

The cover is made of dark brown, textured leather. It features a large, intricate embossed design in the center, consisting of swirling, flame-like or leaf-like patterns. The title 'THE Candlekeep COMPENDIUM' is prominently displayed in the upper half. 'THE' is in a small, simple font, while 'Candlekeep' is in a large, ornate, gothic-style font. 'COMPENDIUM' is in a smaller, all-caps, serif font, flanked by decorative flourishes. The volume number 'VOLUME III' is located at the bottom center in a serif font. The cover is decorated with metal hardware: on the left, there are three circular metal studs and a larger metal piece with a slot; on the right, there are two circular metal studs, each containing a glowing orange-red gemstone. The overall aesthetic is that of a fantasy or medieval setting.

THE
Candlekeep
COMPENDIUM

VOLUME III

VOLUME 111

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EDITORIAL



elcome to yet another volume of the Candlekeep Compendium. Being a collection of the finest Realmslore selected from the shelves of Candlekeep and from travels around Faerûn, and beyond.

Our scribes have been working continuously, burning the midnight oil, to bring this collection of Realmslore to our fellow seekers of knowledge, here at Candlekeep.

Our dwarven expert brings further insight into the way of life for the stout folk and this time delves into the Thunder Blessing. Taking a short break from our regular Folk of Faerûn article, we present a variant on this theme, with the results of talks with the commonfolk of Toril - the laborers, without whom we would find life all the more difficult. Of course, as always, rumors and tales from around the Realms are presented herein, for ye would-be adventurers.

A new column begins within this volume, detailing the ship, captain and crew of the Earling's Spray - a fine vessel traveling the Sword Coast. Meluron Soondulyn presents his latest journals regarding research into one of the lesser-known creator races: the Batrachi, and our faithful scribe, Rikos Dughol, still traveling through Faerûn, visits Olostin's Hold and provides his latest report. Mercenary companies are appearing more frequently throughout the Realms, of late, and herein our latest report details the Green Scales.

Again, a splendid collection of Realmslore for which to feast thine eyes upon. I hope ye enjoy these latest installments from the halls of Candlekeep.

- Alaundo of Candlekeep

This volume is dedicated to Elaine Cunningham and Ed Greenwood - authors of "The City of Splendors: A Waterdeep Novel", for their kind acknowledgment of Candlekeep and for giving us the most wonderful journey through this grand city of the Realms.

THE HAMMER'S STROKE

part 111

By Kevin Liss



or centuries, sages foretold the decline and fall of the dwarven kingdoms.

Time passed, and the greatest of the kingdoms did indeed fall. Delzoun,

Ammarindar, Shanatar, and more recently, Tethyamar: all succumbed to the ravages of their enemies, and to time itself.

Kingdoms rise, and kingdoms fall. In the Year of Thunder (1306 DR), dwarves gained a boon to their population and their future. The Thunder Blessing, also known as the Forge, bestowed the Stout Folk with a restored birthrate. Moradin's children received from him renewed blood, and a fighting chance. All of the dwarven sub-races, save for the gray dwarves, were gifted with this blessing. They now have the numbers to not only hold the kingdoms they possess, but to also reclaim those they lost. It is time for kingdoms to rise again!

The Thunder Blessing has had a twofold effect. First is the increase in the birthrate. This increase, in some areas, has reached a rate as high as half of that of some of the more prolific human lands. And, as any dwarf knows, humans breed almost as fast as orcs and goblins in some places. Another effect of the Blessing is the number of twins born to dwarven parents. Normally, with an increase in population, a few new sets of twins are expected. The dwarves, however, perhaps because of their legendary stubbornness, were blessed with an abundance of twins. Almost twenty percent of the children born since the Forge are twins. The thunder children, as they are called, are quickly becoming the leadership of the new generation of dwarves.

The Forge also created several new dilemmas for the dwarven people, and some old

customs are now renewed. Before the Forge, wizards among the Stout Folk were virtually unheard of. Now, with the dramatic increase in population, many of the thunder children are turning to wizardry as a profession and way of life. Overpopulation in smaller holds also is fast becoming a problem. This dilemma is quickly being solved through either conquest, or reclamation of old territories. Citadel Felbarr is among the latter, while Firehammer Hall is among the former. Halfbloods, legends hold, are the union of a dwarf and either humans, gnomes, elves, or halflings. Halfbloods were common in former days when dwarves were numerous, and are expected to be so again as the sometimes xenophobic race encounters old allies outside of their dwarven holds. Finally, the Dragonmoot is fast becoming a ritual of passage again, especially after the unsure nature of the beasts was revealed in recent events.

Thunder Twins as Leaders

Thunder twins are an enigma of dwarven faith. The Dwarffather, Moradin, blessed the Stout Folk with an increased birthrate, and then doubled this blessing by giving many families twins. Thunder twins can be fraternal or identical, and either male or female. It is not known how many of each gender have been born since the Forge's fires started burning, yet it is thought that equal numbers are born.

The connection that the twins of the Forge share gives them an advantage when dealing with others, either harshly or diplomatically. This forges them into great leaders in the making, since they can handle situations both within dwarven society, and beyond, into the realms of the other intelligent races. Every set of twins shares this connection,

although some feel it closer than others. Most dwarven societies expect thunder twins to assume positions of leadership in the future, and they are taking steps to help them achieve this.

Each clan supports and participates in educating the twins born into that clan. Every faith within the dwarven pantheon promotes the importance to the Folk of the next generation, and especially that of the twins. Identical twins are practically revered in some clans. If and when one of the siblings passes, the other is expected to continue the work of the pair, allowing for a swift and easy transition, especially in leadership roles. Because of this, identical twins are sometimes treated as one individual for purposes of training and education. Fraternal twins are able to live separate lives, yet most see the advantage in having someone so close to them constantly near. The benefits of sharing so close a bond is often ample reason for the twins to stay close, both physically and emotionally.

The Year of Thunder began with the birth of two sets of twins. One set was born in Underholme to a wealthy dwarven patriarch and trade lord of the Belindorn clan. The twins, a boy and a girl, were educated to be great priests, yet soon it was apparent that they favored the arcane arts. The twins, Kieradyn and Runa, have opened a school of magic in Underholme to teach other thunder twins the mysteries of the Weave. They cater exclusively to gold dwarf twins, since they see themselves, and other twins, as the future of the dwarven people. Some believe that they are slowly recruiting a conclave of wizards who will one day expand the power base of the most powerful families of the Great Rift.

The other twins, fraternal shield dwarf brothers born to Clan Wyrmslayer in Citadel Adbar, are staunch fighters and pious worshippers of Moradin. Mith and Barr joined the Hammers of Moradin, quickly becoming Rorann's right hands. These two pairs of twins are expected to lead the children of the Thunder Blessing back into old holds and into new glories in the next century.

Wizards in the New Generation

Arcane magic has long been the force which has eluded dwarfs. They have inherent resistances to it, they shun it. Yet now, due to the Forge, it is in their blood. The Blessing gives magic using dwarves an advantage against the growing threat of the evil races seeking to evict the Stout Folk from their homes. It will help them reclaim lost treasures and holds, and it throws a few surprises at any dragon wishing to conquer the mines and tunnels which hold the wealth of the dwarves.

Sorcerers are becoming more common, now that there are wizards of power among the Folk. Still, wizards are more highly regarded, since learning the craft takes dedication and hard work, whereas gaining power through chance takes luck, not skill. Also, with the introduction of magic into their veins, dwarven bards appear as often as mundane entertainers.

Dwarves prefer some schools of magic over others. Many take the specialist's path, however the majority study all schools, especially those who wander the Realms seeking adventure. Specialists are usually that, wizards fitting specific functions within dwarven society. Specialists, and the schools they prefer, are:

Abjuration: Many followers of the Morndinsamman study in the abjuration schools.

Priests of Berronar Truesilver find great value in the spells of protection offered by abjurers, as do those of Dumathoin. The spells of protection offer new and interesting defensive strategies to the already creatively deadly traps that dwarves set in their homes. Because of the nature of these spells, many female dwarf wizards take up studying spells of this school, and often multiclass as priestesses of Berronar in some of the smaller dwarven communities.

Conjuration: Conjurers are most common among the troops guarding the citadels and homes of the dwarves. While useful, wizards of this school are not as common as those from others.

Divination: The use of divination spells tends to lie in the hands of the clerics. Some arcane diviners are found in larger communities, serving the leaders of all of the dwarven sub-races.

Enchantment: Except those dwarves dealing with other races, most dwarves shun enchantments. If it gives them an advantage at the bargaining table, however, enchanters are used, especially against unscrupulous competitors.

Evocation: Battle-hardened dwarf evokers are deadly foes. Wizards specializing in this school are common enough now to cause many attackers pause at the prospect of facing the already deadly formations of dwarf warriors, for fear of battle-mages in their midst.

Illusion: Illusions are for gnomes, and no respectable dwarf wants to be caught casting illusory spells for fear of being mistaken for one. Unless, of course, it is in defense of their homes, and it enhances the effects caused by certain traps.

Necromancy: While spells of this school are not shunned as a whole, the dark implications of this school are enough for all but a few to steer clear of it.

Transmutation: Since most spells of this school are for personal benefit, adventurers are most common among the dwarves to study in this school. Shield dwarf transmuters are likelier to be found than gold dwarf ones.

This list is not exclusive, and some of the sub-races veer from their more numerous cousins in which schools they are apt to take.

Arctic dwarf wizard specialists will not take, for instance, abjuration or conjuration as a specialization school as often as shield or gold dwarves.

Also, wizards are finding their place both within society, and within the pantheon of dwarven gods. The *xothor* of Dugmaren Brightmantle are fast becoming popular among the thunder children. Many of the young dwarves also become clerics of the god of discovery, and also as wizards.

Loremasters, runecasters, and wizards all pay homage to Dugmaren, whether they join the ranks of his priests, or not.

Reclaiming their Heritage

One of the greatest advantages of the increase in population among the Stout Folk is that they now have the numbers to begin reclaiming lost territory from the evil races that pushed them from their homes in the past centuries. Citadel Felbarr is one of the first, and certainly the most identifiable, of these reclaimed realms. Undoubtedly, plans are being made to retake other areas now lost to the dwarves, such as parts of Shanatar, Ammarindar, and even Undermountain.

The new crusades of the Stout Folk usually consist of the thunder children of a clan, hold, or even territory joining a charismatic descendant of a lost kingdom to reclaim, at least initially, vital territory in the area to be reclaimed. They can outright assault the squatters, as with the reclamation of Citadel Felbarr, or they may whittle away at the lairs and halls of the area until all enemies are vanquished.

Smaller groups will often lay claim to newly discovered territories by founding a small town or hold near a mine. Hundreds of small communities are springing up around Faerûn in this manner. Some consist of a few clans or families, numbering a few score, to larger industries amounting to many clans and hundreds, even thousands, of residents within a year of their founding, such as Mithral Hall. Thunder children amount to a large portion in either army, with Thunder

Twins usually holding leadership positions of some manner, if not actually hosting the crusade.

Halfbloods

In the past, halfbloods began to appear among the children of Moradin. They are the product of dwarves and either humans, gnomes, halflings, or elves. It is not known whether humanoids are capable of mating with dwarves. These halfbloods appear as normal dwarves, but will normally be a head taller than purebloods. This union is almost always mutual, so the halfbloods are treated as any other dwarf rather than outcasts.

With the Forge reshaping dwarven society, it is now suspected that halfbloods will become more common, as they once were. The holds of the North, such as Sundabar, or even Silverymoon, will likely see these unique offspring frequently, now that the survival of the race is less of an issue than it once was. That, coupled with the acceptance of the thunder children to new ideas, will be a driving factor in the forging of new relationships between dwarves and the other civilized races.

The Dragonmoot

Dragons, powerful beings likened to the elements, hoard wealth better than the most devout follower of Abbathor. In the past, young dwarves seeking to prove themselves would band together in the tradition known as the dragonmoot. Since dragons are drawn to areas dwarves inhabit, the resurgence of this tradition was inevitable. Recent events, with the unexpected behaviors of dragons,

allowed many young dwarves from the Thunder Blessing to find common cause and root out dragons sharing the same territory as them. Just as often, dwarven communities expanding into new areas find them inhabited by the wyrms. The dragonmoot thus serves two important purposes. First, it allows the young dwarf warriors a chance to prove their worth, and second, it clears the way for expansion.

A dragonmoot usually consists of several score of young dwarves intent on achieving glory beyond their years, and skill. Banded together, even green fighters are able to fight and slay young dragons. While this is a reckless endeavor, the members of these moots are not inured to the deadly consequences of it. They will not seek out a dragon of known power unless they are led by a champion of repute, which then breaks the reason for the moot. Careful planning is given to the event, so that all involved will achieve a victory to increase their renown, and not damage it. Clerics, wizards, and rogues are all found intermixed in these rites for support, firepower, and scouting purposes.

The Forge burns bright among the dwarven communities of Faerûn. Young dwarf fighters, clerics, wizards, and others seek to carve a path of glory across, and below, the land. Driven by the Blessing, and led by the thunder twins, their purpose seems clear. They will reconquer, repopulate, and invigorate the Stout Folk to attain that for which they fought so long to hold. The Allfather is just beginning to forge his people for the trials before them. Dwarves being dwarves, they welcome it.

LABORERS OF TORIL

By Scott Kujawa

First Reader, here is the first scroll of the new project you have asked me to scribe for the records of Candlekeep.

As you know, you requested that I stay on Toril ever since my return from Talona's planar realm. I agreed with you, since my body is still exhausted from fighting off all the poisons and diseases I contracted on that plane, even though we believed I was protected.

Here are the first ten laborers that I've interviewed so far. Of course, some of this lore may not be true. Furthermore, I had to distill the details lest they fill a whole tome, and besides, some of the information given to me was to be kept secret, and I gave my word, as a follower of the Binder. I hope you enjoy the first ten laborers. I'm tracking down other folk who are willing to let me record what they do to make coin and survive.

Scribe Lythrina Surstyn of Candlekeep

* * * *

Dolath "Corpse Taker" Deindar (LN, Male Human, Expert 1/Cleric 1, Jergal)

Jergal marked this young male human during the Time of Troubles by changing his appearance to better reflect his somber, pensive nature. Dolath's skin, hair, and eyes are pure white, but he hides his features with an unadorned grey robe and white gloves. A skull on a tarnished silver chain hangs around his neck, prominently displayed on his chest at all times. He also carries a desiccated human skull that has the openings sealed. This macabre container holds a mixture of ashes and powdered bones used in one of his rituals. It is usually kept in a nondescript black satchel slung around his shoulders, along with his other religious and professional equipment.

Shortly after the Time of Troubles ended, Dolath was visited by a strange being that said it came from a place called Sigil. The stranger stayed for a day and waxed on about a group called the Dustmen. After listening for awhile, Dolath found he was interested, and soon enough he decided he wanted to be a member. The two visited that strange city, where Dolath passed the tests

required to join the faction. Soon after, he returned to Faerûn to live and spread the faction's philosophy to anyone willing to listen. The being that visited him was a Devourer by the name of Krolar, who has been acting as the Dustmen's ambassador to potential Prime Material inhabitants.

Dolath lives in a ramshackle home in the poor part of the city, but he keeps the inside of his one-story abode well-kept and clean. To the right of his dwelling is the small building that serves as his work area. It is filled with herbs, oils, blends of spices, and other materials used to bury the dead. Dolath keeps additional funerary items in his home. There he has utensils for removing organs, and the back wall is lined with containers for storing the organs. These can also be used to store the ashes of those who are cremated.

Some of the residents of Waterdeep, who know Dolath, are a little afraid of him because of the type of work he does. However, he keeps to himself, except for the few times that he's had to fight off those that have tried to harm him, his home, or his small workshop.

Faurynn and Saerdrie of House Starkeeper (Both are CG, Female Moon Elf, Expert 6, Sehanine Moonbow, Selûne, and Sahastra)

These two elves are twin sisters that live in Silverymoon, near the Temple of Silver Stars. Their home is a tower open to the sky, allowing them to watch the stars, Selûne, and the other celestial bodies.

Both have blue-black hair that falls to their ankles, which they keep braided with ribbons and light links of silver metal, to keep it out of their faces. Both wear blue robes with white trim, decorated with silver moons and stars in dedication to Sehanine Moonbow and Selûne. The twins also venerate a female demipower called Syhastra by the elves. She is part of the Faerûnian pantheon, known as Sahastra among humans. Her holy symbol, a swirling six-pointed star, is also stitched onto the robes worn by the twins.

The sisters are used to being among the nobles of Silverymoon and in the palace, due to being called on by Alustriel, Taern "Thunderspell" Hornblade, and others that need the advice that comes from the stars and celestial bodies. During one of these visits, both of the twins fell for a male moon elfen bard named Kethrion. Kethrion can usually be found singing news of the Gem of the North, ballads, elfen love songs, and other tunes that make the females of the City of Love swoon. For now, the twins have agreed to share his affections when, and if, they finally get him to notice them.

The sisters' tower also contains many scrolls, books, pieces of parchment, and other written material on the stars, Realmspace, the planets, and other features found in Realmspace. Additionally, they have also collected lore about Selûne, Selûne's Tears, and the other Prime Material Crystal Spheres. There are stacks of books which they have personally filled with figures and events they have observed while looking upwards.

Faurynn and Saerdrie lost their parents in the first attack on Evereska. Since then, the twins have harbored a deep hatred towards the phaerimm and the residents of the Shade enclave.

(Author's Note: Sahastra doesn't exist in lore, but the twins believe she does. I might expand on this deity at a later date.)

Meeline and Jhalune (TN, Female Illuskan Human, Commoner 2, Waukeen and Lathander) and (NE, Female Half-Moon Elf, Commoner 1, Mask)

This mother and daughter pair rents a building in Tantras, where they make and dye clothing before selling it. They live in the upper floor of the two-story structure, with the bottom floor serving as their shop. The front room is where they show-off their wares.

Meeline is an aging human woman. Her short blond hair is shot through with grey, and her blue eyes are filled with sadness due to the loss of her moon elfen husband, killed by bandits on his way to Raven's Bluff to deliver a batch of her goods. She wears a pair of pants and shirt that she wove herself.

Jhalune is a half-moon elf. Her hair is pale, like her father's, though a shade or two darker because of her mother's blond hair. Jhalune wears her hair longer, allowing it to fall to just below her shoulders. She wears it up in a tail when she's working, however. Her eyes are a darker blue than her mother's, and they are filled with amusement at the actions of the races of Tantras. Like her mother, she wears pants and shirts woven by Meeline. However, her clothing is dyed in darker shades than those her mother prefers. She enjoys the company of sailors, thinking their songs and tales are exotic. From them, she has acquired several bawdy sea chanties that she likes to sing as she works.

Her mother doesn't know it, but Jhalune is also a spy for a secret group that meets around Tantras. They are working on forming a thieves guild before gaining enough power to take over the city. As far as Jhalune knows, they call themselves the Shadow Stalkers. When she has information for them, she secretly delivers it to various places around Tantras. Some of the places she leaves information include: a fountain shaped like a flying bird to the northeast, a statue of a dryad in the southern part of the city, the

head of a broken gargoyle to the west, and in the eastern part of the city, behind a loose brick in the outer wall of a ruined building.

Taulas el Sharess (CN, Male Lightfoot Halfling, Commoner 1, Sharess)

This halfling decided that the best way to not become a slave in Calimshan was to become a festhall worker in Calimport. Of course, it helped that he has always enjoyed the pleasures of flesh, drinks, and the like. The draw he'd always felt towards the Dancing Lady's faith was further incentive.

From the moment he started working at the Cracked Rooster Festhall, Taulas dressed in bright oranges, reds, and yellows. He keeps his hairy feet bare though, because, like most halflings, he disdains footwear. His brown hair is curled at the ends, and perched on his head is a big green floppy hat, with one large blue feather sticking out of it. The skin that he leaves bare is visibly brown and shines from regular oil-washes.

Taulas has a room in the festhall that he uses for entertaining paying customers. Inside this luxuriously-appointed chamber he keeps perfumes, colognes, oils, and other liquids that provide him with a variety of pleasing fragrances. Sprawled out near the window is a large striped orange feline, which Taulas refers to as "My Little Sharess." He claims that the cat is a messenger from Sharess, and that it has powers that helps protect him.

Aryreen (TN, Female Illuskan Human, Commoner 1)

Aryreen is a slave of Thay and currently owned by Dmitra Flass, the tharchion of Eltabbar. She serves as a maid in the tharchion's estate. This child is the offspring of two other slaves, but she doesn't know who her parents are or if they still live.

She inherited her light red-blond hair from her mother, but she has her father's wide brown eyes. Her skin, pale with small hints of green-brown, combines the skintones of both of her parents. Since she has been a slave all of her short life, her hair reaches below her

shoulders. If she lives to adulthood, it will probably reach to her ankles.

An elder female named Lilane watches over Aryreen and takes care of her, as do the handful of slaves that share quarters with Aryreen.

Spirago (CN, Male Maztican Human, Commoner 4, Maztica) and **Virira** (CN, Female Maztican Human, Plumaweaver, Qotal)

Spirago and his consort, Virira, own land in Maztica. He grows tobacco that is shipped to Faerûn, and she weaves feathers into small items that are also shipped across to that distant continent. He is dark-skinned, with dark hair and dark brown eyes. Virira shares Spirago's dark skin, hair, and eyes, but her hair is longer, past her shoulders. Both of them usually wear feather garments that are woven by Virira. A round hut, with a few other round huts adjoining, forms their home.

Iyramil (CG, Male Wood Elf, Expert 2, the Seldarine)

Iyramil lives on Evermeet, and his dream is someday to be chosen as a moon horse rider. For now, though, he is happy to be one of the few elves that care for these rare animals, found only on Evermeet.

His dark green-brown hair trails down his shoulders to his back, and his bright green eyes are filled with warmth towards these horses. His white clothing, which shows off his dark skin, is worn to honor to the intelligent horses.

Iyramil still lives with his mother, Ajhiisel. His father was killed in the recent drow invasion. Their cottage, a two-story building formed of living trees woven together by magic, is not far from the meadows of the moon horses.

Iyramil also has an older sister, Sentyleth. A priestess of Corellon, she is a century older than her brother. Sentyleth is currently somewhere on the mainland, but Iyramil and Ajhiisel haven't heard from her in tendays.

He is also smitten with another wood elf, Frastyll. She knows that he has feelings for her, but for now she is too dedicated to her studies as a ranger. Plus, she figures they have centuries left to live and that there is plenty of time for a bond to grow between them.

Tunstarr (LG, Male Shield Dwarf, Expert 1, Moradin)

Tunstarr lives in Citadel Adbar. There he is a weapon and armor smith, apprenticed to an elder dwarf who calls himself Dunar. Tunstarr dreams of someday reclaiming some of the lost dwarven lands for his people, but for now, he is content to be an apprentice smith. He is one of the twins of the Thunder Blessing, and his sister, Theryry, also resides in the Citadel, but she has an even deeper wanderlust than he does. This has caused her to learn how to wield many weapons, and she leaves the Citadel for days at a time, exploring the north and meeting with the other races. Recently, she has returned from Silverymoon with tales of the many wars that have plagued the Silver Marches.

Llethale (Female Gnome, Expert 3/Wizard 1, Zann the Learned)

Llethale lives in Huzuz as a sage of medicine and alchemy. She lives and works in a small one-story shop. Books, scrolls, pages of loose material, and other written works are crammed into every inch of the three rooms that make up her home.

Her brown skin is wrinkled with age, but her eyes are filled with deep thoughts. Her white hair barely touches her shoulders. Llethale is usually clad in a long robe; the hem reaches the floor and constantly causes her to trip. Decades of handling written items have left permanent ink stains on all of her fingers.

Llethale's male gnomish consort, Aldin, was buried over a decade ago, leaving her childless and alone. Her parents have also passed on, but she sometimes meets with Aldin's gnomish mother to discuss her dead consort.

UNTOLD STORIES

Collection 111

By Chris Jameson (Adventures I – VI)
& Scott Kujawa (Adventure VII – XII)

Being a collection of adventure hooks and starting tales for use in the *Forgotten Realms*

Adventure Hook I

The PCs are in a good-sized community when this hook happens.

The residents of the city were surprised when they awoke this morning. Plastered all over the city are broadsheets bearing a cryptic message:

*Three blades shall rise
when the eye in the crown goes dim.
The lost land will be found,
The pact of Erecyndlas shattered,
And the fallen queen shall walk the
path of fire once more.
The dark lady's face reveals all.*

Despite the fact that the broadsheet was in many cases nailed to doors, no one saw or heard anything unusual during the night. Beyond the cryptic message, there are no clues to be found on the broadsheets, either.

Within hours, most of the town's populace is discussing the mysterious lines. Many feel it is some sort of prophecy, while others feel it's some sort of publicity stunt. Whichever it is, it has people talking, as they try to puzzle out the message's meaning.

It's up to the DM to decide what the message really is, and what, if anything, it means. It may take some clever hints or obscure bardic lore to solve this one.

Adventure Hook II

This hook can take place in any moderately-sized to large community.

The PCs are approached by the head of the local watch, who has a strange series of events to share.

Late last month, a horse approached three watchmen, and, speaking in perfectly understandable Common, reported that his master had passed out while working outside, and needed help. The horse was able to lead the watchmen to his master, who recovered after drinking a healing draught. The horse's master is a simple farmer, and had no idea his horse could talk.

Several days later, a stray dog, also speaking in perfectly understandable Common, told a watchman he had witnessed a mugging. The dog was able to give an accurate enough description to lead to the arrest of the thief.

Two weeks ago, a sparrow, also speaking in Common, complained to a goodwife that her cat was a nuisance to the local birds. The goodwife, in turn, told the watch what had happened.

There are several other, similar instances. In all cases, an animal that had never before shown signs of intelligence is now obviously more intelligent than any normal animal would be. Obviously, someone or something is *awakening* these animals. But who or what is doing it, and why?

The PCs are asked to investigate this matter. The watch can provide assistance; a

watchman will be assigned to the PCs to aid them (leading them to witnesses, etc). So far, the watch has done its best to keep the news of the animals quiet. They've taken into custody several of the now-intelligent creatures, and have asked witnesses to not speak of their experiences. However, a few rumors are starting to spread...

Adventure Hook III

The PCs are drinking in a tavern when a brawl breaks out. One of the participants is a charming young blade who is heir to a prominent noble family. During the fight, someone stabs and kills the young man. As he collapses to the floor, a startling secret is revealed: the young man was actually a doppelganger in disguise!

Since the PCs were witnesses, the noble family hires them to discreetly investigate. The nobles want to know who tried to kill the heir, what happened to the real heir (and rescue him, if he's still alive or can be *raised*), and how long the doppelganger had been impersonating him. They would also like to know, if possible, what the doppelganger intended to do in its role as the heir, and whether or not there are any other imposters in prominent positions or within their family.

Adventure Hook IV

Tarson Daelgrym is a renowned bard. He came to fame as the leader of the Merry Blades, the Silvaeren group that unmasked and slew a black dragon in Elversult. The group also explored Myth Drannor, where they became implacable foes of the Zhentarim. Tarson, though traveling alone now, is known to continue this enmity. Tarson recently converted to the worship of Finder Wyvernspur, and has spoken openly of his desire to found a temple to The Nameless Bard. Though he has neither confirmed nor denied it, saying only that he respects their goals and finds them to be a worthy group, it is widely rumored that Tarson is a Harper.

For the last three nights, Tarson has been performing at <DM's choice of taverns>. Last

night, after his performance, he departed for his room at a nearby inn. Hours later, tavern-goers were surprised to find the bard lying dead in an alley. As the watch tried to shoulder past the stunned onlookers, Tarson's corpse scrambled to its feet and disappeared into the night.

Who killed Tarson? How did his corpse leave under its own power? And why did it leave? Many people, possibly including the Harpers, want the answers to these questions.

Adventure Hook V

The *Dagger of Anar-Lod* is an ancient and undeniably evil weapon. No one alive knows its true origins, though legends tie the weapon to the fallen Lord of Murder, Bhaal.

According to one of the foremost legends, Bhaal himself wielded the *Dagger* when he was still but a mortal. After ascending to godhood, he imbued the *Dagger* with a shard of his own power and passed it to one of his most loyal followers. Over the course of the following years, it has been handed down from one master assassin to another.

Another legend states that the *Dagger* was created by one of Bhaal's first worshippers. Using powerful and unholy rites, a wizard-assassin stole the souls of his murdered victims, and wove their energies into the vile blade he had created. As with many of the other legends, the *Dagger* was then passed on from one master assassin to another. Sometimes it was bequeathed at the peaceful death of the owner, other times the successor seized it from the master he'd just slain.

It is said that during the Time of Troubles, the *Dagger* was wielded by Sevis Nadell, a widely-traveled assassin who was then in Calimshan. Sevis, urged by the *Dagger's* sentience, traveled northward, carrying the blade back to its divine master. But the blade never reached the Lord of Murder.

Bane, needing additional strength to battle Torm, turned to Myrkul for assistance. The Lord of Death caused assassins all over the Realms to instantly fall dead, using the souls

of Bhaal's followers to aid Bane in his battle. Sevis, still several days south of Baldur's Gate, was one of the many victims of this ritual.

The *Dagger* was found by Tesko Chaunrel, a wandering mercenary. Tesko, a brutish warrior with orcish blood, wielded the *Dagger* for several years. He never realized its potential, knowing only that the ill-aspected blade was magical in nature.

Three years ago, Tesko was slain by the half-elven assassin Yarek Milgreth, who realized that the *Dagger* was more than just another magical weapon. He studied the blade for almost a year before he uncovered all of its secrets. Since that time, his abilities as an assassin have grown more formidable, and he's able to command high prices for his services.

The blade of the *Dagger* is six inches long, and an inch wide at the base. The last two inches narrow to a needle-sharp point. The blade itself appears to be ordinary steel, but is tinted a reddish-black.

The hilt is wrapped in alternating bands of violet and black leather. The leather is worn and faded, but still supple, and feels strangely warm to the touch. The dagger's crosspiece resembles finger bones, one on each side of the blade. The pommel appears to be a miniature human skull, with blood-red rubies set in the eye sockets.

When the *Dagger* is used to kill a victim, if left in the body for an entire turn, it consumes the victim's soul, leaving them unable to be *raised*, *resurrected*, or contacted via *speak with dead*. For one day per level of the victim, the dagger does an additional 1d3 points of damage.

A side-effect of this feeding is that the body is drained of all blood. The *Dagger's* current wielder, Yarek Milgreth, has discovered this effect, and thought of a way to capitalize on it. When slaying a victim, Yarek's preferred method is to enter their bedchamber. Yarek casts *hold person* on his sleeping victim, and then stabs them twice in the side of the neck. He is careful to keep the two wounds shallow

and close together, letting the *Dagger's* feeding kill the victim.

Yarek's victims, when found, are inevitably thought to have fallen prey to a vampire. The victims are usually cremated as quickly as possible, to prevent them from rising as vampires. Thus, Yarek's crimes are concealed without proper investigation.

A prominent NPC has just fallen to the *Dagger of Anar-Lod* and its wielder. The PCs are hired to hunt down and find the vampire that slew the NPC. Alternatively, someone close to the NPC has reason to doubt that the death was the work of a vampire, and wants the PCs to find the real culprit.

An even more interesting twist would be if a vampire, knowing the murder wasn't committed by one of his kind, hires the PCs (through intermediaries, of course) to find the real culprit.

Adventure Hook VI

This hook can be used just about anywhere, though it would seem a bit more plausible to have the PCs encounter Halyn while in a city or town, as opposed to the wilderness.

Halyn Aleanoth needs help. Halyn Aleanoth is a famed moon elf fighter-sorcerer. He first came to fame in Waterdeep, as the sole survivor of The Company of the Silver Griffon's ill-fated foray into Undermountain. One midmorning in early Tarsakh, Halyn and his five companions entered the well in The Yawning Portal, embarking on the same journey countless other adventurers have made.

In late Kythorn, Halyn resurfaced. He burst out of a sewer grating near the High Road, engaged in a running battle with a marilith. Fighting at his side was a slender longsword, obviously magically animated, for it battled the marilith without a wielder. The battle lasted for several minutes and covered the space of two city blocks; Halyn and the animated sword finally managed to slay the demon just as a frantically-summoned Watch patrol arrived.

An enterprising merchant, Tanden Erelson, chose to capitalize on Halyn's dramatic entrance. Tanden, a garrulous and enthusiastic man, was trying to break into Waterdeep's emerging market for chapbooks. Within a week, the first volume of *Moon and Steel: The Adventures of an Elf* was available. The chapbook related Halyn's experiences in the Underhalls, the deaths of his companions, his finding of the intelligent animated sword Keilevryn, and the battle with the marilith, which began on Level One of Undermountain, before moving to the sewers and then to the street above.

Six additional volumes have covered Halyn's subsequent adventures. All have been popular, and there is talk of compiling them into a book. The chapbooks have also maintained Halyn's high popularity; because of them, he has become a minor celebrity in Waterdeep. When in the City of Splendors, Halyn never lacks for companionship or invitations to parties, feasts, and revels.

But now, none of that matters to Halyn. While exploring a nameless ruin several months ago, he encountered a beautiful sun elf, magically entrapped in a giant emerald. After he freed her, the elf, a mage named Celaessa Leiunara, chose to travel with him. Soon after, the two fell in love.

About a month ago, the two were exploring a ruin in the Silver Marches. They were sitting quietly by a campfire when Celaessa's head snapped up. "Jannus Delevaun has returned," she murmured in a barely audible voice. She then quickly incanted a spell, *teleporting* away and leaving Halyn alone and wondering.

Halyn has no idea who or what Jannus Delevaun is. He likewise doesn't know Celaessa's connection to this person, or why his return caused her to depart so suddenly. Halyn is searching for anyone who has information about the mysterious person, or who knows where Celaessa is.

Adventure Hook VII

A winged creature, seemingly made of stone, has been seen in Baldur's Gate for the past several days. Each night it swoops down from the sky and grabs a female human in its talons. It flies over the city before heading west and over the water. Divinations haven't been able to track its movements. The Flaming Fist is offering a reward if someone can prove that it has been killed, if they have any information on where the creature lairs, or where it takes its victims.

Adventure Hook VIII

A hunter is seeking adventurers to protect him as he tracks and finds a creature he calls the "Ground Digger". No one has ever heard of the beast, which the hunter describes as having webbed feet, feathered wings, a scaly body, and a square head. Nonetheless, the hunter keeps talking about it and insists that it can be found in the Trollmoors. He is willing to pay either a minor magic item or some gems or coins to adventurers if they agree to protect him as he hunts for this beast in that troll-infested part of Faerûn.

Adventure Hook IX

Silverymoon has been overrun by pixies and other small flying fey. The city can't seem to rid itself of its mischievous invaders, who are using their magic to play pranks on everyone in the city. Silvaeren officials are asking for help on finding where the fey are coming from, and why they are staying in Silverymoon. When asked, the fey fearfully whisper about someone or something called the Eater, and then disappear. What or who this creature or being is, the sages of the city are at a loss to explain.

Adventure Hook X

An uncharted isle has risen out of the water about four days north of the northern Moonshae Isle. So far it is mostly unexplored; sages and others are interested in learning anything about it. The few sailors and adventurers that have landed on the isle have since disappeared, which worries Queen Alicia and King Keane. Another curious fact about the isle is that the sea elves have attacked ships trying to land there, making it appear that they are guarding something or know more about the isle than they are willing to say.

Adventure Hook XI

Emerna, a female human adventuring wizard, has been seen in the taverns of the hamlet/town/city, telling a tale about a ruin that she and her adventuring companions, The Night Stalkers, found. Inside the ruin, they discovered several coffins and many bone-filled niches. The group came under attack from spirits that oozed out of the earthen walls, draining the life from their living bodies. Emerna was ignored by apparently female spirits, but her friends were reduced to dried husks. Though there were riches, wealth, coins, and other items scattered through the three rooms that they explored, Emerna fled, empty-handed.

Adventure Hook XII

A plague has started to spread though a hamlet/town/city. The plague first causes the humans that are infected by it to become lethargic and dazed. At the onset of the second stage, they start to morph and change. Their hair falls out, and sores and lesions grow on their flesh. When these form, the victims are usually too far gone to be healed with herbs, or even with divine aid. A few hours after the appearance of the sores and lesions, the infected unfortunates swell and burst. Any nearby people who are hit by the infected flesh are themselves infected by the plague.

Strangely, this plague isn't affecting the elven, dwarven, halfling, and gnomish races. Half-elves and half-orcs are affected, though. The sages believe it is because of their human blood. The humans that have contracted this plague believe that Talona's faithful are to blame; a few days ago, a group of Talontar was chased out of town. It is thought that this is their revenge.

EARLING'S SPRAY

By Tyson Howard

"So ye be lookin' fer a ship that be makin' fer Chult from 'ere unda two weeks? Aye, ye best be talkin' to the cap'n of Earling's Spray! What? How ye be findin' 'im? Find yeself looking for a ship with three masts, square sails, and a broadside that be made of the darkest wood ye've evah saw. That'd be Earling's Spray, and ye've found yeself the waverunna ye be seekin'."

- Conversation overheard between an old sea captain and adventurers at the docks of Baldur's Gate, 15 Uktar, 1373 DR.

* * * *

The Ship



aves slowly lap at the black hull of a massive, three-masted ship sitting at the quay. The ship stretches far beyond the length of the pier, measuring almost two hundred feet long. The nearly seamless black zalantar planks of the hull curve upward from the water, meeting white oak railings that run the length of the main deck. Rigging and furled sails stretch like a spider's web between the three masts. Burnished gold lettering, written in a flowing script at the bow of the ship, proclaims with understated elegance that this monstrous craft is the *"Earling's Spray."* Even while moored, the ship appears as though it were cutting through the water. Its elegant form seems strangely out of place amongst the ungainly cogs, hulks, and carracks tied to the surrounding piers.

The *"Spray"*, as it is often referred to, is a unique ship, designed and built by Harlequin Earling in 1350 DR. The *Earling's Spray* is his lifelong work, and also his greatest accomplishment in ship design and construction. The graceful ship is constructed of dark zalantar wood, grown deep in the jungles of Chult and the Shaar. Unlike typical ships constructed in the Realms, the *'Spray* utilizes a number of construction techniques, materials, and insights of its shipwright that make it stand out in comparison to the cogs,

hulks, carracks, and galleys seen throughout the seas of Faerûn.

The hull of the ship is constructed of planks of zalantar wood. Instead of the standard 'clinker' style, where planks overlap each other, the *'Spray* is constructed so that the edge of each plank meets the edge of the next plank. Additionally, the *'Spray* utilizes oversized braces and keel stock, providing sturdy support for the massive ship. Copper plating and joints further reinforce the ship's wooden structure. The *'Spray's* bow gracefully curves upward from the keel, while the hull forms a slight U-shape.

The bowsprit extends nearly thirty feet from the bow of the ship. Set beneath the long spar is a large figurehead of a beautiful mermaid with unruly hair, arms spread forward as if in support of the bowsprit above her. Clenched firmly in the left hand of the figure is a small, gilt holy symbol to Valkur.

The forecastle rises ten feet above the main deck. It can be reached by two steep ladders set into the structure on either side of the forward mast. Inside the forecastle is a storage room dedicated to spare rigging, sails, and other assorted items needed aboard the ship. These items are neatly stowed in crates, shelves, or on racks against the walls, keeping the center of the room clear for easy access to the materials by the crew. Another small room on the starboard side of the forecastle holds the hammocks

and sleeping quarters for the four crewmen who typically are responsible for managing the various aspects of the bow quarter of the ship.

Between the forecastle and the quarterdeck, the main deck stretches for nearly one hundred and twenty feet. The deck is filled with hatches for cargo, with two stairwells at each end of the deck leading down into the depths of the ship. These narrow passageways are blocked by thick doors, keeping rough seas from reaching below deck.

The quarterdeck rises eight feet from the main deck, and is also reached by two steep ladders, set into the structure on either side of the rear mast. It is here that the helm is located. This carved teakwood wheel is nearly five feet across. It is connected to the ship's rudder by a series of steel workings, ensuring that the ship can to be steered in the heaviest of weather.

Inside the quarterdeck lie several small rooms. The entire expanse of the rear of the quarterdeck is occupied by the captain's suite. The entrance to these rooms is through a low-hung door leading to a small anteroom that functions as a meeting place for the officers of the *'Spray* and as the captain's formal parlor. Overstuffed couches are secured around the outer edges of the room, while a large, solid oak table is attached firmly to the floor. Various locked cabinets and lockers line the walls of the room containing a sundry of items ranging from expensive wines to navigational instruments. Off the starboard side of the room lays a chart room while to the port, through a finely crafted door lies the captain's personal chamber. The chart room is filled with diamond shaped racks that are stuffed with maps, annotated charts, and other paraphernalia associated with the navigation of the ship. The captain's personal quarters are spartan, but the furnishings include an elegant bed and plush Dambrathan carpet affixed to the floor. A small bookshelf on the forward bulkhead of the room contains a number of texts and treatises on subjects ranging from accounts of adventurers, to lurid chapbooks from Waterdeep, to various

historical volumes penned by obscure sages from Candlekeep.

The area below decks consists primarily of two levels of holds, a galley, storage rooms, and crew quarters. The primary hold for the ship consists of two lengthy chambers spanning the width of the ship. Each of these holds is used for the transport of larger, bulkier cargo that is light in weight. Running along the ceiling of each hold are a series of ropes and pulleys allowing for the quick transport of heavier items through covered hatches into the lower bowels of the *'Spray*. A thick door separates the two 'bulk' holds, as the crew refers to this level, from the crew quarters and galley. Two sparsely furnished crew quarters are located along the starboard side hull. Running the length of the port side hull on the aft, separated from the crew quarters by a narrow passageway, is the galley, a large pantry, and two small storage rooms. In one of the storage rooms is a small steel locker, cleverly concealed beneath a water barrel. This locker is used for small, valuable items. Forward of the holds, near the anchoring point of the bowsprit, is another chamber reserved for off-duty crew members to rest and relax in hammocks strung amongst the mighty timbers that form the frame of the vessel. This room also functions as a spare storage room, in the event that the *'Spray* is required to carry more cargo than may otherwise fit within the holds of the ship.

Directly beneath the 'bulk' holds are a series of smaller, divided chambers that rest just above the ship's bilge. A stout wall divides these holds lengthwise down the center of the ship. Each of these holds is roughly thirty feet in length, and is accessed from the 'bulk' holds by wide hatches cut through the decking above. Ladder-stairs provide quick access to these rooms during periods of loading and unloading of cargo.

The *'Spray* was built to quickly transport small yet valuable cargoes from the northern reaches of the Sword Coast to the jungles of Chult, and all points between. The ship measures 235 feet from the bowsprit to the stern, and has a narrow beam of only 40 feet. When fully laden with almost 400 tons of cargo, the ship's draft is only 23 feet, with

nearly 18 feet to spare to the gunwales. Although its massive weight of 870 tons makes it one of the largest mercantile ships plying the Sea of Swords and the Shining Sea, it can average eight knots an hour. At full sail and with favorable winds, it has been recorded making almost twelve knots. Even at average speed, the *Earling's Spray* can make the run from the city of Waterdeep to Calimshan in half the time a standard carrack could.

The crew of 32 men and women is small but well-trained by the *'Spray's* owner and captain, Harlequin Earling. Occasionally, when pirate attacks from Luskan or the Nelanthar Isles are particularly harsh, Captain Earling has been known to hire on adventurers, mercenaries, and spellslingers, as an added defense for the ship. Most times, however, the *'Spray* merely outruns any challengers that see it as a prize worth attempting to capture.

The Captain

The short, wiry Captain scratched his well-trimmed Van Dyke beard as he stared hard at the stein of mead sitting before him. On the other side of the booth sat a slightly overweight, balding "tea merchant" named Barrabas. The portly man absently twirled the ends of his magnificent mustache as he awaited the captain's decision. Around them floated a din and noise of voices and sounds; this booth wasn't the only one where hard business was being negotiated.

For several moments, the red-haired captain sat silently, continuing to scratch his beard as he pondered. Finally, the Captain grinned, revealing a wide smile of pure white teeth. He casually reached into the breast pocket of his immaculate blue overcoat. Pulling a large, rolled tobacco leaf from the pocket's deep confines, the half-elven Captain leaned towards the small oil lamp, puffing many times as he chomped down on the slowly smoldering Tashalan cigar.

"My dear Barrabas, what you ask me to carry could put the lives of my crew and my ship in great peril from certain persons in the know.

Such a venture surely will cost more than the usual."

He let his words linger. Tilting his head back, he softly blew a smoky gray haze into the air, then gazed down his small, pointed nose towards the stout merchant sitting across from him. Sweat glistened on the merchant's face, though the Captain wasn't sure if it was merely the heat of too many bodies in the tavern, too much fire in the hearth a mere two yards away, or something altogether more sinister.

With a low grunt, almost a growl, Barrabas slowly nodded his head and replied in a low voice, "Yes, Captain Earling, I realize this. What say you to a sum five times greater than our standard rate, should my associates in Calimshan receive the package by tenday's end?"

The Captain stopped chewing the cigar, letting it dangle from its perch between his front teeth, and stared hard at the merchant.

"I do suppose that we could leave at four bells, though my crew will be angrier than a shark caught on a gaff at being dragged from shore so quickly after making port. Barrabas, for this, your associates will have that small, little problem of a parcel in their short, fat fingers by the sixth day, but you, my friend, will add another rate again for such a delivery. Are we agreed?"

"Very well, six times, then, and in six days. My man will deliver the packet to you on the 'Spray in nigh half the bell." Barrabas abruptly stood and half-turned before the thick, muscular arm of the man standing behind the Captain caught hold of the merchant's arm.

"My dear Barrabas. You know our arrangements by now. Half up front. Now."

The merchant slipped his hand into a slit in his coat and lazily tossed a small bag upon the table. The bag hit the table not with a clink of coin, but the clatter of stones. It laid there for several moments before the short, muscular man with thick eyebrows and dark hair released the merchant's arm. The bag continued to rest on the table for minutes

after the merchant had left; Harlequin Earling ignored it as he smoked his cigar and appraised the situation and the perils his crew would face in this latest errand for Barrabas, the Merchant Prince.

"Dugan, round the men with haste and ready the 'Spray for sail. We leave in three bells' time." The square-jawed, silent first mate of the Earling's Spray nodded his acceptance of the task, and turned to leave the Captain to his thoughts.

"Oh, and Dugan, do try not to be too rough with the crew this time. Poor Foran was worthless for a week after you twisted his arm out of the shoulder dragging him away from that lass he was warming himself with."

His blue eyes, set deep beneath bushy black eyebrows, almost twinkled as Dugan cracked a wicked but mirthful half-grin and made his way to the door. Harlequin Earling opened the pouch sitting on the rough surface of the table and grinned at the vast sum in gemstones that lay within. His soft gray eyes scanned the tavern, looking for suitable men and women; he knew he'd probably need extra muscle for this next adventure. His eyes settled on a group of men sitting near the fire, trying to warm themselves but not yet too deep into their cups. Fluidly, he rose from the table while dropping the bag of stones into his overcoat, and sauntered to the table of hireswords and spellslingers.

Harlequin Earling: male half-elf, 42, NG, Waterdeep, Rogue3/Fighter2/Wizard4, CR 9.

Statistics: (based on 32-point buy), HP 43 (9 + 3d6 + 4d4 + 2d10); Init +2; Speed

30ft; AC 16, touch 13, flat footed 14; BAB +6/+1; Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 12; Height: 5'6"; Weight 141 lbs.

Languages: Common, Elven, Chondathan, Alzhedo, Chultan, Illuskan;

Skills and Feats: Balance +10, Bluff +7, Climb +6, Forgery +7, Gather Information +6, Jump +10, Knowledge (geography) +10, Profession (navigator) +12, Profession (shipwright) +14, Profession (seamanship) +14, Spot +6, Swim +6 Tumble +9, Use Rope +8; Skill Focus - Profession (shipwright), Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus - Profession (seamanship), Leadership (+4), Skill Focus - Profession (navigator), Two-Weapon Fighting, Exotic Weapon Proficiency - Firearms;

Special Abilities: half-elf traits, sneak attack +2d6, trapfinding, evasion, trap sense +1.

Possessions: Earling's Spray, wind fan, leather armor +1, rapier +1, ring of protection +1, flintlock pistol +1, 20 bullets +1, powder horn, 20 bullets, masterwork flintlock pistol, (2) potion of cure light wounds.

Wizard Spells Per Day: 4/4/3, Base DC = 13 + spell level

Spellbook: 0 - all; 1st - animate rope, sleep, obscuring mist, charm person, unseen servant, feather fall, magic missile; 2nd - gust of wind, detect thoughts, obscure object,

alter self.

Harlequin is a well-intentioned and inquisitive man. He is fascinated by the sea and by technological improvements he can incorporate into his pride and joy, *Earling's Spray*. Small and wiry, Harlequin has learned



to use his wits and charm to avoid problems and escape those wishing him harm. His gregarious and friendly nature endears him to most of his business contacts, and he has learned a great deal of tolerance in dealing with those whose social mores and beliefs differ from his own. Harlequin is fiercely protective of his crew, and isn't opposed to more direct means of dealing with those he feels have pushed too far or wronged his crew in some manner.

As a mariner, Harlequin's patron deity is Valkur, although he is also partial to Gond in the moments when his intellectual curiosities divert his attentions from his ship, crew, and business. Harlequin is nothing, however, if not a pragmatist, and takes great care to avoid offending the Gods of Fury or their priests.

Harlequin Earling was born from a short-lived union between Garelys Aurumtran, a moon elf hailing from Evermeet, and Abigeth Earling, a Waterdhavian woman. Although Garelys provided a modest stipend for the raising and care of his child, Harlequin's mother spent much of that money on the care of orphans, animals, and other poor and suffering located in Waterdeep.

At the young age of 11, Harlequin apprenticed with a local shipwright named Belias Backan, a devoted if somewhat eccentric worshiper of Gond. Belias espoused radical thoughts on the design and construction of ships, thoughts that were not commonly accepted within the marine community. Despite this lack of widespread acceptance, Belias did attract some interest from various groups. He obtained several small commissions for the design and building of ships from divers merchant houses and consortiums throughout the Sword Coast. Nevertheless, his business was only marginally successful, and Belias never realized his goal of revolutionizing the shipbuilding industry on the Sword Coast.

Harlequin learned much of the shipwright trade as a result of his apprenticeship with Belias. Although his apprenticeship provided

modest income to Harlequin, the greatest reward was in the knowledge and experience he gained from Belias Backan. These ideas were eagerly devoured by the young apprentice, and, in some cases, even improved upon. In the late winter of 1338 DR, Belias Backan was killed in an unfortunate accident involving the incorporation of gnomish steam technologies into small river boats. Belias's operations were seized by creditors upon his death, and the young Harlequin was forced to pursue his way in the world again. After a number of abortive and failed attempts to join with other existing shipwrights, Harlequin signed on as a carpenter aboard the *Rose Griffon*. He found himself attracted to the individual discipline and freedom that the sea life afforded him.

After several years and promotions to greater ranks and responsibilities aboard the *Rose Griffon*, Harlequin was contacted by his father, who had secretly been keeping tabs upon his estranged son through agents and occasional magical scrying. As a gift to his son, Garelys allowed him to design and construct a ship of his own, utilizing the design techniques learned from Belias. After nearly two years of planning and construction, Harlequin completed the *Earling's Spray*.

Impressed by his son's elegant creation, Garelys assisted Harlequin in establishing contacts within the merchant houses and consortiums shipping valuable but small goods along the length of the Sword Coast. For the past twenty-three years, Harlequin has captained the *Spray*, accumulating his own wealth, which he has since used to repay his father. To this day, Harlequin continues to ply the lanes between the Sword Coast, Calimshan and Chult, transporting valuable cargoes in record times.

MYSTERIES OF THE CREATOR RACES

The Batrachi

By Gray Richardson

To Fourth Reader Shaynara Tullastar, Candlekeep
From Meluron Soondulyn, Waterdeep

28 Flamerule, Year of Wild Magic

Lady Loremaster,

Thank you for your recent help with my research of the Batrachi.

I have long sought out tales of the Iqua Tel'Quessir, since my childhood in Naramyr, when my sea-elf mother would float me on her knee and tell me stories of the great creator races. The Iqua Tel'Quessir comprised a handful of peoples. First among them was a race of serpent-men, who spawned the yuan-ti, lizardmen, nagas and other cursed scaly folk. Numbered also among the Iqua Tel'Quessir were a race of bird-men who ruled the skies, and the mysterious fey folk, who befriended elves when first we came to Toril, and who live to this day in the secret places of wood and stream. My favorite tales of all, though, involved the water-breathing race of shape-shifters that ruled both seas and land at the dawn of time, before the arrival of elves in Faerûn. The race that some people call the Batrachi.

My childhood friend, Shularashf, would tell me stories of how his people, the tako from Shou Lung, were descended from this race. He would change the color of his skin, puff his mantle, contort his octopoid face and knot his tentacles ingeniously to mimic a semblance of people and things, as if there lay dormant in him some remnant of the Batrachi's true shape-shifting.

"Melu, my friend" he would say to me, "my people may have come to Serôs from far to the east, but the tako settled in Kara-Tur from a fallen empire beyond the setting sun, an empire that rose from the depths of the ocean to touch the sky." When he told me these legends, his skin would turn a serene blue, his eight arms would relax and stretch out, and his single golden eye would stare off into the distance, as if he were adrift in dreams of long lost glory.

When my human father brought me to his home in Waterdeep and apprenticed me to Blackstaff Tower, I was overjoyed on those occasions when I could sneak off from my studies of the Art. I would slip down to the library of the academy and the libraries of Oghma, where I could read of the rich history of Faerûn and seek what little glimpses I could find of the lore of lost ages and the Iqua Tel'Quessir.

Thank you for your kind introduction to Lorekeeper Sangalor; he has been most helpful to me. His familiarity with Skullport and the underdark environs beneath Waterdeep has been invaluable to my research.

He is a curious fellow, for a priest of Oghma. I have noticed how many are fearful and wary in their dealings with him. But I find his soul to be filled with great humor and a sincere love of knowledge. His illithid visage is oddly comforting to me; it puts me in mind of my childhood friends beneath the Sea of Fallen Stars.

I am preparing for an excursion into Skullport. I hope to seek out and interview a living descendant of the Batrachi to find if they have any surviving legends of their forebears. For I am assured that in Skullport, there yet lives a group of Batrachi descendants. The only survivors of the Batrachi to still retain their ancestors' shape-shifting prowess: the dread race known as the doppelgangers.

I hope this letter finds you well. I will let you know if my researches bear any fruit.

Yours in knowledge,

Meluron Soondulyn

**From the Journal of Meluron Soondulyn:
11 Eleint, Year of Wild Magic**



With the aid of my apprentice, Jaster, I had been making enquiries after the doppelgangers down in Skullport for nigh on a month – to no avail. I had subtly, at first, and later not so subtly, asked various parties around Skullport to assist me in arranging a meeting with a doppelganger. Or at least take my message to one. I naïvely feared they were a shy race, themselves afraid of exposure and of contact with intolerant surface folk.

And then today, after I had sent Jaster off on an errand, he returned with a most curious story:

"The doppelgangers are indeed descended from the Batrachi," said my apprentice. "They were the second wave to rise up from the sea and walk on land."

"The second?" I asked, "what do you mean?"

"The first of the Batrachi to step forth from the ocean raised a great empire in Faerûn, before the dominion of man, before elves ruled the lands, before even dragons flew in the skies. The Batrachi were the true masters of Faerûn, before they challenged the gods and were slain with fire from the sky."

"Who told you this, Jas?" I queried, "What have you found?"

"There were those of us who remained behind in the sea," he continued, "who loved the sea, and were loath to walk in the air below the sun. We rested in the loving embrace of Mother Ocean, and she protected us from the fire of the gods. But then, after an age, there came a time again for us to step up onto the shores and reclaim our birthright."

"The doppelgangers bravely took those steps. But we had learned our lesson, and forswore our pride. We would act in secret, where the gods could not see. We live in secret below. We move among you unseen. Our people

abide in every realm across Faerûn. We infest every echelon of your society. You do not know us. But we consume your knowledge. We replace you. And one day we shall rule you." A smile of rapture crossed his face as dawning horror crossed my own.

"Jaster, is that you?" I asked, my voice choked with dread.

"You fool" replied the thing, his perfect disguise disrupted by a momentary pale of grey that rippled across his face. "I ate Jaster an hour ago."

I ran from him then. I ran as fast as my webbed feet have ever propelled me upon the land.

* * * *

9 Uktar, Year of Wild Magic

It has been some time since I have braved Skullport, but I finally found the courage to renew my explorations. Sangalor told me of another race in the underdark that he believes to be descended from the Batrachi. And so I bought my way on to a ship that sailed by dark of night into the sea caves, and traveled by hoist and through great locks down into the underdark.

When the ship docked in Skullport, I slipped into the water and made my way down, down through the channels and underground river conduits, deep into the underwater passages to search for the elusive blue ring octopus.

I nearly lost my life the first morning of my adventure to a tentacled horror I mistook as a friendly octopus. Seeing lithe tentacles waving and uncurling from a crevice, I approached with open arms in a gesture of peace and friendship, only to have the thing lunge at me.

Grasping me with coiling arms, its leathery mantle enveloped me, smothering my face. In reaction, one of my contingent spells discharged and boiled the water around me - while protecting me from scalding. As the heat and bubbles churned the water, the dead thing soon uncoiled from around me. It

appeared to be an aquatic variant of the darkmantle, an octopoid creature that may be related in some fashion to the blue ring, but which is completely bestial, possessing no intelligence.

I searched for four days before I found my shy and retiring friend. The blue ring octopus is hard to spot as it lairs in tiny rifts and can change the color and texture of its skin as camouflage to match its surroundings. But when at rest it appears a soft brown color, with distinctive blue rings dotting its body.

And there, in a crevice, I caught sight of a curious eye gazing at me from a patch of cave wall that sported the distinctive azure-limned spots.

I cast a language spell, and achieved a surprising result: my skin came alive with undulating color. As I spoke, shifting patterns of red and yellow and brown rippled across my face and hands, and I gestured as much as intoned a greeting of peace and friendship.

In response, the octopus relaxed her camouflage and became noticeably paler, now standing out in sharp contrast to the dark cave wall. She unfurled her long tentacles and returned my greeting in a flourish of multi-hued patterns and gesticulations. And thus began a silent conversation, uttered entirely in words of color and motion.

I asked her of the history of her people. While they have no writing, they have a rich tradition of unrecorded history, passed down from mothers to children in sagas, which they learn by rote, and which relate the surprising annals of a fascinating people, whose chronicles detail events going back countless ages.

She told me tales of her ancestors and how they triumphed in the aboleth wars, tricked gullible kuo-toas, and cleverly defeated merrows and scraggs. She sung of how they fell to enslavement at the fins of the morkoth, and how the founding mother of her clan freed them from slavery, braved the grotto of the marids and won a *wish* that founded a dynasty.

When I pressed her for even older legends regarding the origin of her people, she told me how they had once lived in the great oceans above, beneath the sky and sun. According to the sagas, they escaped into the earth when the hateful elves boiled the sea. I winced with trepidation and shame at my people's role in that tale, but whether she knew I was part elf or not, she seemed not to hold it against me.

I asked her of the doppelgangers. She did indeed know legends of her doppelganger kin. She told me how they surrendered to the change, exchanging tentacles for arms and legs, giving up the sea, and giving up their faces. The doppelgangers lost their identity, and with it their soul. The blue rings consider them a pitiable race.

She knew nothing of the Batrachi who arose and fell upon the land before the doppelgangers. But their oldest legends tell a seminal myth about two sisters, the daughters of Mother Ocean, and how the eldest left the nest to travel above where the younger dared not go. My friend sang it for me, a keening lament, a kinetic and chromatic song of abiding loss which was so heartfelt that my friend could not continue. She coiled her tentacles tightly from grief and withdrew deep into a crevice. I signaled my thanks and made my way back up to the surface.

* * * *

26 Alturiak, Year of Rogue Dragons

I am in luck! The patriarch of the Waterdeep branch of the Amnish merchant house of Krimmevol has agreed to fund my expedition to discover sunken Batrachi cities in the Sea of Swords – in exchange for taking on his son Carmello as an apprentice. Carmello displays some talent already in the Art. More useful to me even still, he shows some considered skill at hiring a ship and a worthy crew. He assures me we can sail within a tenday.

* * * *

5 Mirtul, Year of Rogue Dragons

Success! A half day's sail west-southwest from the southern tip of the Moonshaes, we discovered our goal: a sunken city of glass towers.

The sea is relatively shallow here, and continues on so for many days sailing before dropping off steeply to unplumbed depths in the west. As far out to sea as we find ourselves, my studies lead me to believe these were once the coastal waters of the western edge of the Faerûnian continent – which may have extended above land as far as the Moonshaes, or farther, before the Sundering.

The city is mostly shattered, the broken towers fallen. What buildings remain intact are knocked aslant, their floors turned nearly perpendicular to the seafloor. The city was destroyed in a great catastrophe, which my divination magics date to some seventeen thousand years before Dale Reckoning – the time of the elven cataclysm which ripped the land apart, sinking many western cities and creating the Sword Coast.

* * * *

6 Mirtul, Year of Rogue Dragons

The primary construction material is glass, a substance, I surmise, that was readily manufactured from the unlimited supply of sand. No doubt it was preferred as much for its abundance as its durability and resistance to rot and encrustation by flora and fauna. Some buildings were constructed from great glass blocks as thick as from shoulder to fingertip. Other buildings were smooth and unbroken, as if the glass blocks were seamlessly joined together, or perhaps sculpted directly from the sand of the sea floor by means of lost magic.

Inside the structures, any furnishings or chattels were long since lost to the millennia. But many of the walls still retained some discernible art – including friezes and stelae in bas relief that had survived the wearing of the waves. We also found mosaics of colored glass that, tarnished as they were by the

grime of ages, blazed with brilliant color when illumined by a light spell.

Among the artistic displays were depictions of battles of humanoid creatures (sahuagin or locathah?) against an octopoid race. It was not clear, at first, which race inhabited the city. Depictions of octopi seemed a popular theme in their art. As we explored, it became evident the octopi were indeed the inhabitants of this city.

A very common motif that we found throughout the buildings was an image of what I assume to be a mother octopus cradling a multitude of tiny young in the coils of her tentacles. Carmello thought it might be a divine symbol, a fertility goddess perhaps, or the Mother Ocean of whom my blue-ringed friend had spoken.

I wonder if Mother Ocean could be an undersea conception of the goddess Chauntea? It would only be natural for an octopus race to worship her in their own image...

Although this mother goddess was prominently depicted, she was not the only god they venerated. I believe these people had a diverse pantheon of gods, though their names be lost to time. There is a half-buried temple dome in the heart of the ruins which we intend to excavate tomorrow.

* * * *

7 Mirtul, Year of Rogue Dragons

Today we excavated the sand from the entrance to the large domed temple. From the inside we could see from the many holy symbols that it was dedicated to the protean kraken god, Panzuriel, an entity whose worship has all but vanished from the Realms in modern times. The kraken deity was vanquished, due in no small part to the efforts of my mother's god, Deep Sashelas. However, his worship seems to have flourished quite strongly in the last days of this city, before the Sundering.

We had barely begun to explore when we were set upon by a kraken that laired inside. We were naïve to think the ruins remained

uninhabited. The kraken devoured four of my crew, and drew Carmello, my apprentice, into the depths below. I do not know how I will be able to bear the news to his father. I am sure I will have lost his patronage. I fear my days of undersea exploration are ended for now.

* * * *

19 Eleasias, Year of Rogue Dragons

I have retraced the steps of Brother Twick of Verdusk into the Farsea marshes and uncovered the ruins of another amazing city. Braving goblins, bullywugs and a rampaging hydra, our party finally chanced upon the gleaming tower tops of a sunken city, buried deep within the swamps.

The ruins are constructed in the same distinctive style as the undersea city I discovered in the ocean near the Moonshaes. Seamless glass and stone and crystal joined to form tall, slender towers which evinced a graceful beauty, despite the clinging muck of the swamp.

We made camp inside the ruins for the night, securing ourselves against the many nocturnal predators and undead that roam the marshes. When we woke the next morning we were astonished to find the waters of the swamp had receded below us. The city had risen up in the night, lifting us to dazzling heights! I know not what natural or magical phenomenon could account for this, but it was only temporary, as we were soon to find. By highsun of the next day the city began to sink again, as the swamp rapidly reclaimed its ancient towers by nightfall.

This land must have been a swamp or wetland even at the height of the city's glory. The city spread around us in a maze of towers and bridges and canals – the architecture sublimely merging water with land and sky. A fitting abode for a people that trod the waves as well as walked on land.

But as we explored the city, I was surprised to see that what art we could find depicted not the octopoid Batrachi, but rather a frog-

like race of humanoids, not unlike the bullywugs that shot arrows at our boat a few days earlier.

We found a crystalline statue of a regal-looking amphibian in elaborate armor. One of the entranceways bore a frieze of a battle scene: tiny frog-men fighting humans five times their height – or giants, more probably. And in one great hall, we found a mosaic of brilliant colored glass, many wagonlengths tall and twice again as wide, which showed another battle scene: the same giants opposing tiny frog-men... However, an amphibian spellcaster in the corner appeared to have summoned a kraken-headed colossus to fight as their champion against the giants. It towered over the battlefield, at least four times the height of the cowering giants below.

Could these frog-men once have been the civilized ancestors of the brutish bullywugs from the surrounding marshes? Did they come to inhabit the city after the octopoid Batrachi had moved on or died out? If so, they had since descended into barbarism – as the city itself descended into the swamp.

After the city sank again beneath the mire, we searched for other ruins. But we were set upon by Marsh Drovers, barbaric humans who dwell in the marshes. They are a superstitious people, and consider it some great sacrilege to explore the ruins. Despite our protestations, they insisted we leave the marshes.

Their warriors are quite fearsome. They herd and ride catoblepas as mounts. Fearful of their deadly gaze, we headed off towards the town of Eagle's Peak, but then doubled back some time later for further exploration.

But the Drovers were cunning and attacked us in the night. My apprentice Oraldyn woke me just in time. He dragged me from my tent nigh a breath before a charging catoblepas trampled it. Half our party was slain by the beast's fatal glare. The rest of us managed to make our way to Eagle's Peak.

* * * *

8 Marpenoth, Year of Rogue Dragons

I hired a guide at the Sweetwater Inn in the village of Eckersley Manor, a local ranger named Loskar. He agreed to take us into the Marsh of Chelimber. He claimed to know of some ruins, and said he knew how to evade the bullywugs and other marsh fauna. Neither claim proved true.

Bullywugs ambushed us on our second day, and instantly slew Loskar. I pleaded for them to spare us, or at least the boy, but they were unmoved and made as if to kill us, too. Suddenly the bullywugs themselves came under attack, from what we thought at the time were a rival tribe of bullywugs.

It turned out that our rescuers were a different race of frog-men altogether. Smaller and more lithesome than the bullywugs, these people called themselves Sivs. Despite their smaller stature, the sivs effortlessly dispatched the bullywugs – and most of them did so without the use of weapons.

When they learned of our story, we were brought to the lodge of a siv elder – a wizardly siv who had no small training in the Art. I dare say he had much greater skill than I.

He had a feast prepared for us and soon we fell to discussing the Batrachi – a conversation that advanced my knowledge immensely. He listened intently as I told him of my studies and of my encounters beneath Waterdeep, and of the sunken city in the Trackless Sea. I told him of the ruins in the Farsea Marshes and how I wished the mysteries were not lost to time.

"You should try planewalking, my boy", he said to me, in near-perfect Chondathan. "The answers you seek have long turned to dust on the material plane, wiped away by thirty-two thousand years of mortal history. And yet there are beings among the planes for whom the creator races are considered young, and who remember the Days of Thunder like yesterday."

"You have walked the planes?" I asked, astounded.

"Oh yes. I have had truck with marids and demons who remember dealing with my Batrachi ancestors long before the time of dragons."

"Your Batrachi ancestors!?" I sputtered, "but the Batrachi were an octopoid race..."

"Oh no, my boy. The Batrachi looked much as I do, or our bullywug cousins who have fallen so far from their ancient grandeur. True, our people spawned from the sea and dwelt there in our infancy. They built an admirable civilization beneath the waves, and filled the oceans with many marvels. But then came Ramenos."

"Spawn of the great World Serpent, Ramenos was a latecomer to the Batrachi pantheon. He was a god of metamorphosis. His creed proclaimed the imperative of transformation. He was a charismatic god. The fervor of his faith spread throughout their oceanic empire. Ramenos preached that their time beneath the waves had come to an end. It was time to wriggle out upon the shore. Their true destiny lay in mastery of the land as well as water."

"And so, through a ritual of transcension, what the elves would call 'high magic', my people shifted their shapes a final time, becoming amphibious. We grew bones and a spine with which to stand erect and step out upon the land."

"The Batrachi settled to the east, amid the wetlands and the coastal regions of the inner seas. There were four seas then. Little ones, as the stars had yet to fall. There we spawned a great empire in the heart of Faerûn – until the coming of the children of Annam."

"The giant races bred like vermin in those days. And the greatest of their lot, the tribe of Lanaxis, the titans, settled in the fertile plains between the inland seas. Lanaxis built his kingdom there."

"The titans encroached on Batrachi lands, and war erupted. The titans would trample the Batrachi, laying waste to their cities. The titans would summon hundred-handed ones

and giant insects to fight for them. The Batrachi in turn summoned krakentua to fight as their champions, colossal fiends with kraken heads who stood as tall as weir trees. The war soon devastated both sea and soil, but the kingdoms were a match for one another and neither gained advantage for very long."

"The war dragged on for years, until the Batrachi sought help from outside the cosmos. They summoned an entity from beyond the planes: a primeval god called Asgorath. He was the father of the dragon race, who were unknown in Faerûn at that time. They struck a terrible bargain. He would aid the Batrachi, for the price of granting his children purchase in Faerûn."

"Asgorath flew into the sky and pulled the stars down from the Sea of Night. Some say he wrestled a great comet from its orbit, others say it was the tears of Selûne. But the kingdom of Lanaxis was destroyed that terrible day when fire rained down from the sky, setting the land ablaze and gouging a scar so deep between the inner seas, they merged together to form the Sea of Fallen Stars."

"And in the wake of that great fire, a hail of eggs fell from the stars, peppering the seed of dragonkind across the face of the One Land. The tiny lizards that hatched belied the great wyrms they would one day become to challenge the creator races for dominion of the world."

"But what happened to the Batrachi?" I asked. "How did they come to disappear?"

"They were all but wiped out by the catastrophe. There were a few survivors, but their civilization was destroyed. Some, like the bullywugs and my own people, fell to savagery. Some returned to the coastal cities of our ancestors, to seek refuge with those we had left behind."

"The Zoveri were among those. They repudiated Ramenos. They underwent an abortive metamorphosis that left them half humanoid, half tentacled monstrosities. You can find them to this day in the shining sea of the House of the Triad, perpetually

burdened by their transgression, forbidden, even in their afterlife, to tread upon the land."

"The last of our civilization was destroyed by your own people, the elves. When the Sundering cleaved the land and shattered the western coast of Faerûn, it toppled the cities and tolled the death knell for our watery cousins."

His statement shattered my own heart. We talked more of those bygone ages, but my heart was heavy with shame for my people. Truly, we elves bear our own burden for our many transgressions against the land.

* * * *

*To Fourth Reader Shaynara Tullastar, Candlekeep
From Oraldyn Krain, apprentice to Meluron Soondunyl*

6th of Ches, Year of Lightning Storms

Lady Loremaster,

It is with great sorrow that I report to you the death of my master, your friend and colleague, Meluron Soondunyl. We were exploring the ancient ruins of Rethild, the Great Swamp, when a terrible black wyrm fell upon us. We had unwittingly stumbled into the demesne of Valraxaxath, a dragon that claims the ruins for his lair. Meluron was mortally wounded saving me from the dragon's jet of acid. I managed to escape with my life, thanks to his heroic sacrifice.

I am enclosing with this letter his journal and some papers which contain his researches into the lost Batrachi. I hope you or some other learned loremasters at Candlekeep will find a use for the knowledge herein – it was gained at too great a price.

Meluron taught me much in my time with him, although my studies are as yet incomplete. I would be blessed to find another teacher even half so worthy as him. If you know of any masters of the Art that seek an eager apprentice, I would be forever grateful for you to recommend me.

Yours in knowledge,

Oraldyn Krain

* * * *

*To Lord Khelben Arunsun, Blackstaff Tower, Waterdeep
From Fourth Reader Shaynara Tullastar, Candlekeep*

24th of Tarsakh, Year of Lightning Storms

K—

It saddens my heart to bring you such news of our cherished friend. I have copied for you herein excerpts from his letters and journal which I think you will find of great interest.

The boy who bears you this letter is a stalwart and eager fellow. He seeks to apprentice himself to a worthy master. Perhaps you can find a place for him in your tower?

—ST

MERCENARY COMPANIES OF THE REALMS

By Daniel Rosenquist

The men and women from countless regions and races that fight goes under many names may it be Sellsword, Soldier of fortune, Mercenary, or Hiresword. Even though they seem to be set apart at a first glance, they do follow a common cause. They fight for gold, the battlefield is their home and the death cries of the fallen is their lullaby. The lust for more power, for those that have it, is an endless cycle and so these men and women always find work when the horn of battle sounds.

Green Scales

Company Type: Standing, fixed

Base: Almraiven (official), Volothamp (unofficial)

Current Sphere(s) of Operation: The Shining Sea and its coasts as well Calimshan, Tethyr, and Amn.

Leader: Sashiana (Female Extaminaar, 9th level rogue)

Government: Webbed

Number of Members: Unknown

General Alignment: LE, NE

History

The story of the Green Scales begins deep beneath the streets of far off Hlondeth, in the Vilhon Reach. It was here, in the year of the Crown (1351 DR), that their mistress, Sashiana, hatched from an egg as a member of House Extaminos. Sashiana was raised in the City of Serpents, and given the view that the house and their way of life are what will one day rule Faerûn.

When the time had come for her to be sent out into the world in the service of her house, Sashiana was sent to Almraiven, in Calimshan, where she was to take over an already established spy cell. The cell's old leader, an extaminaar named Vass'alar, was not one of the more devoted followers of Varae, nor was he entirely loyal to the teachings of the house. While Vass'alar told Sashiana of how the cell was set up, he also told her honeyed words about how House Extaminos was growing stagnant and old.

At first, Sashiana was shaken by Vass'alar's treacherous words. She thought of reporting it back to her superiors in Hlondeth. But what kind of operative would she be if she asked for permission on everything she did? Besides, the old snake had his uses, after all. When he had served his purpose, she would think of a way to reward him for his treason. In the meantime, she would play along.

Vass'alar knew all too well what was waiting for him. He had once done the same for his master, when he took over the cell. When the time had come to dispatch of Vass'alar, Sashiana simply sent him down to the torture chambers. Now alone to guide the small network of spies and informants, she soon found out what Vass'alar had meant. Sashiana's superiors back in Hlondeth were focused on their own advancement, and not the advancement of House Extaminos as a whole.

What Sashiana did not and still does not know is that her superiors were members of the Sibyl's Chosen. The information she

provided them was not used for their own benefit, it was used to benefit the Serpent Sibyl. (See *Serpent Kingdoms* for more information on this cult)

A few more months passed, and Sashiana began to realize the futility of reporting to Hlondeth, when nothing gainful was done with her information. Instead, she decided, she would forward the house's plans her own way. Sashiana quickly and quietly moved her base of operations to Volothamp, covering her actions by leaving a cell in Almrvaien to report to Hlondeth. When the move to Volothamp was complete, Sashiana begun forming the Green Scales spy network. She had broken away from her masters in Hlondeth, but she could still use the skills they had given her.

Since the move, Sashiana has begun spreading her hold across the Lands of Intrigue. As an intelligence network, the Green Scales have no official front office where one can strike a deal. Instead, Sashiana contacts likely prospects who can afford to pay or who are in need of her services. Generally, Sashiana favor deals with other Scaled Ones, or any deal that she thinks might increase House Extaminos's glory. However, since she has ended her direct contact with the extaminaar in Hlondeth, certain operations conducted by the Scales may in fact be in opposition to extaminaar goals.

Strategies and Tactics:

The Green Scales spy network is compromised of small cells in each major city in Calimshan, Tethyr, and Amn. Each cell knows of no more then two other cells, and the regional leader. There are no professional requirements to join a cell; a cell could, for example, consist of a baker, a guard, a caravan merchant, and a house servant. Most cell members do not even know they work for the Green Scales. Instead, they think they are earning a few extra coins by reporting to a local authority or power group.

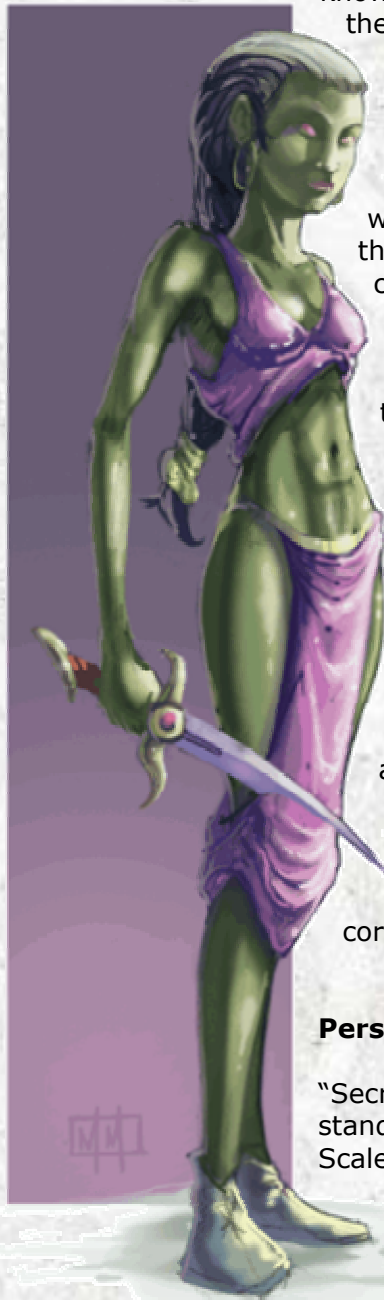
Selection of new members to the network is a slow process, and one that Sashiana is not interested in changing. Although the base of the network consists of commoners, a few elite spies roam the Lands of Intrigue, doing the dirty work for Sashiana. They also collect and bring back the more valuable information to her lair beneath Volothamp.

The Green Scales avoid combat, only taking missions that require infiltration and spying. The core members of the spy network, usually yuan-ti fullbloods and extaminaar, go to great length to protect their identities, using poison and magic when they are cornered.

Personality:

"Secretive and few in any city" is the standard rule Sashiana uses for the Green Scales spy network. If an agent is captured or killed, it can take months before a new agent is recruited in that particular area.

Sashiana has become rather paranoid since she broke from House Extaminos, and looks for plotting underlings and hired assassins under every scale.



Logistics:

All though most of the members of the Green Scales are commoners, the elite spies of the network are known to wear Shadow Armor. They also smear their bodies with blood flower salve on particularly dangerous missions. The elite spies' are also known to use ossra smoke to boost themselves in combat and harm their enemies.

Cost:

To hire the Green Scales costs 150 per day. The price may vary, depending on the difficulty of the job taken.

JOURNAL OF AN APPRENTICE SCRIBE

Olostin's Hold, part 1

By J P Hazelhoff

Well met, fellow scribes and learned scholars!

Allow me to introduce myself. I am Rikos Dughol, late of Saradush, in Tethyr. I have been traveling across Faerûn, at least across the regions known as the Western Heartlands and the North, as an apprentice scribe with my master Brin Orgul.

During my travels, I have kept a journal of the places I have visited and things I have seen. As I retrieve and edit these journal entries while staying in Candlekeep, I will make them available for all to read. My journal might resemble the works of Volothamp Geddarm, whose writings I came across during my studies, but are by no means copies of his excellent work, which has served as a wonderful source of inspiration.

Most of the journal has been written during those moments when I did not have to perform some tasks for my master, or when I wasn't occupied with the physical part of traveling. Because of this, the entries in the journal may sometimes seem disjointed. Also, the entries might not be published in chronological order; the pages were scattered during an unfortunate incident with an overeager air mephit.

I hope that for the places I've visited, the journals will provide you as much insight as Volothamp's journals provided me.

*Till swords meet,
Rikos Dughol of Saradush*

* * * *

Journal of an apprentice scribe by Rikos Dughol of Saradush

12th Eleint 1371, Year of the Unstrung Harp



old, muddy and too many mosquitoes; yes, despite all the lofty songs the bards sing about the Silver Marches, the silver is only a thin layer of veneer. Underneath, it's still a land of bogs, mud, barbarians, monsters and people who think this is the greatest land in Faerûn... Why could my master not have stayed in Waterdeep? At least that city provided some form of civilization and had enough to offer for a simple apprentice like me, whenever my Master gave me some time off.

Instead of staying in the City of Splendors, we are on our way to Everlund and Silverymoon, but the autumn rains have turned the roads into rivers of mud. We won't make Everlund by nightfall; therefore, Master Orgul decided to stop at Olostin's Hold, supposedly the only human settlement of any size in the High Forest. For the remainder of the day, we're going to stay in the one building that passes for an inn, and it isn't even located in the village proper. Not that there can be much to do in this small village! I might as well practice my writing skills and see if there is something to tell about this place.

Let me start by mentioning the first signs indicating that there is a village on the fringes of the ancient forest. A traveler comes up towards Everlund via the Evermoor Way – a road which begins at the Bridge Gate in Everlund, and winds its way southwest for hundreds of miles, passing between the Evermoors and the High Forest, north of the Dessarin Hills, and offering the most direct available route to Waterdeep and the cities of the Sword Coast. About where the High Forest seems to almost literally reach out for the Silverwood on the other side of the road, there one finds a couple of fieldstone-and-log buildings, Nethmoun Ardusk's wainwright's workshop, and a couple of small farm houses. Next to Ardusk's workshop a small dirt road – now an almost impassable stretch of sucking mud – leads up a low hill. Crowning the top of the hill is a squat, two-story building with a wooden watch tower: The Flaming Flagon.

The Flaming Flagon tavern is located halfway between the Evermoor Way and Olostin's Hold. The term "tavern" is slightly misleading. The proprietor, Uhrieved Hartshorn, has expanded the old tavern to include several bedrooms and stabling for horses. Technically, The Flaming Flagon is more of an inn. The building is a solid affair with an enclosed courtyard. A gate provides access, and can be closed in times of peril by two large steel reinforced oaken doors.

The building itself is 'L'-shaped and two stories high. The short leg of the 'L' houses the kitchens and Uhrieved's private quarters on the ground floor, and the common room above. The long leg of the building houses the stables and a number of storage rooms. The second floor in that part of the building houses a large dormitory and four common bedrooms. Stone walls, two feet thick, encircle the remainder of the courtyard. At the corner of the two walls which enclose the courtyard, stands a wooden platform, which functions as a lookout and guard post.

Two cooks and a scullery boy run the kitchen, two barmaids assist Uhrieved in the common room, and in the stables, two stable boys take care of the horses or run any required duties. Uhrieved is a lean hawk-nosed man with an unfortunate stutter. And

as I found out, it is better not to mention that when he can overhear... Glyndra and Alyth are the two barmaids. Their broad hips and stout arms hint at barbarian ancestry. Despite their very gentle nature, they are not two ladies to argue with.

The Flaming Flagon name and sign comes from a flagon floating overhead, between the heavy beams supporting the shingled roof. The flagon gives off a constant, dancing, magical flame, and was allegedly enspelled in some wizard's duel long ago. The proprietor has hammered burnished copper to the ceiling above it, and the reflected flickering glow gives the taproom a cheery, cozy, warm feeling. The floor is flagstone throughout, and generously sprinkled with sawdust. The seats and benches are made of rustic, massive wood. Another peculiarity is an alcove with a couple of gaming tables.

The food in the Flaming Flagon is plain but hearty. Most travelers settle for a stew or a piece of meat with cooked potatoes and greasy gravy. Due to its proximity to the forest and the hunters living in the area, game is always available; deer, rabbit, pheasant... The stew is made from venison, mushrooms and potatoes and spiced with herbs and pepper. Served with a piece of fresh bread and a pint of ale, it makes a good meal.

The drinks served in the Flagon are a selection of simple ales and the local wine. For more exclusive drinks as zzar and firewine, one doesn't want to visit Olostin's Hold. Though the local wine cannot compete with a simple table wine from Tethyr, it is a pleasant drink, and to be honest, I have had worse wine to drink in Waterdeep.

As one crests the hill to walk up to the Flagon's gate, Olostin's Hold can be seen a short distance away. It stands on the next gently sloping hill, with the trees of the High Forest looming directly behind, obscuring any further view. One of the locals told me that on very clear days, the highest snow-covered peaks of the Greypeak Mountains can be seen. Judging by the weather outside, though, those clear days don't occur very often... The man might as well have been spinning a tale. The only mountains that I

could see, even during a small break in the rain, are the Lost Peaks towards the south. These peaks seem to loom ominously over the green expanse below, and are no doubt home to dragons, orcs, and other dangers which are so prevalent in this wild corner of Faerûn.

Judging by the talk in the commons, of late, the folk of Olostin's Hold have been much troubled by trolls ranging from the Evermoors. These marauding monsters have made the Yartar – Everlund road much less safe than it used to be, and so less traffic passes near Olostin's Hold than it did in previous years. The talk sent chills down my spine; it was only the two of us on the road traveling towards Everlund. We would never have survived a troll attack. When I brought this to Master Orgul's attention, he looked up from the scroll he was reading and smiled as if trying to calm a worried child. I shouldn't listen to that kind of talk; it was only meant to scare me. Well, I'll bring some extra firewood and torches tomorrow; it might scare of the brutes if I can get them lit in time in this pouring cold rain...

Now, I was trying to describe a little more of the village, but its insignificance in the scope of things made me skip to the forest, the mountains and the dangers of the area. Well, truth be told, it seems there is not much to write about Olostin's Hold. From what I could see, a stone keep sits on the hill, overlooking the village and the Evermoor Way. At the lower end of the hill and in the small valley along the dirt road leading toward the Flaming Flagon, several simple houses have been constructed from fieldstone and logs. Most of the roofs are covered by wooden shingles, but a few sport reddish-brown tiles. Perhaps because of the proximity of the majestic forest, all of the roofs seem partially covered in moss.

The keep protects the small village of about two hundred people, and extends its protection to as many as six hundred more farmers, woodcutters, and homesteaders in the immediate area. The hold's folk are very careful not to anger the powers of the forest; the woodcutters take only dead or dying trees, sometimes ranging far into the forest to find trees safe to bring down. All in all, a

simple town, of which numerous versions dot the landscapes of Faerûn.

Glyndra told me a little about the village's history. According to an ancient legend¹, Olostin was a rogue warrior who opposed the mighty wizards of long-lost Netheril. Leading a band of like-minded folk, he raided Netherese villages and holds. Allegedly, he had formed a pact with the denizens of the High Forest, who feared further encroachment of the dreaded Anauroch. To shield him from the prying magic of the wizards, the forest powers allowed Olostin to build a keep within the Forest's zone of influence. Current-day Olostin's Hold is rumored to be built on the ruins of that long-lost hold. I can't help but think that if the story was true, hordes of treasure hunters would have tried to turn over every stone in the vicinity to see if Olostin had buried some Netherese magic in his hold, or there would have been more wealthy villagers living on unearthed riches. I guess the villagers just like it better as an old legend, rather than the truth. I wouldn't appreciate it either, if strangers started to dig around in my backyard.

Olostin's Hold, as it is today, is fairly new. About seventy years ago, the ruined keep was occupied by a ranger of the marches, Elthond Vvar. Elthond rebuilt the keep to defend the haphazard village that had grown close to the ruins, creating a safe haven on the road to Everlund. It remains so today. Elthond passed away about thirty years ago, leaving no direct heirs. That was when the Elthondssons from Everlund rose to prominence. They were the closest of Ethond's kin, and they have ruled Olostin's Hold ever since.

When the Flaming Flagon was more of a tavern, there was a proper inn in the village. The inn, The Headless Troll, used to be a passable resting place. It was built of wood,

¹ Note: Of course there is some truth behind the history of Olostin's Hold. Olostin's Raiders were a constant nuisance to the wizards of Netheril, and had many hideouts, though none on the western side of the High Forest. The foundations of the keep in present day Olostin's Hold date back to days of ancient Netheril. However, the ruins are not of human origin...

and painted black inside to hide the scorch marks from when the beheaded troll for which the inn was named was burned here. It apparently fled up and down the hallways, pursued by enthusiastic people with torches, causing much damage. Because of the black paint, the place was as dark as the inside of a coal sack. Some of the inn's candles were rendered from sheep fat that was old indeed; as a result, the place usually had a faint stink akin to a slaughterhouse. Two years ago the place was struck by lightning and burned to the ground; apparently it could not sustain more fire damage. It was never rebuilt, and the little business it had transferred to the Flaming Flagon.

The light of my oil lamp is getting feeble and my eyes feel weary. I guess that it's time to stop writing and make myself more comfortable on this straw-filled sack, which serves as my bed. Thank the gods I've brought a winter blanket in my pack.

CREDITS

Volume III of the *Candlekeep Compendium* contains the work of many people, who have put much time and effort into penning these articles of lore. Many thanks to all who contributed and helped on this project.

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We hope you have enjoyed this volume of Realmslore. Any feedback is greatly appreciated. Please email us at **compendium@candlekeep.com** or visit the Candlekeep forum at **<http://www.candlekeep.com/forum>**

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Volume IV

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