

Wind is a very basic concept, a gust of air, a force spell, or a bolt of lightning. They all come from the same base element. Wind can be alarming, it can destroy with untold power, or it can comfort you. A gust blowing through your hair can feel like adventure, or feel like a time back home.

Tyran Matthau sought such comfort as he stood on the helm of the Pharoah. The wind parted his hair awkwardly, but he closed his eyes and let the slipstream pass over him. He thought about his mother, Anne. She was gone, and he never knew her well since she died of childbirth but his dad talked a lot about her.

“She loved the sea, Ty. As blue as the stone in that damn necklace she wore and as pure as the earth that she stood on.”

His father was hopelessly in love, or at least he was. Something was missing from him, and as Tyran got older the more aware of it he became. He saw the island in the distance, Carrymein Cove, the destination for his father and the 400 crates of rum and spice they had aboard. As they sailed into the harbor, Walter Matthau, Tyran's father approached him near the bow.

“Beautiful isn't it? I'd someday like to see us living in a place like this.”

Tyran thought for a second, would he like a place like this? He was raised on this ship, and he didn't know much past what he wanted other than power. The Dorrel Trading company, of which owned this ship, had promised his family a lot. Political power chief among the privileges of being an administrator, Tyran knew he was born and bred to take power.

“Yes, father.” He murmured back. He did love his father, and he did want them both to be happy, especially his father, who needed to fill a wife sized hole in his heart.

At the docks, Walter met up with the docking chief.

“Hello, Barrew.” He said with a firm handshake. The creature that approached was not human but rather some sort of orc or orc kin. A mutt Tyran thought, he was well versed on the races and it seemed that this character fit into no particular category.

“Walter, it's been a long time. I see that Dorrel has you by the balls still.” He laughed after he said it, but it was odd, it was more menacing than it was friendly.

“Yes well, we all do what we must for our living.” Walter shot back.

The two began to walk down the docks and look through a shipping charter. Tyran followed close listening to the conversation. Tuning out the talk after it became quickly uninteresting; the orc caught his attention.

“I told you Matthau, I need those parts.”

Walter looked back at his son.

“Why don’t you go do me a favor?” He handed Tyran a ledger for the shipment.

“There is a woman in that shop over there, her name is Anise. Run over this and make sure everything is accounted for with her please.”

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Vilena Ysyr looked out of the glass window at the front of her shop. She saw the Pharoah at the dock and knew that her shipment was soon to arrive.

“Anise, come down, the shipment is here.”

She looked out the window again and saw a different man than usual approaching the shop. He was young, around her age, and handsome.

She opened the door to greet him.

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Tyran stood in the open door of the Dock Shop. Taking notice of the young woman inside, who was around his own age. She stood about 3 inches shorter than Tyran, and had skin that was oddly pale for an islander. She wore a dress, with a vest that she used around the shop. It had various pockets for coin and pads of paper sticking out of it. Her long blonde hair had only the smallest streaks of darkness in it, and it flowed over her shoulders like a lilac scented waterfall. Tyran almost stumbled as he stepped in the door, distracted. “Hello, my name is Tyran Matthau” he said calmly, and with a bow.

“Why hello Mr. Matthau, my name is Vilena Ysyr” she returned with a smile. “Anise is one her way to verify the shipping record.”

“And what does a lovely lady like you get out of being on an island of pirates? You could be in the capital, married to a Lorne or Notelli lord.”

The woman laughed heartily at Tyran. “I was never much for the city, my father had us there for only a few years before we left. It was always loud and filled with the worst folk I could imagine.”

“One would say the same about pirates” Tyran rebuked with a laugh that Vilena returned.

Just as the conversation started, it ended as a large unpleasant looking woman came down the

spiral stairs that go to the 2nd floor. She was rather rotund and with a tan, cracked face that showed her age a little too well.

“Whoozis? Where’s Walter?” she choked out talking around a large hunk of yellow flesh that she had just bitten off of some island fruit or another.

Vilena piped up “This is Tyran, I believe he is Walters son.”

“It is true, dear Anise, Walter sends his regards. I am here with the ledger.” Tyran handed her a writing board with a stack of papers on it. Each item was marked with a box, and amounts totaling quantity and value.

As Anise took the ledger, Vilena and Tyran stepped off to the side.

“What is it that a lady does for fun around here? I have to spend a night or two on the island.”

With a smile, Vilena looked out the window. “Well, I always like to grab a stiff drink at the Brass Monkey before I turn in.”

“And would you perhaps like some company tonight?” Tyran said.

“Perhaps I would Mr. Matthau.” Vilena smiled and ran her hands through her hair, creating an explosion of lilacs and patchouli, smells that Tyrans father traded oils in no doubt, Tyran thought.

“Alright, everything is squared up boy.” Anise croaked from behind a counter. She produced a rather large coin purse and slapped it on the counter with a “THWACK” sound.

“Tell your father to pay me a visit, I always enjoyed seeing him.” Anise said this with a crooked smile that made Tyrans gut check itself back in after the alluring smell of Vilena’s hair.

Tyran took the coin purse and latched it to a hook on his belt. “I will do just that Anise, thank you.” Tyran shot out a hand almost instinctually and Anise reluctantly grabbed it to shake. “A pleasure mam.”

Tyran walked back towards the door and as he left gave a soft smile towards Vilena.

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Tyran returned to the Pharoah to inform his father of the business. He found him standing on the bow again.

“Father, I have Anise’s payment here.” He handed the coin purse to his father who mulled it in

his hands before throwing it into a pile of coin purses from various shops on the island.

“Anise would like a visit.” Tyran said with a chuckle. His father shot back a smile and a chuckle at him. Walter grabbed his son by the shoulder and pulled him close.

“Son, all of this will be yours one day. I can’t do this forever, and I would like to settle down before I’m too old to survive off the land.”

“You know I would be proud to take up your mantle father.” Tyran said. His father pulled him to the front of the ship, and they both sat, legs hanging over the edge. Tyran remembered sitting like this with his father when he was young.

“Son, there are important lessons taught by the sea. Some of them come easily like waves on a gentle sea, and other will crash into you, waiting for you to capsize and consume you. You have learned a lot in our time on the water, and I am proud that you’ve come this far. I only pray that you learn some of those lessons easier than I did.”

“Which lessons would those be, father?” Tyran asked.

“Well, the lesson I am learning now, even in my old age, is that the Ocean is a bounty of riches and adventure. However, in the end, it will always take what you love most from you.”

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Later that day, Tyran found himself walking along the boardwalk. The smell of fresh fruit and seafood was already alluring in and of itself, but the allure of conversation is what drew Tyran to the green and weathered dock. Just as he settled in to have a pint of ale and a grilled skewer of coconut prawns, a scream shattered the crowds.

Tyran dropped his food, the wooden skewer bouncing off the deck before being quickly set upon by a group of wild sea birds.

Tyran pushed past the crowd towards the commotion. In the center of a circle, two men were fighting with daggers. A woman was lying on the ground next to one of the men, her midsection sliced completely across. The two men, one wearing an obnoxious amount of gold jewelry with dark tan skin, and a large matted red beard, the other a cloak and a set of gold embroidered robes that implied nobility. The obvious pirate lashed out towards the nobleman, catching his wrist as he tried to recoil. The pirate quickly lashed the arm, and the all too familiar sound of cracking bones filled the air. The crowd was gathered but not helping, no guards seemed to be in sight, if there even were any.

The nobleman held his wrist and yelped, falling to his knees. Just as the pirate raised his dagger, a crack exploded next to his head. The pirate turned to see Tyran standing at the edge

of the large circle. Whip drawn and ready. The pirate reached up to touch the same ear that the whip just nearly deafened and he realized that the ear was gone and the warm feeling on that side of his head was not the fear of surprise, but a rather large stream of blood.

“I think you may want to reconsider.” Tyran turned to a woman behind him. “Quickly! Get a mage, or cleric or someone.”

Tyran turned to face the pirate once more. The pirate had his dagger at the ready, an insane smile on his face. He lunged forward and ran towards Tyran. Tyran cracked his whip once again, this time wrapping quickly around the pirates ankle. The pirate tripped, and in anger, tried to rise quickly to meet Tyran head on. The pirate climbed up to his knees and as he tried to swing his right leg forward to stand on it, it gave way and he fell once again. He looked down at this ankle and saw the bladed end of the whip wrapped around his bleeding ankle. His tendon was severed, and his leg now useless. He looked up at Tyran and let out an angry growl. He leaped up on his arms and tried to grab Tyran who stepped back.

The pirate was crawling towards him, a trail of blood smeared across the wood of the deck.

“Not today.” Tyran roiled the whip back in a frenzy, and brought it down in a frenzy. The pirate screamed as each blow left a deep gash in his back. Tyran whipped until he stopped crawling.

“I trust you will take care of him?” Tyran yelled at the crowd. “Where I come from, a man who murders a woman in such fashion is tortured.”

“The nobleman limped over to Tyran, who offered his arm for the man to lean on. “My wife, she, she’s dead.” The man said.

“I am truly sorry I was too late, do you know why he did this?” Tyran asked.

“He saw her tattoos. Shes an ex pirate, I saved her from this place, we came back to see her family.” The man said.

“When you say ex Pirate, not many of those living anymore, how did she get out?” Tyran asked curiously.

“I took her, changed her name, paperwork, all of it.” The man said.

“You didn’t have her tattoos removed?”

“All but the wrist tattoo, it’s enchanted, I haven’t had the money to get it removed.” The man said.

“Well, maybe think about shelling out next time.” Tyran said as he pushed the man away and

walked away, the crowd making room for him.

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Later that night, Tyran, a few ales in and filled with shrimp was headed towards the Brass Monkey. As he waltzed across the boardwalk, he looked in each shop window. Most of them had sea provisions, nets, anchors, boat rations and of course booze. Tyran liked the idea of a store that sold liquor by the barrel, and he would be sure to have his father procure a cask of aged bourbon for them to share.

He stepped by the Morticians hut, looking in the window. The woman from before who had been cut lay on a table, her body covered by a sheet and two small scrying stones rested on her eyes.

“They say that the stones let them see into the future, see where they are headed.” Vilena said as Tyran turned to see her, now in a proper sun dress, patterned with orange flowers. The pale white of the material set against her skin almost made her look like a ghost.

“I apologize, I was lost in thought, and I did not see you there.” Tyran said, stepping closer.

“It’s very alright. I’ve been watching you for a little while.” She said with a smile.

Tyran took her by the arm and walked her down the boardwalk. “I quite like that dress, it is very fitting on a woman such as yourself.” Tyran quipped.

With a laugh Vilena said “Thank you, I made it myself. Each flower is hand sewn.”

The two made their way to the Brass Monkey. Upon entering, they found a relatively quiet corner to settle into.

“So, why are you here?” Tyran asked.

“My father is part of the council of pirates. I’ve been here all my life.”

“Wow, that is quite the heritage. Are you happy here?” Tyran replied.

“I am, but I cant help but want to see more. My mother wouldn’t have stood for this. She was a nomadic soul.” Vilena said longingly.

“I suppose our fathers will always haunt us.” Laughed Tyran. “My mother is gone too.” He added.

“I am sorry, it’s hard, to grow up nurtured by only your father. Makes you different.” She said.

“Aye.” Tyran nodded.

He noticed that Vilena had a necklace on, an amulet that was both purple and red, set into a gold inlay. The golden chain was light and gentle, much like her.

Later that night they made love in a rented room. Tyran feeling at home for once in a long while, never wanted any of it to end. However, as all things must, it did.

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Tyran awoke with a start, he thought at first he was dreaming. His father was standing at the end of the bed.

“Wake up, we have to go.”

The dream state was wiped away quickly when Tyrans clothes hit him in the chest. He got up and dressed and wrote a quick note to Vilena.

“I hope you had fun, we are now late.” His father said pulling him along.

They came to a long house, set atop a hill. It was the largest building by far, adorned with all sorts of seafaring equipment. Upon entering Tyran knew where he was. The pirate council sat before them both as they entered. A total of 5 men, most looking like typical pirates, long beards, leather garb, and various jewelry. However the man in the center of the table was dressed in a blue robe with gold embroidery. His eyes hidden by the shadow of his hood, and only a white beard stuck out of the hood.

“Hello, my good men.” Walter started. “I hope you all had a restful night, I apologize for my tardiness, my son was having a restless evening.”

“Let us start Walter. I am rather displeased with the nature of our last 3 shipments. We have been shorted on parts the last 3 months. We are afraid we must consider cancellation of our trading contract with the Dorrell and Sons trading company.”

“I apologize for the delay but my supplier cannot keep up with the demand of the whole council. We simply have too many people trying to purchase at the moment.”

“We recognize that you are at the whim of your supplier but we have shown more than enough good faith towards them. We should be at the top of the list when it comes to being supplied.”

“We are sorry but we cant do that, you know the kind of people that are requesting our services.” Walter said, worryingly.

“Hold on!” Tyran voiced.

“Son don-“ before his father could finish, Tyran spoke again.

“My father is the reason that you have any shipments coming to this hell hole. The entire eastern trade network skipped this island until it was connected by Dorrell and Sons, specifically at the whim of my father. All of us in this room have paid a steep price for this to happen, as I am sure you are aware Councilmen.” Tyran spoke.

“I implore you to reconsider this deal, the damage to this island as a whole will be too great.” Tyran followed.

“Your deed is noble, boy. However there are other companies who can serve us.” A gnarled pirate with dirty black hair, cropped short, and a row of missing teeth in the front rebuked.

“None so well connected as us. If you’ve forgotten we had to push the Eastern Trade Writ through the Goryn council to even get access to this route. We can just as easily have it re-written to skip this tiny island.” Tyran replied.

“Your boy is smart, Walter” the robed councilman said.

“Alright, we will keep the deal going but I need to see at least the first quarter of parts shipped by the next shipment.”

“I will talk to our supplier” Walter said.

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As they left the long house, Tyran followed Walter. They stopped outside the hut.

“Do not speak, unless asked. You are lucky I know them well. In other places you would be lucky to only be removed.” Walter said angrily.

“What are the parts for father.” Tyran asked.

Walter hung his head. “I cannot tell you. I am sorry. The less you know, the less you are liable for should things go wrong.” He said.

“Father, what are you involved in. I need to know.” Tyran pushed.

“The parts are for a weapon. One that a few others we know are also working on.” Walter said. “No doubt you’ve heard of the attacks on the mainland. The dead rising from their graves.”

“Yes, but why aren’t the cities dealing with it?” Tyran asked.

“Well, the funding from the government is gone, since the collapse. When we overthrew the Emperor, many didn’t realize that a lot of money would be stolen and the funds dried up. Now looking for a renewed revenue stream, many of the city government are turning to less than savory resources. Some of the noble families are ready for when our protectors turn on us. Or so they say.” Walter said.

“I am with you father, we can do this together, let me help.” Tyran said.

“If we are found son, I need you to keep this family in the game. You have to stay put, and keep your head out of this. That being said you did good work in there, you will do better at this than even myself.” Walter said.

The two continued to the ship, with Tyran making a stop by Anise’s shop to give Vilena one last kiss.

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The Pharoah approached the docks of Goryn, the mainland capital city. It was a cloudy day, a low roll of thick grey clouds lapped together in the sky.

Wracked by storm, the ship came to port. Along the way back to the city, the ship had a rough run. The captain Syrus Blackshane had fallen ill with a fever. Just before succumbing to the illness, the captain gave a letter to Walter. He was asked to deliver it to a man named Janis in Goryn. After that Janis would instruct Walter on what to do next.

Upon arrival back at the City, Walter took this news to Marcus Dorrell post haste. Marcus posted a company charter for the Pharoah with Walter listed as captain not even an hour after the meeting. As they prepared to leave on this journey, Walter met with his son shortly after loading supplies.

“Go below deck son” Walter asked. “Don’t come up until someone comes to get you.”

“Whats happe-“ before Tyran could finish his father was pushing him away.

Tyran watched the dock from below through a window. He quickly saw the crimson cloaks of the city guard passing the window and walking across the gangplank towards the ship. Tyran ran up to the top of the deck, his father be damned.

When he arrived at the top, he saw his father talking to the guards. Tyran didn’t hear much before the first guard landed a solid blow into his father’s gut, catching him as he fell. Another

guard grabbed his father's other arm and they began to drag him away.

"Father!" Tyran yelled. Another guard caught him by the arm as he tried to pursue his father.

"Remember Tyran, I love you, and I am proud of you." His father said before being taken out of earshot and away.

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Weeks passed. A private trial was held, and little was said. Outrage began to pour out from Walters constituents over the lack of verdict. Then 2 weeks to the day after his father's arrest, Tyran heard the decree of the City Council announced in the town square. A wizard dressed in a crimson cloak stood on the balcony of the city hall.

"We are concerned with the growing threat of the rebels from both sides of the sea. Walter Matthau was caught trafficking illegal weapons parts to known affiliates of the Rebel Army. In addition a letter was found on his person addressed to a known affiliate of the rebellion and an ex agent of Lord Zyzus.

The crowd gathered began to stir lightly.

"It is in light of both affiliations that we have come to the decision to exile Walter Matthau to death at the Chateau in the frigid northern waters of the Ghasterring Sea."

The crowd began to chatter, some yelling others leaving with little commotion.

"What were you involved in father?"

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A charter for the Pharoah was posted later that day with the ships purser Erris Zalbrather listed as the captain. Tyran had little intention of being on the charter, but he did go back to the Pharoah. He gathered his father's things, and then his own. He sent this crate to dock storage and made one last trip back to the Pharoah. As he arrived he saw Erris on deck.

"Hello, Erris, I was curious if I could have a word with you. Below deck." Tyran asked.

"Yes my boy, I am truly sorry to hear about your father. We all wish the best and we know that he is innocent." Erris replied, his voice slipping out of his mouth like a thick trail of black smoke.

The two went below deck to the captain's quarters.

As soon as the door shut behind them, Tyran grabbed Erris by the collar of his shirt and brought him close.

“What did you do to my father? Did you rat? I know you wanted the captains position!” Tyran yelled.

“My boy listen to yourself, I am one of Walters oldest friends.” Erris plead.

“Don’t say his name.” as Tyran said this he reeled back and landed a fist on the bridge of Erris’ nose. It began to bleed.

“I don’t know anything, you savage.” He choked out past thick globs of blood.

Tyran reeled back again and struck Erris again in the head. He grabbed his shirt and threw him to the ground. Sitting on Erris’ chest, he began to throw punches into his face. Small sprays of blood gushed forth and hit Tyran in the face, each more satisfying than the last. After a few strike Tyran took Erris’ hand in his and began to snap his fingers.

“Tell me you bastard.” Tyran screamed in a blood lust.

“Okay, okay.” Erris sputtered through tears. “I changed the letter the captain gave him. I slipped in some bullshit about him being a worshipper of Zyzus.

Tyran kicked the man in his ribs, feeling the snap of a break as he did. Erris was on the ground sputtering and coughing, bloody and beaten to a pulp.

“Stay away from my family or I will use my crossbow next time.” Tyran said.

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A month later, Tyran sat, not at the bow of a ship, but in the deep bowels of a pirate vessel. Headed towards the last place he felt at home. It was the early morning as they approached Carrymein Cove once more. Tyran felt the ship stop and emerged from the depths. What he saw when he did however, almost doubled him over. He stepped on what was left of the old dock. The island before him was torn to shreds. The building collapsed. Supplies, food, and corpses all dotted the beach. The long house up the hill was leveled, the stone from the walkway flung from one end of the beach to the other. A small group was gathered on the dock.

“What happened here?” Tyran asked a man dressed in a blue robe that was standing on the dock talking to the group.

“No one knows yet. Only a handful of us got out, all you see here. Whatever it was it was

magical, the presence woke up every wizard on the island.

Tyran looked at the group gathered. He did not see Vilena.

He walked out past the dock and towards the wreckage of Anise's shop. The rubble left behind was recognizable, with many of the things Tyran saw once dotting the shelves now lying in the sand. There was a group of four men gathered in the rubble of the shop, sifting through the sand, looking for valuables. The leader, who was not lifting a finger to help, sat atop a counter that had managed to make it through the storm. He had long brown hair and a scar across his right eye. One of his men pulled a necklace from the sand. The same purple red gem with gold inlay that he knew so well, that he saw in his dreams. This was her necklace.

"I suggest you take off and leave that where you found it." Tyran said stepping into view from around the ruined storefront. The men laughed at him.

"I don't suppose you'd want to take this little souvenir for yourself? The man said, slipping down from the counter and grabbing the necklace from his accomplice.

"I know who it belonged to, I will see it gets where it needs to go." Tyran replied.

"How's about this friend, you give us 1000 of your shiniest gold pieces and we won't throw it in the ocean?" the man said.

Tyran stepped forward. "Listen, I know people, a lot of people both good and bad. I would hate to have to get a list of the crew from the captain and have your families punished for your arrogance."

Tyran quickly flashed the writ that showed his name and his affiliation with the largest trading family in the capital.

The three lackeys shifted.

The one in front of the other two spoke up.

"Hey man, just leave us out of it." He said.

The leader, looked back at his henchmen, and laughed.

"Really this city boy has you scared?" he said.

"We all have family in Goryn, Jayce" one of the back row said.

Jayce waved them off. "I will take care of this myself."

The group of three ran off, leaving Jayce holding the amulet.

“Well, I am not so easily intimidated. This will sell for a pretty penny but given that it is of some importance to you, I have resolved to destroy it.” After he said this, he laughed.

Tyran readied his crossbow at his side. The man saw and drew a longsword.

He lunged forward at Tyran who held his crossbow up, catching the blade of the sword. Tyran rolled backwards, firing his crossbow at the man. The bolt flew past his head as he dodged to the left. Tyran grabbed another bolt from the quiver he had on his back, and as he started to pull the string back Jayce lunged again. Tyran caught the blade with the bolt, which held up against the swing. He pushed back against the sword and forced Jayce's arm backwards, into an awkward position. Tyran drew back again and thrust the bolt into Jayce's arm before he could riposte. Jayce screaming grabbed at his arm, Tyran drew his crossbow back bolt readied. Jayce grabbed his fallen sword with his other hand and lunged again, this time Tyran catching a blow to the arm. Tyran recoiled and yelped, but kept his crossbow readied. Jayce blind with rage swung again this time trying to find purchase in Tyrans neck. However before the blow could land, Tyran squeezed the crossbow releasing the bolt. It flew and with a sickening crack, went clean through Jayce's skull through the eye.

When he fell, Tyran grabbed the necklace, kissed it and slipped it into a belt pouch. He rose, turned and walked back to the ship.

Weeks later Tyran walked down a forested path. The sun was breaking through the trees, gracing his face with small patches of warmth as he walked south. He finally came to a wooden arch with a sign, a town at last. The sign hung with a layer of green moss growing on it. It said “Omert.”

Realms of the Dead - Bolt and Druick

The mountains are a strangely spiritual and beautiful place. For many they hold the spirits of gods long dead, with jutting spires of old earth that hold secrets that died with the tribes and farmers that once held themselves so closely to the land. This holds true doubly so for the Orcs and Humans of the Mahmouht clan. They believe that all weather, from sunshine to storm, is channeled through the mountains. Worshippers of storm and sun alike, the Mahmouht make camp in the foothills of the surrounding mountains. Not far from the fledgling logging camp Omert, a warband of Orcs and Humans from the Mahmouht clan watch the main road. There are many among the ranks of the war band, brothers and sisters, parents and children, all hunting together. Tonight, however there were different plans for a feast.

Bolt Vonderhuge waited, crouched behind a few other raiding party members. He was young by the standards of the raiding party, not yet even completing the vision quest required by the clan to be considered a true brother in arms. It also didn't help that Hieryt Blightblade, the clan leader, not only distrusted him, but also his human father who had since been cast out from the clan. Bolt's knees felt weak at the thought of how distraught his mother was over the affair. The only reason he was even allowed to come along in the first place is because there was no one to hunt for the family, although Hieryt had not told him that this would be a raiding party. Just as Bolt got lost in a thought about how he'd rather be anywhere else, Hieryt let out a whoop. A caravan was headed down the road driven by a man wearing a grey robe. He looked to be middle aged, and had a sword strapped to his hip. As soon as the leader let out his call, the party sprung to action. A dozen or so feral orcs and humans suddenly exploded from the nearby treeline. The caravan driver, taking notice, bucked the reigns of his horse. It was too late however as they were upon him. A woman not too much older than Bolt, thrust a spear into the meaty neck of the right horse that drew the carriage. The spear dug deep into the flesh as the horse let out a panicked whinny. As the horse raised its front legs to buck, the woman quickly yanked downward on the spear, leaving the poisoned tip embedded in the creature's neck. Death, would follow quickly. Bolt saw this first act of aggression play out in front of him. He had never been as smart as some of the rest of the clan, but giving into these base instincts never felt right to him. He quickly moved over to the other horse, who as of that moment was bucking, watching the dead horse fall. Before the harness and reigns could drag it down, snapping its bones with the weight of the dead horse, Bolt ran his knife blade through the leather straps holding them together. With another swift cut the horse broke free. As he turned to watch the horse run away, he heard a scream that felt like it came from a thousand miles away.

A few feet behind him on the carriage, the driver was screaming as Hieryt drove the head of an axe into his stomach. Bolt then saw from the side of the caravan small girl, no older than 8 crawl from under the canvas wagon cover. As soon as she plopped to the ground, Bolt sprang from

his position near the front, bounding over the girl, and circling around the back. Another of his clan mates Raster Gobneith was holding the blade of a dull sword to the throat of a woman in the back of the caravan. The light bounced off the blade and shot a beam just under the woman's eye. As a tear dripped through the light, catching it and reflecting into a brilliant array that captivated Bolt. For one moment the chaos that had overtaken his family, and the only friends he had seemed to stand still. All of this was wrong, he didn't know what told him that, but he knew it to be true. When the tear landed on the blade of the sword, as if struck by lightning, Bolt grabbed the blade, so dull that the edge did not even cut into his flesh. Mustering strength he was heretofore unaware of, he slowly, but easily bent the flimsy iron backwards. Raster looked at him with fear, but a respect that Bolt had never seen before. Bolt then quickly threw an elbow into the bridge of Raster's nose, causing him to fall backwards unconscious. Bolt then took the woman by the arm and pulled her from the carriage. He then pushed her around the other side and pointed to the woods off the path. "Go, now. Camp not too far from here." The woman grabbed her daughter by the arm, quickly slipping into the trees.

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Gnomes are very interesting creatures. Among all the other races of Jerisynd, they seemed to be the only ones who manage to always be at the center of some sort of trouble. Tricksters by nature, and magicians by practice, Gnomes are very attuned to the art of magic. Druick Blarney was one such Gnome. Druick grew up in the forests as did most gnomes. His family, owners of a local brewery in the town where he lived, were nothing special. He found the pursuits of magic at a young age, performing most tricks and minor spells years before most gnomes in his family could even read a spell. His parents, the non-magical types they were tried to foster a love for magic in Druick's heart, but as the world began to change, they saw a path for their only son that led to death. They wanted him more than anything to take over as master brewer when Papa Blarney was unable to turn the cranks and mechanisms that brewing a good Gnome Toadstout required. When he was a teenager, Druick fell in love, as Gnomes are wont to do. Legendary amongst the races as romantics and poets Druick seemed, at least to his parents, to be slipping into the life that they wanted for him.

On a summer evening, just as the sun was setting and the insects of the forest set out upon the night air, a crackle came from the sky. Most thought it was the sound of a storm rolling in, quickly on the heels of the cool night air. However, under the earth of the small Gnome village of Keer-Mill-Shine there began a stirring. As the sun finally set, the first of the screams rang out. Druick sat at the window of The Grimy Toadstool, the tavern that he helped his parents run. The windows were grimy and grey with the soot of candles and lanterns, glass panes aged to a yellow tint in a hasty manner due to the cloud of tobacco smoke that hung in the air constantly. The scream startled him awake, hastily scrubbing the grimy window to get a better look. He ran out the front door and saw something very out of place for a cool summer's night. The rumble of thunder was on the horizon, the air was cool and smelled of the earth. In the light of a torch that rested gently in a sconce on the side of the tavern, Druick could see two figures. One was a man, or at least was. His skin hung loosely from bones that were exposed in various places around the body. The eyes were two small red dots set against the rusty light of the torch. Druick could see that the woman that screamed was on the ground, chunks of flesh torn from her chest and face. The standing corpse then fell to its knees and began to tear into the

abdomen of the Gnome woman who lay in the street. Druick, under his breath muttered "Lykellis Mrhue." A gust of air, so strong it scooted Druick back by a foot exploded from his palm. The blast reached the walking corpse quickly and blew the creature away in a whirlwind of torn flesh and broken bones. Druick had never seen his magic work that strongly. Just as he had this thought, another corpse shambled around the corner. Druick turned to go inside to warn his parents, when his arm was grabbed by the rotted fleshy extension of another walking corpse. He pulled away with enough force to separate the bone from its home, and quickly throwing the loose arm to the ground, ran inside.

Druick quickly ran up the stairs to his parents chambers, throwing open the door. "We have to leave!" he squeaked, out of breath and flustered from adrenaline. "What, why? Whats going on?" his father said as he shot up from reading the rather small book he was holding. About this time, the screams became a chorus. From outside Druick could see an orange glow that could only be a fire. Thunder crashed as the slow trickle of rain that was hitting the roof became a torrent. "Get your things gathered, something is wrong" Druick yelled as he swung back down the stairs and over to the door. He threw the wooden bar down over the door and secured it. Then he quickly drew up wind with the tip of his finger and directed it at each lit torch, blowing them out. He hurried quickly up the stairs to find his parents panicked. The storm outside crashed louder and louder, almost masking the sound of loud pounding on the door.

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Bolt Vonderhugue stood at the edge of the woods, making sure that the mother and child were gone. As he turned however he was met with a scream.

"You traitorous fool." Hieryt screamed, grabbing Bolt by the shoulder and throwing him back towards the back side of the caravan.

"Those two were our targets. Nobles that we could have gotten a mountain of gold for." Hieryt screamed at Bolt.

"What do we need gold for, the mountain provides for us." Bolt answered, standing up as he said it.

"You have no idea do you. Armies of the dead are rising from the ground beneath the feet of those who should be safe. What do we do when they come to our door. We need weapons." Hieryt's tone changed just as he said this. Going from anger, to pity.

"If that is truth, then there are other ways than this."

Hieryt swung his fist at Bolt, who caught it just under his right eye. Anger filled Bolt, but rather than the blind anger he always felt, this anger was channeled, controllable. Bolt fired back with his own fist, so blindingly fast the Hieryt yelped as he caught it in his right side. Bolt threw several more quick punches. Hieryt took them and reeled. With a scream, he unloosened his axe from his belt and swung it at Bolt, a horizontal cut meant for Bolts neck. Bolt raised his blade catching the axe under the lip of its head, pulling it backwards and out of Hieryts hand.

"You drew against me. You die." The anger that filled bolt came to a head. Like an arrowhead perfectly knocked from flint, Bolt sharpened this anger and struck one blow with the pommel of his blade into the skull of the Chieftain. Hieryt fell in front of him and from the caved and cracked skull seeped blood that was almost black. The others in the group stood and looked at Bolt.

"You all know this was wrong" he said, as he began to walk back towards the mountain.

On his way back, he began to feel the impact of his decision. His mother would be accountable,

as Clan law still held him as a minor. "I cant go home" he muttered to himself. After walking for some time, he stopped and made camp. The mountain provided a safe place for him, as he felt he was at home on all its slopes. He made a fire with his flint and steel and chopped a few small trees up for wood. As night fell, Bolt stretched out on the ground, surrounded by leaves and sticks that were so common on the forest floor as summer turned to fall. He fell asleep quickly, making short work of the jerky he had in his bag. That night he dreamed.

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The pounding grew louder and more frantic, following Druicks lead. Druick ran around the bar collecting anything he could stuff in his bag. Food, waterskins, and his parents brew book were at the top of his list. He looked out the window and saw the faces of the dead pawing at each other recklessly, trying to get through the glass. Another strike hit the door this time with enough force to cause the wood to creak and splinter. The pounding stopped. It was quiet, the dead at the window standing still. A crash of thunder loudly complemented the rain. Druick stood as still as the air, which was no longer heavy with the sound of pounding fists. Just as it seemed like it was over, the door crashed open, blown from its hinges by the horror that now stood in the frame. A skull mounted atop a corpse still covered in flesh, larger than the others, now looked at Druick with murderous intent. Druick yelled and circled around the bar, running into the stairwell that lead up to his parents room. He locked the door behind him and ran up to his parents. "Out the window, NOW!" he screamed, just as a crash came from the stairs no dubt the creature had broken through. His parents fought for a moment, but as the creature shambled up the stairs the protests stopped. Druicks mother began to climb out of the window as a deafening clap of thunder rumbled the tavern. Drucks father grabbed his crossbow and took aim at the creature, but before his bolt could fly, the creature was upon him. Druick who turned from helping his mother saw as the creature picked his dad up and reeled back to hit him. Druick screamed and just as he did thunder clapped, only this time it was from in front of him rather than from above. Druick continued to scream as he felt the waves of a violent tingling sensation pulse through his whole body. He rose off the ground by nearly two feet, floating, and the agony of the pulsating tingling made his mind scream with sensation. Then just as it felt like he was going to be torn apart, the tavern was torn away from before him. The wood splintered, the glass shattered and the creature holding his father dropped the old plump Gnome. Druick released the power he felt inside him and the whirlwind tore the earth from his feet. He floated higher propelled by a hurricane of force. The rain hit his face sideways, and with one final scream Druick exploded with lightning. The bolts struck the ground, the creatures, the surrounding houses, and anything else caught within the maelstrom that Druick created. Just as he felt the power subsiding, the violent winds from his whirlwind threw him into the air, flinging him away from his home town.

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Bolt Vonderhuge awoke, sweaty and still tired from a night of restless sleep. His clan mates had not bothered looking for him, or he would have already been dead. He made no effort to cover his tracks as he kicked dirt over the fire that now smoldered before him. He began to walk on the ridge of the mountain, feeling the power of the earth under him. He didn't know what to do or where to go, the clan had been his whole life. He eventually resolved to go to the Eldervyne Tree, the oldest tree on the mountain, to pray to the spirits of the earth. It took him a few hours

to reach the tree, but he did with little trouble. Upon reaching the glade where the tree resides, he sat down before approaching. The log he was on groaned with his weight.

Bolt was a half-orc, a race known to exist on the fringes of society. They typically grow large and Bolt was no exception. He sat on the log, looking at the tree about 100 yards from his position. He wondered what it all meant. He knew in his heart that the clan was being poisoned by a want for gold, that they were going astray of the mountain. He decided that until he figured all of this out, he would camp under the Eldervyne. His clan many come to offer tribute, but it would mostly be the older women, and these were sacred grounds, no blood was to be spilled. He made a small shelter and a rough bedroll out of fir needles and sawgrass. He built a fire pit with 10 large stones he pulled from a nearby stream, lighting it once again, and chopping wood. He slept again that night, restless as ever.

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Druick awoke in a forest clearing. He was unsure of where he was, and the memory of what happened was hazy at best. He was sore from falling so hard after he was flung, but was able to move. He, like all other Gnomes, possessed a love for nature, and he found this place beautiful. No doubt he was in the mountains that were not too far from his home. He took notice to where the sun was and knew he would have to make camp. He quickly threw together a fire and made a crude tent from leaves. He then began to remember what had happened, the storm, the whirlwind. His parents, who were probably destroyed, and for that he felt guilty, and channeled it one of the few ways he knew how. He tried to conjure another storm, but could not, instead focusing on the wind he knew he could create. After a few hours of experimenting he was able to produce small amounts lightning. By this time it was dark, well after midnight. He was tired and hungry, but did not give up. After practice, he was finally able to produce a bolt that stretched up to the sky.

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Bolt shot up straight out of his sleep. He was awake and aware. He heard the crack of lightning but saw no storm in the sky. Curious, he left his shelter and began to walk in the woods. As he did things quickly changed. The world around him was now tinted blue with gathering storm clouds all around him. They began to spit lightning that struck him, however he did not feel pain. Instead he felt invigorated, and began move the massive stone of the mountains with his bare hands. He felt right and happy for the first time in a long time. As he moved the stone, the clouds began to break, and as he rolled onto his back on the ground, the stars, no visible through the storm, shined in the face of his mother. Bolt awoke once more, on the edge of a sharp ridge. He knew that he had finally had his vision quest. He sat up and felt satisfied, when he saw the bolt of lightning that shot up to the sky. He slid down the ridge on his legs and back and watched as the small creature standing in the woods shot lightning up into the sky. It was an incredible sight, and one that made Bolt feel connected with the mountain. He knew that the mountain was the conduit of the gods, and that all natural force sprang from the womb of the mountain. Seeing this man, manipulate the weather was a near revelation for the half-orc. He leaned forward and snapped a branch at his feet. The small creature turned surprised at the noise and say bolt on the edge of the camp watching him.

“Oh, shit!” the small man yelled. Bolt threw his hand up and bowed to him.

“I am not here to hurt you.” Bolt said, rising up from his bow.

"I saw you, you have the power of the gods, how?"

Druick chuckled to himself. This barbarian is unfamiliar with the magical ways of civilization. He could explain it, but where was the fun in that.

"Yes, I am the kin of the gods of the mountain." Druick shot another bolt into the sky, throwing in some wind for good measure.

"You are holy, then." Bolt replied, this time falling to his knees and bowing again, this time to the ground.

"What are you doing out here anyway?" Druick asked, motioning for the Orc to rise.

"My clan has forsaken me, I killed our chieftain" Bolt replied, not smart enough to gather how that must have sounded to the small man.

"Uhh wow, what in the name of Gozreh did you do that for, big guy?" Druick said slowly backing away from the Half Orc.

"He was leading our people from the mountain, he hurt those who did not deserve it, wanted to kidnap families." Bolt hung his head, ashamed of the words as they left his mouth. Is this what the tribe had become? Just as the words left Bolts mouth another snapping branch from behind them alerted Bolt that they were no longer alone. Spinning on his heels, he turned towards the darkness where the sound had come from, drawing his sword instinctually. He focused his eyes, being able to see in the dark helped greatly with this. He body tightened. He grabbed Druick quickly by the head and lifted him into his backpack just as an arrow tore through the space where Druick was standing not even a second ago.

"What the!" Druick spat out, and Bolt said nothing, instead sprinting forward towards the bowman. Bolt spun, as he entered the copse of trees by the clearing, seeing another figure coming at him from the left. He deflected the blow of an axe off his sword, and upon looking at who was holding the blade filled him with anger. Karzeh Norn, the woman he loved as a teenager, now stood, crossing an axe with Bolt. "I don't want to hu-" he was cut off by another swing of her axe. Druick now saw what was happening, his clan is coming to kill him. He had other problems now though, the woman that Bolt was fighting was not the source of the arrow that almost killed him. Instead he searched the darkness for its source. He saw the moonlight reflect off of a buckler, and he knew where to strike. Mustering his latent power he produced a bolt of lightning from his hand with little effort. The now familiar tingle that radiated through his arm was followed by the smell of storms, and the crackle of power. A bolt from his palm stretched forward into the darkness, followed by a scream. He did it. Bolt, not caring about Druicks last action, quickly set in to fight back against Karzeh, he struck out at the woman however she was quick and avoided the attack. She swung at him and he deflected once more. With his free hand he grabbed her arm as she tried to bring it back from the strike. "Karzeh, I don't want to fight you." He grunted. "You made your choice half blood." The words seared Bolt like a hot iron and without hesitation he snapped her arm like a twig. She screamed, but it fell on Bolts deaf ears. Bolt recoiled his blade and struck out, but at the last moment she caught the blade with her axe handle, quickly riposting him and attempting to strike back. The axe blade came for Bolts gut, but it was quickly blocked as Bolt deflected and brought his blade around to swing. The woman before him jumped out of the way of the strike, and attempted to hit again, this time, the blade of her axe catching a hardened patch of leather on Bolts armor. Bolt threw his sword down, and dropped the pack with Druick in it off his back. He began to walk at a brisk

pace toward the woman. She swung at him but he caught the blade on his forearm, leaving a gash that spewed blood. Unphased, Bolt continued until he could grab her by the head, his large fingers wrapping around her skull like an apple. He squeezed as hard as he could, and instantly felt the jagged crunch of bone followed by the warm sticky feeling of blood. Her body fell to the ground, disfigured.

“Interesting” Druick said. He saw a utility in this man. Torn between the old and the new world, he knew how he felt. Later they sat around the fire, Druick handing a pipe stuffed with limp leaf to Bolt, exhaled and sat looking at the large man.

“You cant go home can you?” Druick said. Bolt looked up at him and sighed. “Not after all this.” Bolt hung his head. Druick thought for a moment. His town was probably destroyed after what he did, his parents perhaps dead at his own hand. “You can hang out with me” Druick blurted. He almost felt like he didn’t want to say it, but he did feel bad for the guy. “I want to become your follower” Bolt replied bluntly. “We can talk about all that, for now let’s get some rest, I have something I need to do tomorrow.” They both fell asleep. Dreaming of nothing, but for the first night in a while, they both slept well.

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Bolt awoke to a smell that took him back. A fresh egg, from a mountain sparrow, cooking on a stone was a scent from Bolts youth. His grandmother used to make him the very same on the last day of the week. He would run to her house eat eggs and fresh back fat from a boar. He quite enjoyed those days, which had gone forever with the death of his grandmother. The smell gently whisked him from sleep. He awoke to find Druick cooking 5 eggs on a stone by the fire. “Hey big guy, I have some food for you. I was hungry.” Druick scooped the eggs off the stone and onto another small flat stone.

“I don’t have any camping gear, but I’m guessing you don’t have a problem eating with your hands.” Unenthusiastically, Bolt produced a stone fork from his belt pouch. He made quick work of the eggs, and stood to stretch.

“What do you have to do today?” Bolt asked.

“I need to go see my home.” Druick replied as he kicked dirt over the fire.

Bolt grabbed him and stuffed him in his backpack. “Which way?”

Druick, thrilled with the idea of not having to walk, pointed to the northeast. “That way.”

The two set off. Leaving the camp as it was on the ridge.

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The duo arrived at Keer-Mill-Shine just as the noon sun was peaking in the sky. There was little left. Bolt placed Druick on the ground, and said “I will let you make peace.”

Druick walked over to where the Tavern was. He knew that the deep ruts cut into the ground were from him and that the smoldering pile of wood was also his doing. As he looked at the ruins, a guard tapped him on the head.

“You lost little guy?”

“No, I just.....I just used to eat here all the time during my travels. I came to pay my respect.

Obviously surprised at the revelation that this was not a child, the guard quickly said “Oh, sorry, just be careful.” He then returned to the caravan of guards that sat at the town gate. The caravan was obviously loaded with bodies, however Druick knew that the guard would find it suspicious if he told them the truth. His parents were on that cart, but he knew that he could not

see them.

He stepped into the ruined Tavern, and in a pile of rubble saw a lockbox that his father kept under his bed. He walked over to it and busted the lock easily. He opened it and inside found papers, deeds and other documents. On the top however was a letter penned to his father. It said, "Dear Finneus Blarney, we appreciate your concern over your son, however his real family only wanted him to have the amulet. He must not know about his bloodline, or there could be dire consequences." The letter was signed L.R.

Druick felt the cold stone of the amulet his "father" gave him press against his chest. He felt that in his heart he always knew, as he never felt at home here. Under the letter sat his adoption writ, which he stuffed in his pocket. He stood, left the Tavern and called to Bolt who strode over and placed him in his bag. "I think its high time we find a new home, big guy." Bolt nodded and they headed back to the mountain. Years passed and the two became very close, performing small deeds for gold. As the town of Omert grew however, more and more people came to the area. Bolt and Druick built a cabin and farm on the land where they made camp so long ago. They lived, happy as they could be, until one day the stumbled upon a Druid that changed their lives.