

Lost LEAVES *from*
the
INN of the LAST HOME

Edited by

MARGARET WEIS



Lost LEAVES *from* INN *of* the LAST HOME

This d20 System® game accessory utilizes mechanics developed for the new Dungeons & Dragons® game by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison.

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Contents

Lost Bios

ADRIAN DU CHAGNE: PALANTHA'S LORD OF LIES	6
PAGASH, LIGHTNING DRAGONIAN	8
CRUCIBLE IN THE WAR OF THE LANCE	11
CRIMSON SKIES	15

Lost Relics

AMULET OF THE SOUL'S FIRE	19
THE BEASTHEART	20
BLOODTHORN	21
BRONZE STYLUS OF EONS	22
EYE OF THE STORM	23
THE GNOMISH WRECH OF REORX	24
HABBAKUK'S AV	25
HIDDUKEL'S DICE	26
SHIPARE'S SCALES	27
THE LAST ALTAR	28
MAJERE'S EVERLASTING ROSE	29
MISHAKAL'S GRACE	30

OBSIDIAN ORB OF INFINITY	31
PATHFINDER	32
RING OF LAUGHTER	33
THE STAFF OF ARGON	34
TAIVUL (KIRI-JOLITH)	35

Lost Magic & Mysteries

THE BRIGHTBLADE	37
MAN'TIS ROSE	40
SHARDS OF A DRAGON ORB	42
RENEGADE HUNTERS AFTER THE WAR OF THE LANCE	44
THE WELL OF TALIN	48
MYTHIC MIGHT: ARTIFACTS OF THE LOST TOWERS OF HIGH SORCERY	50

Lost Tales

DEFEAT IN KENDERHOME	63
THE JOURNAL OF FALYRINTHESAL HARAMDASS	67
GUNTAR'S WAR JOURNAL	74
THE TRUE & FAITHFUL ACCOUNT OF LORD TOEDE'S CAMPAIGN	76

Lost Music

FANFARE FOR DEREK CROWNGUARD
83

OLD SOLACE
84

THE ROAD TO FOGHAVEN VALE
86

THE GHOME SONG
87

SONGS FROM Autumn Twilight

QUALINESTI HYMN
91

HYMN TO TAKHISIS
92

HYMN FOR LAVRAPA
93

FUNERAL SONG FOR A SOLAMPIC KNIGHT
94

SONG OF DARKEWOOD
95

BATTLE SONG OF THE
SOLAMPIC KNIGHTHOOD
96

A WEDDING GIFT
97

Lost Organizations

A KIRATH WILDRUNNER
99

THE KNIGHTS OF BALIF
102

SHADOW WARS
103

THE WAY OF THE SEEKERS
110

THE BARDIC COLLEGE OF ERGOTH
113

EXPLORING THE MYSTERY OF THE BÜPDESPHAR
116

Lost Lore

FLINT'S JEWELRY
126

THE LAST DAYS OF THE
GROMISH NATIONAL OPERA
127

KENDER COURTING AND
MARRIAGE TRADITIONS
132

MINOTAURS OF THE BLOOD SEA
137

WAR DRUMS OF THE HIGH OGRES
141

THE OTHLORX CURSE
144

THE PHAETHON
147

NOTES ON SOLAMPIC FEASTING
154

TEN REASONS WHY KOBOLDS ARE BETTER THAN
DRACONIANS
162

Lost Recipes 164

*Trough Recipes
page 174*



Biographies

War and strife bring out the best—and the worst—in people. Some make their mark during the conflict, while others wait for a future day in which their stars will shine. Here you will find: a master of thieves, a lowly slave, a powerful dragonrider, a noble draconian, and more. Their stories will both disturb you and inspire you, but you will come away with something valuable from each as you continue on life's journey.

Caramon Majere

Proprietor of the Inn of the Last Home

ADRIAN DU CHAGNE: PALANTHAS' LORD OF LIES

Excerpts from *Palanthas: A Biographical History*, by Stefanos, Aesthetic of the Great Library

Adrian Du Chagne was a noble-mannered resistance fighter who turned master thief. He was born in the Market District of Palanthas to unknown parents. Rumors spread about his father, a gruff looking fellow who ran an inn that was consumed in fire some years ago. No one knew what happened, but the City Guard discovered the infant Adrian—covered in ashes and hidden under the inn's front desk. Locals believed that the gods protected the infant, saving him from the fire.

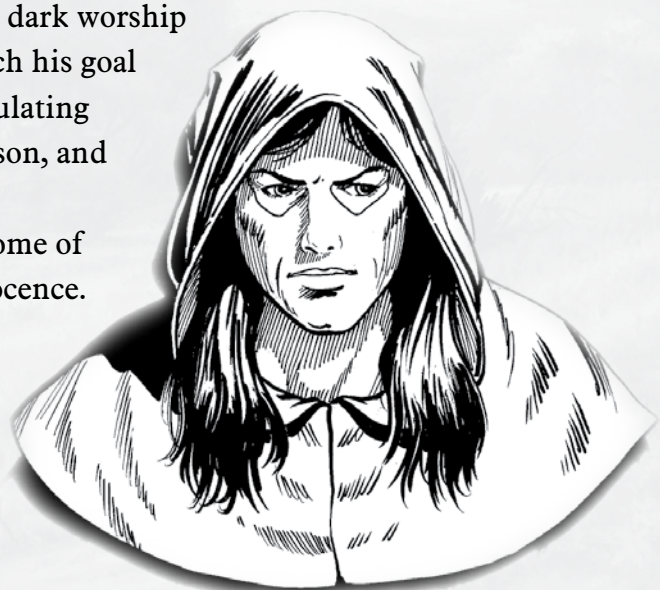
Adrian grew up in the care of an adoptive family from Solanthus. His father, Ian Du Chagne, was an important steel merchant from the Hinterlund province of Solamnia who moved to Palanthas in 321 AC. Ever-increasing profit made Du Chagne one of the richest men in the city, his wealth supported by leases contracted with the Lord-Mayor of the city. The young Adrian lived in that world of double-dealings in which his father's enterprise thrived.

At sixteen Adrian's father died, so the young man picked up where his father left off. The great Commerce Guild, founded by Ian Du Chagne, took another road to success: that of the underworld and its black market. Already a full member of the Thieves' Guild, Adrian offered to help the Guildmaster hide its activities within his businesses. With the Lord-Mayor preoccupied with the coming War against the Dragonarmies and the City Guard forming the garrison at the High Clerist's Tower, the move went unnoticed.

During the winter of the war of the lance, Adrian called out to the gods to aid him in the next step of his career: mounting a coup against the Thieves' Guildmaster himself. His call was answered. It was then that Adrian took his first vow into the dark worship of Hiddukel, the Lord of Lies. The evil god told him how to reach his goal in a vision. He followed the divine instructions precisely, manipulating events to complete the plan. The Guildmaster succumbed to poison, and Adrian rose to take his place.

His ascension into the Thieves' Guild appeared legitimate. Some of Adrian's colleagues did not believe their new Guildmaster's innocence. Hiddukel warned him in a dream of an assassination attempt by one of his allies. The following night, the young Guildmaster waited patiently for his killer. The traitor was found dead by the City Guard in a back alley with a slit throat.

The Blue Wing of the Dragonarmies swept over Solamnia. Even before the Lord-Mayor decided to keep his neutral stance in the War, Adrian chose his side. What he did not



expect was the reward he would earn. The Lord of Lies whispered in Adrian's dreams, warning of domination of Ansalon by Takhisis. Adrian lead his men into a guerilla war on the plains of Solamnia.

Many battles were fought, but the guild's men did not take part in all of them. More important work was ahead of them as messengers, assassins—even as squires or spies in the Dark Queen's army. When the Thieves' Guild offered aid, the Solamnic Knights did not know who the Guildmaster was, nor the identity of his colleagues. Only a few even knew of these "allies." But they got results. Adrian also legally sponsored the war by financing nobles all across Solamnia. His enterprise offered resources much needed on the front lines: food, supplies, and weapons.

A week before the Battle of the High Clerist's Tower, Adrian was arrested by the City Guard and charged on three counts. First, he was accused of being the ringleader of an assassination conspiracy against the Lord Mayor. Second, the Palanthian authorities accused him of giving aid to the Solamnics outside of Palanthas—a felony because it had the potential to trigger a war that the citizens of Palanthas were desperate to avoid. The last accusation was being the author of a traitorous lampoon distributed in the inns and taverns across the city, proposing a citywide

uprising against the "ineffective power in place." Of those accusations, Adrian was only guilty of the second. The others were merely inventions of his Thieves' Guild rival, Amothus Dale. Although summoned to justice, Adrian planned something else for his rival and left for the High Clerist's Tower.

Amothus Dale knew his fate soon after the Battle of the High Clerist's Tower, arrested as a spy for the Blue Dragonarmy. Adrian was rewarded for his aid during the conflict against Takhisis' Dragonarmies by the withdrawal of all charges against him. He was also granted the noble title of Earl. After the War of the Lance, Adrian continued his secret worship to the Lord of Lies. He remained Guildmaster of the Thieves' Guild of Palanthas and owner of one of the most powerful enterprises in Ansalon well into his declining years.

Earl Adrian Du Chagne's portrait now hangs in a side corridor of the Lord's Palace in Old City, depicting a tall, thin man in his mid-twenties who wears a distinguished black robe with gold lining. Written descriptions of him at the time spent as Guildmaster suggest that he rarely, if ever, wore these robes of office, preferring a black woolen cloak with a hood.

NAGASH, LIGHTNING DRACONIAN

Nagash, like many noble draconians, spent the waning years of the War of the Lance in martial training and slavery. After he freed himself from the Dragonarmies, he had a long and successful career fighting the forces of Darkness across Ansalon.

It was after he won his freedom that he began occasionally writing his memories, thoughts, and musings in a journal. Reportedly laconic in person, Nagash had a tendency to ramble in writing; his journal is not a daily diary, but rather a collection of essays on subjects he was pondering at the time he put pen to paper. This article contains a few selections of interest to those studying the plight of noble draconians during the War of the Lance and its immediate aftermath. The unabridged volume is available to scholars at the Library of Palanthas.

—Kiro Dorova, Tower of High Sorcery at Wayreth

AN EXCERPT FROM THE ENTRY “OF MY OWN CREATION.”

It is painful for me to bring to mind, but I remember a great deal of the ritual of my own creation, and it seems of such vital importance to history that I believe I should record it here, despite my own misgivings about reliving the ordeal.

When I awoke for the first time, I did not even realize that I was awake at first. I was aware that I had been hearing a voice chanting; I do not know for how long. I opened my eyes, and found three creatures standing over me.

Two were small, wearing black robes, chanting in strange languages. The third—an enormous creature, terrible but familiar—glowed red with malevolence. It opened its mouth and spat on me, then spoke in a language I instinctively understood: “Awaken, my cousins,” it growled. The hideous beast’s words were a soul-crushing curse that filled my heart with vile corruption, and I recoiled in horror.

I think I passed into unconsciousness once again. I could see nothing, but I was aware of impossibly immense voices, not the wretched creatures I had heard before. The first voice was somehow both repulsive and irresistible: “These new souls please me.” It was mad with malignant greed, eager to gain possession over more living creatures.

But another voice interrupted: “No, dear sister.” This voice was very different, filled with such brilliant glory and nobility that it burned my soul—yet I craved more, every fiber of my being clamoring for the voice’s purifying radiance. “You have overstepped your bounds.”

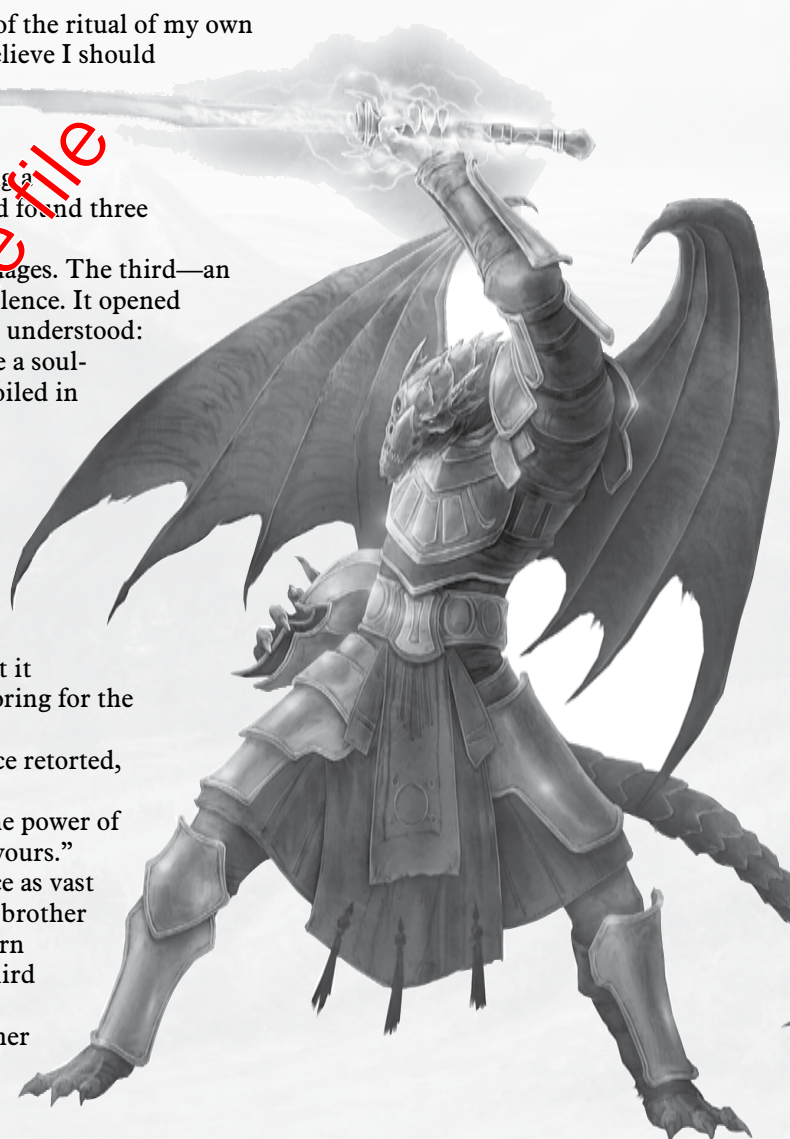
“You are not welcome here, dear brother. Depart,” the first voice retorted, inky hatred dripping from each word.

“I come to claim my children,” the second voice countered. The power of its words was agonizing, but I rejoiced in it. “These souls are not yours.”

“The law of the Most High is clear,” added a third voice, a voice as vast as everything that has ever happened and ever will happen. “Your brother speaks correctly. The Balance must be satisfied. As Darkness is born of Light, so must Light be born of Darkness. Stand aside.” The third voice’s serene clarity calmed my fear.

“I will not,” the first voice spat defiantly. Even so, I could feel her waver.

Sample file



"You must, dear sister. I do not forget my own." The majesty of the second voice seared my heart, burning away the residue left by the foul ritual of my creation.

The voices faded.

Time passed; again, I know not how long. Perhaps it was mere seconds, perhaps centuries. Finally, I opened my eyes, and the black-robed figures and terrible creature were there. My heart sank in despair, crying out for the noble presence that had claimed me a moment—a lifetime—ago.

It answered, silently, in my mind. "Do not fear, though you rest among the enemy," the beautiful voice assured me. "I do not forget my own.

"You are mine," Paladine said to me.

EXCERPTS FROM THE ENTRY "OF TARRIN, MY BROTHER AND FRIEND."

I was among the first few created, along with my brother Tarrin. Lord Ariakas referred to Tarrin when he coined the name of our race—"Strong and noble, these draconians," he said. We called ourselves noble thereafter.

Tarrin and I grew close as we grew together. He was a good friend; he was the cleverest of the pair of us, and knew the day would come when our masters discovered that we belonged to Paladine, not the Dark Queen. He told us to be ready for that day, to do whatever we needed to do to survive, and that Paladine would remember us and not abandon us...

...He advised us all, and me especially, to pay lip service to the religion we were being indoctrinated with. Kowtow to the idols and icons of Queen Takhisis, he said. Pray to her with our lips, and to Paladine with our hearts. His advice kept us alive...

...Tarrin was a gifted warrior. In our combat training, only Tarrin was stronger than I. Even at a young age, he could lift the largest of the great blades, and he used his size and the momentum of the weapon to best any of us, and he even began to outfight the combat instructors. We all became skilled with our blades, but Tarrin was by far the most gifted, blessed by Paladine...

...During the time of our slavery, Tarrin and I passed many hours together in conversation. At the time, we mostly spoke to each other in Nerakese, as was enforced by our masters, but he encouraged me to continue practicing Draconic, which we both instinctively understood from the time of our creation. He said it was a gift from our dragon parents, one of the few worthy gifts they gave to us.

We composed oratory, choosing words which sounded pleasing together even if the matter of the words was unpleasant (I later learned that this was called "poetry"). We promised each other to keep journals of our trials and triumphs once we were delivered from slavery, so that our stories would live on. We poured the despair and the lamentations of our captivity and the Dark Queen's Curse into our compositions, rather than allow it to fester in our hearts. We begged Paladine for deliverance in our words so that our souls could be patient, for we trusted that someday He would fulfill the promise He made us upon our creation and make us instruments of His will...

...Only a month or two after we arrived at the mine, humans mounted a raid on the facility. Tarrin, together with Sorin and Urria and a few others, were in a position to use the commotion to escape. I could not—I had been confined in chains since the previous evening as punishment for some minor transgression—but I urged him to go without me. He was reluctant, but I promised him that we would meet again someday, even if it were at Paladine's feet at the end of days. That is the last I have seen of Tarrin. Later I heard that he traveled briefly with Githanas the Elflord; I do hope that was truth rather than rumor, for none of us could have hoped to find a more noble and worthy mentor.

EXCERPTS FROM THE ENTRY "OF MY CAPTIVITY."

Early in our lives it came to pass that the priests of Takhisis entered our chamber, with the hobgoblin and base draconian guards, and placed several of us in irons: Tarrin, Sorin, Urria, me, and several more besides. Until this time we had been undergoing training as warriors, to fight in the great war that Queen Takhisis was waging upon the world, and we were only confined in chains when we had done something to displease our masters. Having satisfied our masters in our most recent lessons, we were confused as we were led away.

Months later I learned that, soon after we were taken from the temple, they slaughtered many of those remaining. Only a few handfuls of each of the noble races survived...

...Physical discipline had been part of our training previously, but they had stopped short of causing serious injury; this time they did not. Our legs and hands bound in chains, and our mouths muzzled, they beat us savagely with cruel weapons under the watchful eyes of some of the priests. One baaz draconian viciously stabbed me in the midsection with a hooked spear. I doubled over, bleeding profusely. I knew I would die without assistance, and it seemed I was unlikely to receive it. Involuntarily placing

my shackled hands over the wound, I prayed to Paladine to help me, somehow, in some way—and the wound closed. Paladine healed me. This enraged the priests who were nearby, who shouted “Blasphemy!” and ordered the guards to take care that I did not do that again...

...They would not tell us where we were, although I could tell it was a mine. Our taskmasters were no longer draconians, but hobgoblins and humans. I believe it was Neraka, given their manner of speech. As we were now known to be servants of Paladine, we were unfit to fight for the Dark Queen’s army; however, we could be forced to labor for it. We were made to draw iron out of the ground and smelt it for the war effort. No longer soldiers in training, we were slaves, for our strong backs and tough hides would allow us to work deeper and longer than the more delicate humans could.

A foolish youth, I was uncooperative, combative, and made a general nuisance of myself. My taskmaster gave me a new name: “Worthless,” or Nagash in Nerakese. Many others received similarly derogatory names. They were trying to break our psyches, but we would not let them. I embraced my new name, resolving to turn it into a cruel joke at their expense someday, and I have carried it since...

...We could tell that the war progressed poorly for our masters. The grumbling guards complained that they knew not where they would get the warm bodies to wield the weapons and armor that our iron made. They treated us cruelly, demanding more and more; I believe that they feared that if they seemed inefficient in their administration of the mine, they would be reassigned to the front

Since Tarrin, Urra, and Sorin had escaped over a year previously, they forbade the slaves to speak to one other (to prevent conspiratorial planning, presumably) and I was frightfully lonely. One day I had simply had enough, and Paladine granted me the courage to act. When my irons were removed as I was changing tasks, I assaulted my taskmaster and freed myself.

Given the opportunity to escape quickly and quietly, I was sorely tempted; freedom beckoned, only steps away. But I realized that I had the opportunity that Tarrin did not have; I had time to free the others. If I simply slunk away into the shadows, I would be living up to the name my taskmaster had given me. I steeled myself, certain that Paladine claimed me for a greater purpose than that.

I will spare this journal the details, which were terrible and bloody. I slew many evil men and hobgoblins that day, but freed dozens of my fellows. We left the mine burning. I armed myself with the weapons of my former captors, and embarked on the next chapter of my life.

Editor’s Postscript:

Nagash vanished in the Desolation soon after the War of Souls; it is presumed he fell in battle. Prior to his disappearance, Nagash entrusted his unfinished journal to a young resident of the ruins of Kenderhome, who later generously donated the volume to the Library. It is filled with dozens upon dozens of journal entries, which offer unique and deep insight into the noble draconian mind and experience.

CRUCIBLE IN THE WAR OF THE LANCE

From the Memoirs of Kammerin Half-Elven, Harbormaster, Port of Sanction

He told me he had not taken the Oath.

I did not realize the significance of the statement at the time since a man delirious with pain and exhaustion delivered it to me. It was not until days later that I understood the full import of his words.

The man was dragged by soldiers of the Red Dragonarmy into the slave quarters one night and dumped, more dead than alive, near my scrap of fetid floor. He lay silent and unmoving for some time while other slaves stumbled over him, cursed him, or ignored him. In the foul prison we slaves called home, few had the strength left to pay attention to the suffering of another.

Yet there was something about the new arrival that intrigued me. He was not well dressed. In fact his, plain travel clothes looked worn and filthy and hinted of Khurish origin. Yet he didn't resemble the men of Khur. Even slumped on the floor as he was, I could see he was tall and his face appeared young—not as young as mine, for I was only a boy at the time, but certainly he was barely into his manhood. Golden hair lay matted under a lump on his head, and his face was bruised under a layer of dirt and blood. He was slender, well built, and lithe as a fencer. Could he be like me? I wondered. Could he be a half-elf?

I reflect back on those days now and marvel at my misery. I was young and alone, the bastard half-breed of an elven mother who died of shame and a mercenary who captured her and never let her go. I grew up working on merchant galleons until the day pirates captured our ship and sold the crew into slavery on the dark, crowded decks of Sanction.

Sanction. It is my home now. However, in that tumultuous summer, it was a terrible place of foul fumes, lava flows, overcrowded streets, gloom, and the constant stink of evil. Emperor Ariakas had gathered his Dragonarmies in Sanction and the Dark Queen's Temple of Luerkhisis sat like a boil on the slope of Mount Thunderhorn. Oh, the buildings were new and the harbor had been dredged and its docks enlarged to accommodate the armies, but the city was dirty, smoke-ridden, and built with the blood of slaves.

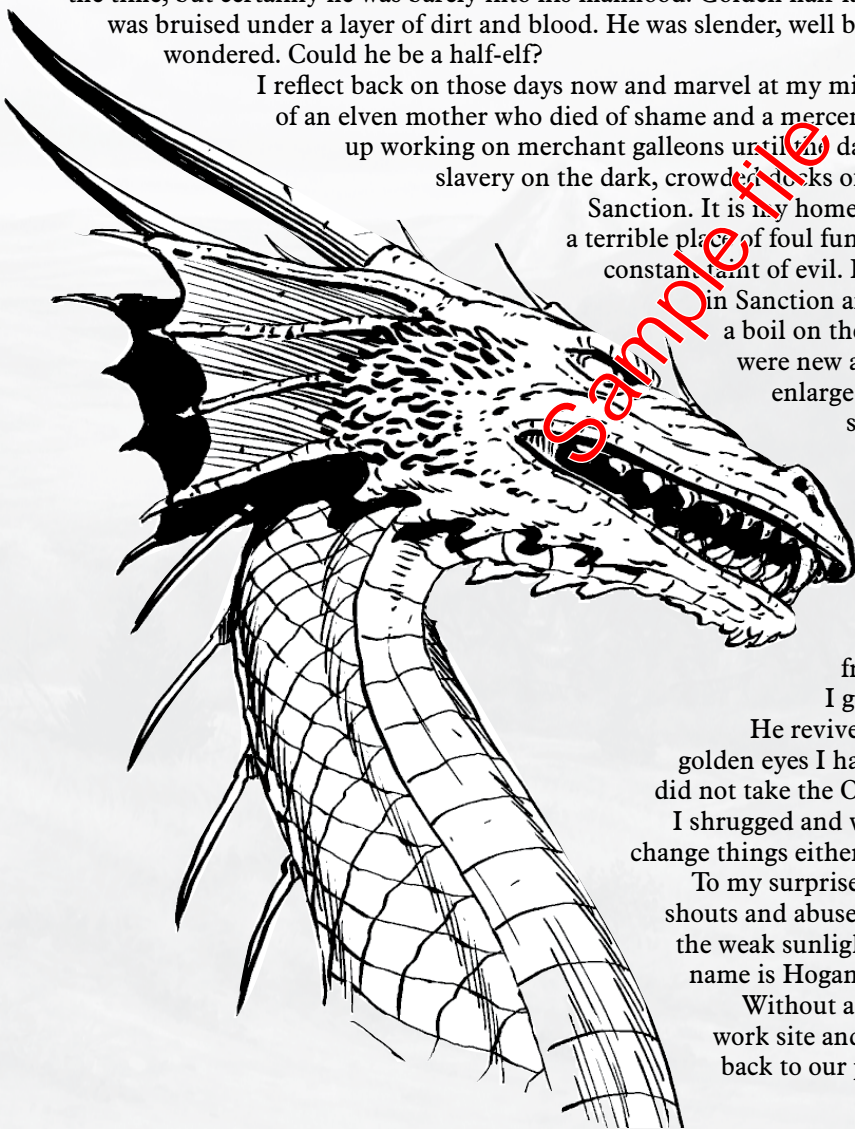
I was not thinking about the city that long ago night, only my small space on the floor by the tiny barred window and the wounded man that might have something in common with me. I finally screwed up my courage and dragged him over to my place by the wall. I used a little of my precious water and a scrap from my ragged shirt to clean his battered head, and I gave him the rest of the water to drink.

He revived enough to open the most compelling pair of golden eyes I had ever seen, swallow the water, and say softly, "I did not take the Oath," before he fell unconscious again.

I shrugged and went to sleep. Either he lived or died. I couldn't change things either way.

To my surprise, the man was awake in the morning. He rose to the shouts and abuse of our guards and silently followed me outside. In the weak sunlight the man looked down at me and nodded. "My name is Hogan."

Without another word or complaint, he went with us to the work site and labored until the sun set and the guards drove us back to our prison. With the passing of days his injuries healed



and his strength returned. I was amazed at how quickly he regained his vigor in spite of the beatings and starvation we all faced.

Although I burned with questions, I did not pry into his life until he offered to talk in the dark hours of the night. He told me he was searching for a friend, his mentor and guardian, a man named Claric. Claric had last been seen in the Khalkist Mountains. Hogan had been searching in the mountains east of Sanction when a group of Red Wing dragonriders surprised him. In the ambush he had been knocked unconscious and brought to Sanction to join the hordes of slaves that built and labored to support the Dragonarmies.

As I listened to him, I got the strong impression he was only biding his time before he escaped to continue his search. I made up my mind then that, if the opportunity came, I would escape as well too. I asked if I could go with him, but then he did a strange thing. Lying flat on the stone floor of the prison, he pressed his ear flat to the floor and closed his eyes. I thought he had fallen asleep, until after a while he lifted his head and winked at me.

The next morning, the wind shifted from the south to the southeast and blew a pall of smoke and ash from the Lords of Doom over the city.

Hogan gave me an enigmatic smile as we trudged after the guards to our latest site, an old stone temple to the gods that had fallen into ruin. We were collecting the stone for other construction projects and tearing down the temple. The gods had abandoned Sanction to Takhisis, who tolerated no other temples than Her own. The work was brutal and dangerous; the overseers gave us few tools and cared little if we survived. There were plenty of slaves to be had in Sanction.

My friend seemed distracted during the day, peering constantly into dark crevices and studying the ground with his golden eyes. Twilight came early that day, for late in the afternoon Mount Thunderhorn suddenly spewed forth a new column of smoke and more lava glowed on its summit, brighter than the sunset.

The guards looked up the mountain as smoke darkened the sky, and Hogan said softly, "Let's go."

He tensed, his knees bent, his legs poised to run, when his attention was diverted by voices suddenly raised close to our work party. A party of soldiers and their officer passing by the temple had stopped to examine the slaves. I had heard that Dragonarmy officers occasionally took slaves from the work gangs for their own purposes, but I had not seen it happen until that night. The soldiers had already pulled out one young man, and I realized with a jolt of terror that they were talking among themselves and pointing to me. Beside them, a lady had joined the group and struck up an argument with the officer, a tall, muscular man in dragonriding leathers.

Hogan's entire stance changed from flight to an intense, wary investigation of the woman. I might have understood in different circumstances. She was incredibly beautiful, young and slim, with red hair the color of flame-touched chestnuts. Her elegant dress was red, too, and fitted to a figure that would catch any man's eye. But this was not the time, I thought, and I did not see the reason for his sudden, consuming interest. The girl was annoyed with her officer, that was certain, and her voice lifted above the noise of the work gang.

Then her eyes shifted slightly and caught sight of Hogan staring at her. Her anger abruptly dissolved into curiosity and several other emotions that played across her lovely face in swift succession. Her companion caught the look, turned to see at whom she was staring, and frowned.

"Time to go," murmured my friend. He yanked my arm and darted into a dark gap in the tall pile of masonry, pulling me after him. Shouts rose behind us. We jumped and slid down a collapsed wall into a dark chamber in the floor below. Another crevice yawned before us, and he led me into the depths of the old ruin. The light faded behind us. I lost all sense of sight, but Hogan's vision in the dark was keen, and he led me on through the shattered floors.

Going underground was not the path I had imagined for us. Where was there to go? The rubble or the foundation would trap us eventually. And yet it did not.

Cracks or gaps appeared before us while we twisted and climbed our way down into the lower levels of the temple. Soon we groped our way into a small chamber partially blocked with fallen stone and earth. There was no sound of pursuit, so Hogan murmured a soft word and formed a pale sphere of light between his hands. I stared at him in surprise. So, he was a wizard. That explained some, I thought. But not enough.

"How did you know?" I asked. "Where are we going?"

"Underground," was all he would tell me.

Before us yawned a steep staircase that plunged down into total darkness. He handed me the wizard's light, and to my astonishment, he pulled a large chunk of fallen stone and masonry over to the stair's entrance, blocking it from view. He took the light and led the way down the stairs.

Underground we went, deeper than I ever imagined we could go under a city like Sanction until to my wondering eyes appeared a lengthy tunnel and signs of some sort of habitation.

Hogan said something in a language I did not understand, and then added, "Shadowpeople."

I was stunned. Shadowpeople were creatures of legend. Shy, elusive, and territorial, they lived in clans in subterranean communities and avoided humans whenever possible. "I don't think there are many left. They have been hunted and abused. I smell death and abandonment."

"Really," I retorted. "What does that smell like?" I know I was being rude to the man who had just saved my life. All I can say is I was tired, frightened, confused, and very tired of mysteries. Hogan chuckled. Perhaps he would have answered my questions then and there, if we hadn't walked through an open arched doorway into a cavern of towering proportions. Bones lay scattered on the floor, and scorch marks marred the stone.

"A shadowhall," he said.

"Yes. You made excellent time finding the place," a voice echoed out of the ebony darkness.

Hogan did not flinch, but I nearly leaped out of my skin. I whirled to see another light form across the cavern. Its bright light gleamed on red hair and a slim form in a crimson dress. Cool and unafraid, the girl from above walked toward us. Ignoring me, she circled Hogan, her delicate nostrils flared and her full mouth pursed in concentration.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"I know you," he said calmly. "I had hoped to avoid this meeting. I am only looking for Claric."

She must have recognized the name for she laughed. "Clarion? That busybody? Sticking his bronze nose in everyone's business." She sighed and waved a slim hand. "He was here. Stars above, this place has been like the skies over the Dragon Isles lately."

Her reference startled me. The Dragon Isles? What did that mysterious place have anything to . . . do . . . with . . . A thought formed in my head that sent a cold wash of fear through my limbs.

"So I heard," Hogan was saying. "The Oath has been broken."

A spasm of anger marred her face. "I am not surprised. It was a heinous thing to do. I am glad the silver dragon found the truth."

"What oath?" I asked.

Hogan ignored me. "You objected?"

"Of course. How could any of our kind condone such a perversion?"

"Our kind? What oath?" I stammered.

"Many have," Hogan said, his voice cold. "If you are so horrified, why did you do nothing to stop it?"

"I did not know until my rider boasted of it and those warped creatures began to crawl out of the temple. I told Lord Ariakas such an act would prove disastrous. He did not agree."

I admit I was terrified. I knew then who the beautiful redhead was, but at that moment, I began to doubt Hogan. Somewhere in the distance, the volcano rumbled, and the ground trembled under my feet.

The girl suddenly smiled and to my horror, I saw flames leap in the depths of her eyes. "So you know who I am, but I do not know you. Nor, it seems, does your little friend." She laughed again and slowly circled around us.

Hogan turned with her, keeping her in his vision, his face the grimmest I had seen yet in our brief friendship.

"Kam," he said to me. "Back away."

Back away where? I remember thinking. Except for the two lights that burned like glowing eyes in the darkness, I could not see a thing. I didn't want to move blindly into that unknown cavern.

Something moved overhead. I heard what sounded like the scratch of claws on stone, and then something large and hairy swooped down from the roof of the cavern and grabbed my arms. Something leathery beat downward. My stomach dropped to my knees as the creature yanked me off my feet and carried me into the unseen depths of the cave. I heard Hogan shout my name, but I was too stunned to reply.

A shout of frustration echoed through the cave, and a brilliant burst of red light flared behind me. I looked back in terror into the opening jaws of a red dragon. As I had feared, it was Firestorm, the red dragon who lived in a lair on the slopes of Mt. Thunderhorn. Her spiny head lifted toward me, her wings partially unfurled, making her look larger in the great cavern. Dragonfear hit me in a ferocious wave, and I screamed in terror.

Then another light flared and scintillated on the pale stone of the cave. I had one brief glimpse of another shining dragon before I was carried out of the cavern and into a maze of high tunnels, caves, and passageways.

I quickly realized my captors were very adept at traveling through the subterranean tunnels. Leaping and gliding with ease, two of them carried me in a dizzying journey away from the shadowhall and toward the source of the rumbling noises. I tried to struggle, but the creatures were incredibly strong and, I quickly learned, very intelligent.

Be still, young one. We will not hurt you. The words formed in my head without passing through my ears. I stopped fighting out of sheer surprise.

"Who said that?"

We did. We are taking you away from the red dragon. We hope the bronze will follow us.

I stared at the strange faces with their upturned noses and huge eyes. Recognition finally came. These were shadowpeople, the denizens of the lightless caverns. My head swam with confusion. "What? What bronze?" I cried.

The creatures slowed and came to a stop in a cave that I saw must be near the volcano. They let me down to the cave floor but kept their powerful hands on my arms. Unending tremors shook the floor under my feet and the distant rumble had changed to a deep roar. Heat assailed me, and the smell of molten rock filled the cave. *You are his friend. He will follow. Then we can ask him for help.*

"Who are you talking about?"