating each syllable with a regal accent that made Potema's heart soar. "I hope your accommodations at Castle Solitude meet with your approval."

"They do, King Uriel, thank you," said Iachesis, delighted and charmed.
Iachesis and his Psijics entered the chamber and the door was shut behind them. Potema sat only for a moment on the throne before stepping off the dais and greeting her guests.

"I am so sorry to have kept you waiting," said Potema. "To think that you sailed all the way from the Summerset Isles and I should keep you waiting any longer. You must forgive me."

"It's not all that long a voyage," said one of the gray cloaks, angrily. "It isn't as if we sailed all the way from Pyandonea."

"Ah. You've seen my most recent guests, King Orgnum and his retinue," said Potema breezily. "I suppose you think it unusual, me entertaining them, as we all know the Pyandoneans mean to invade Tamriel. You are, I take it, as neutral in this as you are in all political matters?"

"Of course," said Iachesis proudly. "We have nothing to gain or lose by the invasion. The Psijic Order preceded the organization of Tamriel under the Septim Dynasty and we shall survive under any political regime."

"Rather like a flea on whatever mongrel happens along, are you?" said Potema, narrowing her eyes. "Don't overestimate your importance, Iachesis. Your order's child, the Mages Guild, has twice the power you have, and they are entirely on my side. We are in the process of making an agreement with King Orgnum. When the Pyandoneans take over and I am in my proper place as Empress of this continent, then you shall know your proper place in the order of things."

With a majestic stride, Potema left the stateroom, leaving the grey cloaks to look from one to the other.

"We must speak to Lord Levlet," said one of the grey cloaks.

"Yes," said Iachesis. "Perhaps we should."

Levlet was quickly found at his usual place at the Moon and Nausea tavern. As the three grey cloaks entered, led by Iachesis, the smoke and the noise seemed to die in their path. Even the smell of tobacco and flin dissipated in their wake. He rose and then escorted them to a small room upstairs.

"You've reconsidered," said Levlet with a broad smile.

"Your Emperor," said Iachesis, and then corrected himself, "Our Emperor originally asked for our support in defending the west coast of Tamriel from the Pyandonean fleet in return for twelve million gold pieces. We offered our services at fifty. Upon reflection on the dangers that a Pyandonean invasion would have, we accept his earlier offer."

"The Mages Guild has generously -- "

"Perhaps for as low ten million gold pieces," said Iachesis quickly.

Over the course of dinner, Potema promised King Orgnum through the interpreter, to lead an insurrection against her brother. She was delighted to discover that her capacity for lying
worked in many different cultures. Potema shared her bed that night with King Orgnum, as it
seemed the polite and diplomatic thing to do. As it turned out, he was one of the better lovers
she had ever had. He gave her some herbs before beginning that made her feel as if she was
floating on the surface of time, conscious only of the gestures of love after she had found
herself making them. She felt herself like the cooling mist, quenching the fire of his lust over
and over and over again. In the morning, when he kissed her on the cheek, and said with his
bald white eyes that he was leaving her, she felt a stab of regret.

The ship left harbor that morning, en route to the Summerset Isles and the imminent
invasions. She waved them off to sea as she footsteps behind her. It was Levlet.

"They will do it for eight million, your highness" he said.

"Thank Mara," said Potema. "I need more time for an insurrection. Pay them from my
treasury, and then go to the Imperial City and get the twelve million from Antiochus. We
should make a good profit from this game, and you, of course, will have your share."

Three months later, Potema heard that the fleet of the Pyandoneans had been utterly destroyed
by a storm that had appeared suddenly off the Isle of Artaeum. The home port of the Psijic
Order. King Orgnum and all of his ships had been utterly annihilated.

"Sometimes making people hate you," she said, holding her son Uriel close, "Is how you
make a profit ."
The Wolf Queen, Book Five
by Waughin Jarth

From the pen of Inzolicus, Second Century Sage and Student of Montocai:

3E 119:
For twenty-one years, The Emperor Antiochus Septim ruled Tamriel, and proved an able leader despite his moral laxity. His greatest victory was in the War of the Isle in the year 110, when the Imperial fleet and the royal navies of Summerset Isle, together with the magical powers of the Psijic Order, succeeded in destroying the Pyandonean invading armada. His siblings, King Magnus of Lilmoth, King Cephorus of Gilane, and Potema, the Wolf Queen of Solitude, ruled well and relations between the Empire and the kingdoms of Tamriel were much improved. Still, centuries of neglect had not repaired all the scars that existed between the Empire and the kings of High Rock and Skyrim.

During a rare visitation from his sister and nephew Uriel, Antiochus, who had suffered from several illnesses over his reign, lapsed into a coma. For months, he lingered in between life and death while the Elder Council prepared for the ascension of his fifteen-year-old daughter Kintyra to the throne.

3E 120:
"Mother, I can't marry Kintyra," said Uriel, more amused by the suggestion than offended. "She's my first cousin. And besides, I believe she's engaged to one of the lords of council, Modellus."

"You're so squeamish. There's a time and a place for propriety," said Potema. "But you're correct at any rate about Modellus, and we shouldn't offend the Elder Council at this critical juncture. How do you feel about Princess Rakma? You spent a good deal of time in her company in Farrun."

"She's all right," said Uriel. "Don't tell me you want to hear all the dirty details."

"Please spare me your study of her anatomy," Potema grimaced. "But would you marry her?"

"I suppose so."

"Very good. I'll make the arrangements then," Potema made a note for herself before continuing. "King Lleromo has been a difficult ally to keep, and a political marriage should keep Farrun on our side. Should we need them. When is the funeral?"

"What funeral?" asked Uriel. "You mean for Uncle Antiochus?"

"Of course," sighed Potema. "Anyone else of note die recently?"
"There were a bunch of little Redguard children running through the halls, so I guess Cephorusr has arrived. Magnus arrived at court yesterday, so it ought to be any day now."

"It's time to address the Council then," said Potema, smiling.

She dressed in black, not her usual colorful ensembles. It was important to look the part of the grieving sister. Regarding herself in the mirror, she felt that she looked all of her fifty-three years. A shock of silver wound its way through her auburn hair. The long, cold, dry winters in northern Skyrim had created a map of wrinkles, thin as a spiderweb, all across her face. Still, she knew that when she smiled, she could win hearts, and when she frowned, she could inspire fear. It was enough for her purposes.

Potema's speech to the Elder Council is perhaps helpful to students of public speaking.

She began with flattery and self-abasement: "My most august and wise friends, members of the Elder Council, I am but a provincial queen, and I can only assume to bring to issue what you yourselves must have already pondered."

She continued on to praise the late Emperor, who had been a popular ruler, despite his flaws: "He was a true Septim and a great warrior, destroying -- with your counsel -- the near invincible armada of Pyandonea."

But little time was wasted, before she came to her point: "The Empress Gysilla unfortunately did nothing to temper my brother's lustful spirits. In point of fact, no whore in the slums of the city spread out on more beds than she. Had she attended to her duties in the Imperial bedchamber more faithfully, we would have a true heir to the Empire, not the halfwit, milkspot bastards who call themselves the Emperor's children. The girl called Kintyra is popularly believed to be the daughter of Gysilla and the Captain of the Guard. It may be that she is the daughter of Gysilla and the boy who cleans the cistern. We can never know for certain. Not as certainly as we can know the lineage of my son, Uriel. The eldest true son of the Septim Dynasty. My lords, the princes of the Empire will not stand for a bastard on the throne, that I can assure you."

She ended mildly, but with a call to action: "Posterity will judge you. You know what must be done."

That evening, Potema entertained her brothers and their wives in the Map Room, her favorite of the Imperial dining chambers. The walls were splashed with bright, if fading representations of the Empire and all the known lands beyond, Atmora, Yokunda, Akavir, Pyandonea, Thras. Overhead the great glass domed ceiling, wet with rain, displayed distorted images of the stars overhead. Lightning flashed every other minute, casting strange phantom shadows on the walls.

"When will you speak to the Council?" asked Potema as dinner was served.

"I don't know if I will," said Magnus. "I don't believe I have anything to say."

"I'll speak to them when they announce the coronation of Kintyra," said Cephorusr. "Merely as a formality to show my support and the support of Hammerfell."
"You can speak for all of Hammerfell?" asked Potema, with a teasing smile. "The Redguards must love you very much."

"We have a unique relationship with the Empire in Hammerfell," said Cephorus's wife, Bianki. "Since the treaty of Stros M'kai, it's been understood that we are part of the Empire, but not a subject."

"I understand you've already spoken to the Council," said Magnus's wife, Hellena, pointedly. She was a diplomat by nature, but as the Cyrodilic ruler of an Argonian kingdom, she knew how to recognize and confront adversity.

"Yes, I have," said Potema, pausing to savor a slice of braised jalfbird. "I gave them a short speech about the coronation this afternoon."

"Our sister is an excellent public speaker," said Cephorus.

"You're too kind," said Potema, laughing. "I do many things better than speaking."

"Such as?" asked Bianki, smiling.

"Might I ask what you said in your speech?" asked Magnus, suspiciously.

There was a knock on the chamber door. The head steward whispered something to Potema, who smiled in response and rose from the table.

"I told the Council that I would give my full support to the coronation, provided they proceed with wisdom. What could be sinister about that?" Potema said, and took her glass of wine with her to the door. "If you'll pardon me, my niece Kintyra wishes to have a word with me."

Kintyra stood in the hall with the Imperial Guard. She was but a child, but on reflection, Potema realized that at her age, she was already married two years to Mantiarco. There was a similarity, to be certain. Potema could see Kintyra as the young queen, with dark eyes and pallid skin smooth and resolute like marble. Anger flashed momentarily in Kintyra's eyes on seeing her aunt, but emotion left her, replaced with calm Imperial presence.

"Queen Potema," she said serenely. "I have been informed that my coronation will take place in two days time. Your presence at the ceremony will not be welcome. I have already given orders to your servants to have your belongings packed, and an escort will be accompanying you back to your kingdom tonight. That is all. Goodbye, aunt."

Potema began to reply, but Kintyra and her guard turned and moved back down the corridor to the stateroom. The Wolf Queen watched them go, and then reentered the Map Room.

From the pen of Inzolicus, Second Century Sage:

3E 120:
The fifteen-year-old Empress Kintyra Septim II, daughter of Antiochus, was coroneted on the 3rd day of First Seed. Her uncles Magnus, King of Lilmoth, and Cephorus, King of Gilane, were in attendance, but her aunt, Potema, the Wolf Queen of Solitude, had been banished from the court. Once back in her kingdom, Queen Potema began assembling the rebellion, which was to be known as the War of the Red Diamond. All the allies she had made over the years of disgruntled kings and nobles joined forces with her against the new Empress.

The first early strikes against the Empire were entirely successful. Throughout Skyrim and northern High Rock, the Imperial army found themselves under attack. Potema and her forces washed over Tamriel like a plague, inciting riots and insurrections everywhere they touched. In the autumn of the year, the loyal Duke of Glenpoint on the coast of High Rock sent an urgent request for reinforcements from the Imperial Army, and Kintyra, to inspire the resistance to the Wolf Queen, led the army herself.

3E 121:
"We don't know where they are," said the Duke, deeply embarrassed. "I've sent scouts out all over the countryside. I can only assume that they've retreated up north upon hearing of your army's arrival."

"I hate to say it, but I was hoping for a battle," said Kintyra. "I'd like to put my aunt's head on a spike and parade it around the Empire. Her son Uriel and his army are right on the border to the Imperial Province, mocking me. How are they able to be so successful? Are they just that good in battle or do my subjects truly hate me?"

She was tired after many months of struggling through the mud of autumn and winter. Crossing the Dragontail Mountains, her army nearly marched into an ambush. A blizzard snap in the normally temperate Barony of Dwynnen was so unexpected and severe that it must certainly have been cast by one of Potema's wizard allies. Everywhere she turned, she felt her aunt's touch. And now, her chance of facing the Wolf Queen at last had been thwarted. It was almost too much to bear.

"It is fear, pure and simple," said the Duke. "That is her greatest weapon."

"I need to ask," said Kintyra, hoping that by sheer will she could keep her voice from revealing any of the fear the Duke spoke of. "You've seen the army. Is it true that she has summoned a force of undead warriors to do her bidding?"
"No, as a matter of fact, it's not true, but she certainly fosters that rumor. Her army attacks at night, partly for strategic reasons, and partly to advance fears like that. She has, so far as I know, no supernatural aid other than the standard battlemages and nightblades of any modern army."

"Always at night," said Kintyra thoughtfully. "I suppose that's to disguise their numbers."

"And to move her troops into position before we're aware of them" added the Duke. "She's the master of the sneak attack. When you hear a march to the east, you can be certain she's already on top of you from the south. But listen, we'll discuss this all tomorrow morning. I've prepared the castle's best rooms for you and your men."

Kintyra sat in her tower suite and by the light of the moon and a single tallow candle, she penned a letter to her husband-to-be, Lord Modellus, back in the Imperial City. She hoped to be married to him in the summer at the Blue Palace her grandmother Quintilla had loved so much, but the war may not permit it. As she wrote, she gazed out the window at the courtyard below and the haunted, leafless trees of winter. Two of her guards stood on the battlements, several feet away from one another. Just like Modellus and Kintyra, she thought, and proceeded to expound on the metaphor in her letter.

A knock on the door interrupted her poetry.

"A letter, your majesty, from Lord Modellus," said the young courier, handing the note to her. It was short, and she read it quickly before the courier had a chance to retire. "I'm confused by something. When did he write this?"

"One week ago," said the courier. "He said it was urgent that I make it here as quickly as possible while he mobilized the army. I imagine they've left the City already."

Kintyra dismissed the courier. Modellus said that he had received a letter from her, urgently calling for reinforcements to the battle at Glenpoint. But there was no battle at Glenpoint, and she had only just arrived today. Then who wrote the letter in her handwriting, and why would they want Modellus to bring a second army out of the Imperial City into High Rock?

Feeling a chill from the night air at the window, Kintyra went to shut the latch. The two guards on the battlements were gone. She leaned over at the sound of a muffled struggle behind one of the barren trees, and did not hear the door open.

When she turned, she saw Queen Potema and Mentin, Duke of Glenpoint, in the room with a host of guards.

"You move quietly, aunt," she said after a moment's pause. She turned to the Duke. "What turned you against your loyalty to the Empire? Fear?"

"And gold," said the Duke simply.

"What happened to my army?" asked Kintyra, trying to look Potema steadily in the face. "Is the battle over so soon?"
"All your men are dead," smiled Potema. "But there was no battle here. Merely quiet and efficient assassination. There will be battles ahead, against Modellus in the Dragontail Mountains and against the remnants of the Imperial Army in the City. I'll send you regular updates on the progress of the war."

"So I am to be kept here as your hostage?" asked Kintyra, flatly, suddenly aware of the solidity of the stones and the great height of her tower room. "Damn you, look at me! I am your Empress!"

"Think of it this way, I'm taking you from being a fifth rate ruler to a first rate martyr," said Potema with a wink. "But I understand if you don't want to thank me for that."
The exact date of the Empress Kintyra Septim II's execution in the tower at Glenpoint Castle is open to some speculation. Some believe she was slain shortly after her imprisonment in the 121st year, while others maintain that she was likely kept alive as a hostage until shortly before her uncle Cephorus, King of Gilane, reconquered western High Rock in the summer of the 125th year. The certainty of Kintyra's demise rallied many against the Wolf Queen Potema and her son, who had been crowned Emperor Uriel Septim III four years previously when he invaded the under-guarded Imperial City.

Cephorus concentrated his army on the war in High Rock, while his brother Magnus, King of Lilmoth, brought his Argonian troops through loyal Morrowind and into Skyrim to fight in Potema's home province. The reptilian troops fought well in the summer months, but during the winter, they retired south to regroup and attack again when the weather was warm. At this stalemate, the War lasted out two more years.

Also, in the 125th year, Magnus's wife Hellena gave birth to their first child, a boy who they named Pelagius, after the Emperor who fathered Magnus, Cephorus, the late Emperor Antiochus, and the dread Wolf Queen of Solitude.

Potema sat on soft silk cushions in the warm grass in front of her tent and watched the sun rise over the dark woods on the other side of the meadow. It was a peculiarly vibrant morning, typical of Skyrim summertide. The high chirrup of insects buzzed all around her and the sky surged with thousands of falling birds, rolling over one another and forming a multitude of patterns. Nature was unaware of the war coming to Falconstar, she surmised.

"Your highness, a message from the army in Harthfell," said one of her maids, bringing in a courier. He was breathing hard, stained with sweat and mud. Evidence of a long, fast ride over many, many miles.

"My queen," said the courier, looking to the ground. "I bring grave news of your son, the Emperor. He met your brother King Cephorus's army in Harthfell in the countryside of Ichidag and there did battle. You would be proud, for he fought well, but in the end, the Imperial army was defeated and your son, our Emperor, was captured. King Cephorus is bringing him to Gilane."

Potema listened to the news, scowling. "That clumsy fool," she said at last.
Potema stood up and strolled into camp, where the men were arming themselves, preparing for battle. Long ago, the soldiers understood that their lady did not stand on ceremony, and she would prefer that they work rather than salute her. Lord Vhokken was ahead of her, already meeting with the commander of the battlemages, discussing last minute strategy.

"My queen," said the courier, who had been following her. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to win this battle with Magnus, despite his superior position holding the ruins of Kogmenthist Castle," said Potema. "And then when I know what Cephorus means to do with the Emperor, I'll respond accordingly. If there's a ransom to be paid, I'll pay it; if there's a prison exchange needed, so be it. Now, please, bath yourself and rest, and try not to get in the way of the war."

"It's not an ideal scenario," said Lord Vhokken when Potema had entered the commander's tent. "If we attack the castle from the west, we'll be running directly into the fire from their mages and archers. If we come from the east, we'll be going through swamps, and the Argonians do better in that type of environment than we do. A lot better."

"What about the north and south? Just hills, correct?"

"Very steep hills, your highness," said the commander. "We should post bowmen there, but we'll be too vulnerable putting out the majority of our force."

"So it's the swamp," said Potema, and added, pragmatically. "Unless we withdraw and wait for them to come out before fighting."

"If we wait, Cephorus will have his army here from High Rock, and we'll be trapped between the two of them," said Lord Vhokken. "Not a preferable situation."

"I'll talk to the troops," said the commander. "Try to prepare them for the swamp attack."

"No," said Potema. "I'll speak to them."

In full battlegear, the soldiers gathered in the center of camp. They were a motley collection of men and women, Cyrodilis, Nords, Bretons, and Dunmer, youngbloods and old veterans, the sons and daughters of nobles, shopkeepers, serfs, priests, prostitutes, farmers, academics, adventurers. All of them under the banner of the Red Diamond, the symbol of the Imperial Family of Tamriel.

"My children," Potema said, her voice ringing out, hanging in the still morning mist. "We have fought in many battles together, over mountaintops and beach heads, through forests and deserts. I have seen great acts of valor from each one of you, which does my heart proud. I have also seen dirty fighting, backstabbing, cruel and wanton feats of savagery, which pleases me equally well. For you are all warriors."

Warming to her theme, Potema walked the line from soldier to soldier, looking each one in the eye: "War is in your blood, in your brain, in your muscles, in everything you think and everything you do. When this war is over, when the forces are vanquished that seek to deny the throne to the true emperor, Uriel Septim III, you may cease to be warriors. You may choose to return to your lives before the war, to your farms and your cities, and show off your
scars and tell tales of the deeds you did this day to your wondering neighbors. But on this day, make no mistake, you are warriors. You are war."

She could see her words were working. All around her, bloodshot eyes were focusing on the slaughter to come, arms tensing around weapons. She continued in her loudest cry, "And you will move through the swamplands, like an unstoppable power from the blackest part of Oblivion, and you will rip the scales from the reptilian things in Kogmenthist Castle. You are warriors, and you need not only fight, you must win. You must win!"

The soldiers roared in response, shocking the birds from the trees all around the camp.

From a vantage point on the hills to the south, Potema and Lord Vhokken had excellent views of the battle as it raged. It looked like two swarms of two colors of insect moving back and forth over a clump of dirt which was the castle ruins. Occasionally, a burst of flame or a cloud of acid from one of the mages would flicker over the battle arresting their attention, but hour after hour, the fighting seemed like nothing but chaos.

"A rider approaches," said Lord Vhokken, breaking the silence.

The young Redguard woman was wearing the crest of Gilane, but carried a white flag. Potema allowed her to approach. Like the courier from the morning, the rider was well travel-worn.

"Your Highness," she said, out of breath. "I have been sent from your brother, my lord King Cephorus, to bring you dire news. Your son Uriel was captured in Ichidag on the field in battle and from there transported to Gilane."

"I know all this," said Potema scornfully. "I have couriers of my own. You can tell your master that after I've won this battle, I'll pay whatever ransom or exchange --"

"Your Highness, an angry crowd met the caravan your son was in before it made it to Gilane," the rider said quickly, "Your son is dead. He had been burned to death within his carriage. He is dead."

Potema turned from the young woman and looked down at the battle. Her soldiers were going to win. Magnus's army was in retreat.

"One other item of news, your highness," said the rider. "King Cephorus is being proclaimed Emperor."

Potema did not look at the woman. Her army was celebrating their victory.
From the pen of Inzolicus, Second Century Sage:

3E 127:
Following the Battle of Ichidag, the Emperor Uriel Septim III was captured and, before he was able to be brought to his uncle's castle in the Hammerfell kingdom of Gilane, he met his death at the hands of an angry mob. This uncle, Cephorus, was thereafter proclaimed emperor and rode to the Imperial City. The troops formerly loyal to Emperor Uriel and his mother, the Wolf Queen Potema, pledged themselves to the new Emperor. In return for their support, the nobility of Skyrim, High Rock, Hammerfell, the Summerset Isle, Valenwood, Black Marsh, and Morrowind demanded and received a new level of autonomy and independence from the Empire. The War of the Red Diamond was at an end.

Potema continued to fight a losing battle, her area of influence dwindling and dwindling until only her kingdom of Solitude remained in her power. She summoned daedra to fight for her, had her necromancers resurrect her fallen enemies as undead warriors, and mounted attack after attack on the forces of her brothers, the Emperor Cephurus Septim I and King Magnus of Lilmoth. Her allies began leaving her as her madness grew, and her only companions were the zombies and skeletons she had amassed over the years. The kingdom of Solitude became a land of death. Stories of the ancient Wolf Queen being waited on by rotting skeletal chambermaids and holding war plans with vampiric generals terrified her subjects.

3E 137:
Magnus opened up the small window in his room. For the first time in weeks, he heard the sounds of a city: carts squeaking, horses clopping over the cobblestones, and somewhere a child laughing. He smiled as he returned to his bedside to wash his face and finish dressing. There was a distinctive knock on the door.

"Come in, Pel," he said.

Pelagius bounded into the room. It was obvious that he had been up for hours. Magnus marveled at his energy, and wondered how much longer battles would last if they were run by twelve-year-old boys.

"Did you see outside yet?" Pelagius asked. "All the townspeople have come back! There are shops, and a Mages Guild, and down by the harbor, I saw a hundred shops come in from all over the place!"

"They don't have to be afraid anymore. We've taken care of all the zombies and ghosts that used to be their neighbors, and they know it's safe to come back."

"Is Uncle Cephorus going to turn into a zombie when he dies?" asked Pelagius.
"I wouldn't put that past him," laughed Magnus. "Why do you ask?"

"I heard some people saying that he was old and sick," said Pelagius.

"He's not that old," said Magnus. "He's sixty years old. That's just two years older than I."

"And how old is Aunt Potema?" asked Pelagius.

"Seventy," said Magnus. "And yes, that is old. Any more questions will have to wait. I have to go meet with the commander now, but we can talk at supper. You can make yourself busy, and not get into any trouble?"

"Yes, sir," said Pelagius. He understood that his father had to continue to hold siege on aunt Potema's castle. After they took it over and locked her up, they would move out of the inn and into the castle. Pelagius was not looking forward to that. The whole town had a funny, sweet, dead smell, but he could not get even as close as the castle moat without gagging from the stench. They could dump a million flowers on the place and it wouldn't make any difference at all.

He walked through the city for hours, buying some food and then some ribbons for his sister and mother back in Lilmoth. He thought about who else he needed to buy gifts for and was stumped. All his cousins, the children of Uncle Cephorus, Uncle Antiochus, and Aunt Potema, had died during the war, some of them in battle and some of them during the famines because so many crops had been burned. Aunt Bianki had died last year. There was only he, his mother, his sister, his father, and his uncle the Emperor left. And Aunt Potema. But she didn't really count.

When he came upon the Mages Guild earlier that morning, he had decided not to go in. Those places always spooked him with their strange smoke and crystals and old books. This time, it occurred to Pelagius that he might buy a gift for Uncle Cephorus. A souvenir of Solitude's Mages Guild.

An old woman was having trouble with the front door, so Pelagius opened it for her.

"Thank you," she said.

She was easily the oldest thing he had ever seen. Her face looked like an old rotted apple framed with a wild whirl of bright white hair. He instinctively moved away from her gnarled talon when she started to pat him on the head. But there was a gem around her neck that immediately fascinated him. It was a single bright yellow jewel, but it almost looked there was something trapped within. When the light hit it from the candles, it brought out the form of a four-legged beast, pacing.

"It's a soul gem," she said. "Infused with the spirit of a great demon werewolf. It was enchanted long, long ago with the power to charm people, but I've been thinking about giving it another spell. Perhaps something from the School of Alteration like Lock or Shield." She paused and looked at the boy carefully with yellowed, rheumy eyes. "You look familiar to me, boy. What's your name?"
"Pelagius," he said. He normally would have said "Prince Pelagius," but he was told not to draw attention to himself while in town.

"I used to know someone named Pelagius," the old woman said, and slowly smiled. "Are you here alone, Pelagius?"

"My father is... with the army, storming the castle. But he'll be back when the walls have been breached."

"Which I dare say won't take too much longer," sighed the old woman. "Nothing, no matter how well built, tends to last. Are you buying something in the Mages Guild?"

"I wanted to buy a gift for my uncle," said Pelagius. "But I don't know if I have enough gold."

The old woman left the boy to look over the wares while she went to the Guild enchanter. He was a young Nord, ambitious, and new to the kingdom of Solitude. It took little persuasion and a lot of gold to convince him to remove the charm spell from the soul gem and imbue it with a powerful curse, a slow poison that would drain wisdom from its wearer year by year until he or she lost all reason. She also purchased a cheap ring of fire resistance.

"For your kindness to an old woman, I've bought you these," she said, giving the boy the necklace and the ring. "You can give the ring to your uncle, and tell him it has been enchanted with a levitation spell, so if ever he needs to leap from high places, it will protect him. The soulgem is for you."

"Thank you," said the boy. "But this is too kind of you."

"Kindness has nothing to do with it," she answered, quite honestly. "You see, I was in the Hall of Records at the Imperial Palace once or twice, and I read about you in the foretellings of the Elder Scrolls. You will be Emperor one day, my boy, the Emperor Pelagius Septim III, and with this soul gem to guide you, posterity will always remember you and your deeds."

With those words, the old woman disappeared down an alley behind the Mages Guild. Pelagius looked after her, but he did not think to search behind a heap of stones. If he had, he would have found a tunnel under the city into the very heart of Castle Solitude. And if he had found his way there, he would have found, past the shambling undead and the moldering remains of a once grand palace, the bedroom of the queen.

In that bedroom, he would find the Wolf Queen of Solitude in repose, listening to the sounds of her castle collapsing. And he would see a toothless grin growing on her face as she breathed her last.

From the pen of Inzolicus, Second Century Sage:

3E 137:
Potema Septim died after a month long siege on her castle. While she lived, she had been the Wolf Queen of Solitude, Daughter of the Emperor Pelagius II, Wife of King Mantiarco, Aunt of the Empress Kintyra II, Mother of Emperor Uriel III, and Sister of the Emperors Antiochus and Cephorus. At her death, Magnus appointed his son, Pelagius, as the titular head of Solitude, under guidance from the royal council.
3E 140:
The Emperor Cephorus Septim died after falling from his horse. His brother was proclaimed the Emperor Magnus Septim.

3E 141:
Pelagius, King of Solitude, is recorded as "occasionally eccentric" in the Imperial Annals. He marries Katarish, Duchess of Vvardenfell.

3E 145:
The Emperor Magnus Septim dies. His son, who will be known as Pelagius the Mad, is coronated.
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